Managing More Than Just Athletes: Impression Management Among Canadian High-Performance Sport Coaches

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Abstract

While existing data provides a snapshot of the lack of diversity in sport coaching, there remain gaps in understanding the experiences of individuals who are struggling to work as coaches in the Canadian high-performance sport system because of their racialized and gendered identities. This study aims to address these gaps by examining the experiences of racialized and/or women sport coaches working in Canadian high-performance sport and how they may engage in impression management. Impression management (Goffman, 1959) is defined as how individuals attempt to influence how they are perceived by others. Guided by intersectionality, phenomenology and utilizing semi-structured interviews, this study highlights eight interviews to examine how race and gender shape their self-presentation strategies. Findings reveal that impression management was strategic and deeply internalized, creating tensions between professionalism and authenticity. The insights deepen our understandings of identity, power, and belonging and how structural conditions can shape minoritized coaches' daily lives.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 From the Sidelines to Academic Inquiry

As a second-generation South-Asian Muslim female, I have felt like an outsider my entire life. Throughout my experiences, I have become accustomed to navigating the challenges and difficulties that come from feeling different from the status quo. In many instances, I felt I had to adapt and survive in a culture that felt foreign to me, and which treated me as a foreigner. My method of getting by involved absorbing the dominant culture that was lined with whiteness and masculinity and trying to fit in. I constantly rejected anything that made me stand out. I changed my name, the ways in which I presented myself, my hobbies, the way I spoke, and all other aspects that I thought could reveal the 'real' me by ensuring everything about me conformed to what I understood—without ever having to be told—as the social standard. I found whatever way I could to feel like an insider. Although I so desperately wanted to be a leader, an advocate, and to change the social standards, I felt confined within and by my multiple identities, unable to achieve what I wanted, in fear of facing the consequences of alienation.

Being someone who was born and raised in Canada, and yet someone who felt different all the time, I could not quite grasp why I automatically felt the need to adapt, even though I knew the language, customs, values, and apologized for everything (as Canadians are often notoriously known for doing). It was difficult for me to comprehend how a culture I have always been a part of could feel both like home and not like home, and accept me in certain ways, but not others. With the passing of time, I realized that these feelings of inadequacy and being inbetween were not ones unique to me, but a shared experience with others who held this 'outsider within' status (Collins, 1986). As I have navigated and, in many ways, still continue to navigate this 'outsider within' status in various contexts, it is not lost on me that, more so than ever before, greater attention is being paid to such issues of belongingness, diversity, and

inclusiveness as not all individuals are treated or experience life fairly (Government of Canada, 2023).

Within sport, numerous scholars and advocates have paid attention to the inequities that happen within these traditionally white, patriarchal, and heteronormative environments, especially in high-performance sport, for those who are different and 'outsiders within'—especially women and racialized individuals (e.g., Allen et al., 2010; Coakley, 1993; Joseph & McKenzie, 2022; McKenzie et al., 2023; Joseph et al., 2021; Rankin-Wright et al., 2017; Ratna, 2010; Wellard, 2009). However, much of the research done on this topic is in relation to athlete experiences (e.g., Bennett & King, 2021; Carrington, 2011; MacIntosh & Martin, 2018; Lawrence, 2005; Nya & Scherer, 2024; Mauro, 2018; Paunescu et al., 2013; Sandrin & Palys, 2021). There remains a relative lack of literature exploring racial and gender disparities and the implications of such disparities on the perceptions and experiences of belongingness and exclusion/inclusion among other types of sport participants, particularly among sport coaches.

1.2 What We Know (and What We Keep Missing) about High-Performance Sport Coaching

Given the significance of interpersonal relations in sport (between and among athletes, coaches, parents, administrators, etc.), several sport coaching scholars acknowledge that, like other client-facing professionals, sport coaches routinely 'perform' certain versions of themselves—versions that may differ from the authentic selves they may express when alone or with close, trusted others—for their athletes and colleagues in efforts to convey an air of expertise, capacity or confidence (see for example, Jones et al., 2010; Potrac et al., 2002). Such insights are in line with the concept of impression management, a phenomenon first conceptualized by Erving Goffman, and which is broadly defined as the ways in which individuals attempt to influence how they are perceived by others (Jones et al., 2010). A defining

feature of impression management is the desire to present oneself in the best possible manner to and with others to avoid stigma, defined as the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance (Goffman, 1963). In sport, coaches are often left navigating how they are perceived by others, making impression management a routine part of their work lives due to the various pressures of their environment (Jones et al., 2010; Potrac et al., 2021). It is critical to understand that coaching roles are public-facing and, in many cases, precarious as one's reputation in sport will likely affect future coaching (especially employment) opportunities, funding, and contracts (Norman et al., 2018; Werthner, 2009). Coaches are therefore frequently under pressure to be seen as in control, confident, and composed, even if they may be internally feeling anything but in control, confident, or composed (Corsby et al., 2022; Potrac et al., 2021). Even though such performances may not always be indicative of how coaches feel behind the scenes, coaches may perceive them as necessary and be inclined to engage in impression management to meet the expectations of those around them (Hambrick & D'Innocenzo, 2018; Ronglan, 2010; Taylor et al., 2019). In addition, while this may seem like a normalized and routine part of 'the job' for the coaches themselves, it is important to recognize that impression management in work situations, including in sport coaching, can be understood as labour (that usually goes unrecognized by organizations) as coaches may modulate their own behaviours, language, mannerisms, and perform different versions of themselves in order to achieve particular types of emotional, relational, and psychological aims in the sport setting (Jones et al., 2010; North et al., 2018). Yet, the kinds of impressions coaches must manage, and the consequences for not doing so effectively in the eyes of others, are not the same for everyone.

While existing data provides a snapshot of the lack of diversity in sport coaching, there is still much work to be done to better understand the experiences of those individuals who are

struggling because of their racialized and gendered identities to take up space in the Canadian sport coaching work landscape. As shared by Joseph et al. (2022), 78.5% of the sport coaches in the Canadian university sport system are white. Furthermore, Finn (2022) states that "women made up just 16% of head coaches and 18% of assistant coaches across 54 Canadian national teams" (p. 1). Such stark under-representation of racialized and women-identifying coaches is particularly troubling given calls by scholars, advocates, and participants for more nuanced attention to and consideration of how identities operate within specific contexts, and how experiences of power and oppression shape the lives of people (cf., Crenshaw, 1989).

Scholars have increasingly pointed out that race and gender can shape the professional experiences and expectations placed on sport coaches, suggesting that minoritized coaches may have to navigate impression management practices that go beyond just demonstrating professionalism or mastery of sport coaching technical skills, responding instead to implicit norms of whiteness and masculinity in sporting environments (Joseph & McKenzie, 2022; Norman, 2010; Rankin-Wright et al., 2017). For example, as noted by Kilty (2006), and LaVoi and Dutove (2021), women coaches may feel an added pressure to adopt an assertive vocal tone, and suppress emotion to challenge gendered assumptions of fragility or incompetence. Similarly, racialized coaches may engage in heightened self-monitoring, and focus on appearance, demeanour or language to fit into predominantly white sport coaching environments (Bishop et al., 2023; Joseph et al., 2021). While numerous scholars have explored how whiteness and masculinity render sport and workplaces as contested terrain for those marked as Other (i.e., for self-identifying women, gender-diverse folx, or those who identify as racialized), there remains little research examining how race and gender intersect to shape coaches' performance of impression management in high-performance sport, particularly in the Canadian context. This

study seeks to fill that gap by exploring how coaches' racial and/or gendered identities inform and get informed by the impression management strategies they employ to navigate their workplaces.

1.3 Purpose, Questions and Overview of Thesis

This study was motivated by a desire to gain a more in-depth understanding of whether and how Canadian high-performance sport coaches from under-represented groups may or may not be engaging in impression management as they work in sport. In an effort to explore the lived experiences of women and/or racialized Canadian high-performance sport coaches in relation to the concept of impression management, the following research questions guided this study:

1. Do Canadian high-performance sport coaches engage in impression management to navigate their sport work environments? If so, how, why and what are its effects?
2. How do race and gender inform and get informed by sport coaches' impression management work?

This thesis style is written in adherence to the Faculty of Graduate Studies requirements at York University and the School of Kinesiology and Health Science. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two (Review of Literature) delves into the scholarly literature around impression management, impression management in sport coaching, and how race and gender can influence the ways in which coaches employ impression management. Chapter Three (Theory, Methodology and Methods) highlights the theoretical framework (intersectionality), methodology (phenomenology) and methods used for data collection and data analysis. Following that, the fourth and fifth chapters focus on the data gathered from the participants through semi-structured interviews, and the themes that arose from this data. The thesis

concludes with a final chapter that pulls the substantive and analytical threads of the study together, while also identifying both the limitations of the study and the possible future directions for advancing this research topic.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The following chapter highlights some areas of scholarly literature relevant to this study, beginning with an examination of Goffman's concept of impression management, as well as the health-compromising consequences of constant impression management work. This will be followed by a snapshot of sport coaching work in Canada, with particular emphasis on the complexities of labour undertaken by sport coaches. This will be followed by a discussion of women and racialized sport coaches' under-representation within Canadian sport, before exploring the extant literature on impression management and sport coaching.

2.1 Impression Management

The concept of impression management stems from sociologist, Erving Goffman (1956), who posited that individuals are constantly performing on the stage of everyday life, and that our interactions with one another shape our socialization, such that we grasp and embody the ideas of how we should behave in social settings from others (Jones et al., 2010). In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* Goffman (1956) introduced his dramaturgical framework to describe how individuals navigate their everyday life interactions. Goffman viewed the self as a "performed character, as a product of social circumstances, the management of which was conceptualized as self-work" (Jones et al., 2010, p. 17). According to Goffman (1963), impression management involves the dynamic interplay between role-taking, and the self, highlighting that individuals want to present themselves in the best possible manner, which can mean that people do not act as their true selves.

This desire to present oneself in the best possible manner to and with others, is often to avoid stigma, defined as a situation in which an individual is disqualified from full social acceptance (Goffman, 1963). Goffman (1963) highlights that stigma can be either public or

personal (i.e., self-stigma). Where public stigma describes negative beliefs about individuals with perceived undesirable traits held by the public, self-stigma transpires when these negative perceptions are internalized by individuals (Corrigan & Rao, 2012). The process of actively wanting to avoid stigma can involve individuals behaving in ways which differ from how they may behave (i.e., their true selves) when alone or with close, trusted others (e.g., family), which can mean that people do not always act as their true selves. This concept as explained by Goffman (1957) is labeled as 'front stage' and 'backstage' performance. The 'front stage' performance is the process of individuals engaging in certain practices and tactics in their social environments, and interactions to fit the standard of that environment. On the contrary, 'backstage' performance is when individuals are comfortable with acting as their true selves due to the automatic safety and acceptance that they feel within that specific environment.

Goffman's (1963) dramaturgical framework has been utilized in the sociology of sport literature to analyze how individuals manage and understand their identities, perform within specific environments, and the ways in which individuals navigate surveillance. For example, Donnelly (2000) discusses interpretive approaches in sociology, by drawing attention to Goffman's (1963) ideas of 'front stage', 'backstage', and impression management, and how they offer a way to explore how sporting subjects manage their public selves in relation to external expectations. Donnelly (2000) also notes that Goffman's (1963) work can help us understand how athletes and coaches preform things such as normalcy and competence that reflect the expectations of their respective sport organizations. Birrell and Donnelly (2004) also discuss how Goffman's (1963) work reveals the tensions between individual identity and collective norms, specifically in relation to gender and race. They argue that the performances that individuals put on are deeply intertwined with gendered expectations, such as adapting to the often-male

dominant norms, which shows that sport often reinforces traditional gender roles and norms. Similarly, Markula and Silk (2011) apply Goffman's (1963) concepts to athletic performance, in which they discuss that athletes often engage in constant self-monitoring and adjustment to maintain credible presentations of the self, particularly within gendered sport contexts. These studies show the value of dramaturgical sociology in understanding how sport operates as a stage where social roles are continuously negotiated.

Furthermore, social science and behavioural disciplinary areas have aimed to expand on Goffman's (1963) initial insights, which help situate the phenomenon of impression management in organizational and boarder sociocultural contexts. For example, Leary and Kowalski (1990) unpack what they refer to as the 'two-component model' in which impression management involves two discrete processes. The authors begin by highlighting the first process as 'impression motivation,' which is defined as the degree to which people are motivated to control how others see them. Impression motivation is conceptualized as a function of three factors: the goal-relevance of the impressions one creates, "the value of desired outcomes, and the discrepancy between current and desired images" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 34). The first component of the model highlights that it is to increase subjective well-being by increasing one's self esteem, maximizing reward-cost ratio and facilitating the development of desired identities (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The second component of the model is 'impression construction.' Once individuals are motivated to alter their behaviours in order to affect others' perceptions of them, the authors state that impression construction "involves not only choosing the kind of impression to create, but deciding precisely how they will go about doing so (such as deciding whether to create the desired impression via self-description, nonverbal behaviour or props, for example" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 36). Essentially, the goal of this model was to describe

why people want to manage their impressions but also highlights the important feature of why individuals adopt particular tactics rather than others. However, this model lacks attention to the broader social structures such as race, gender and organizational power that shape whose impressions are more heavily policed, and whose are more readily accepted. This thesis thus builds on the sociological critiques of impression management by exploring how the broader forces shape the lived experiences of under-represented groups (women and/or racialized individuals) in high-performance sport coaching environments.

We can glean additional insights from those who have explored impression management in (non-sport) workplaces (e.g., Adelswärd, 1988; Bourdage et al., 2015; DuBrin, 2010; Lewin & Reeves, 2011). Bolino et al.'s (2008) work highlights how engaging in impression management is perceived as leading to favourable outcomes for those who are employing it. This reinforces Wayne and Liden's (1995) observations that when employees utilize strategies that align with their supervisors or those who are senior to them to seem more admirable, charming and pleasant, they receive higher performance evaluations compared to those who do not use these tactics.

There is also a fair amount of research demonstrating that engaging in impression management tactics can lead to negative personal and health outcomes. For example, Ni et al. (2023) explore impression management as a source of emotional labour. Emotional labour refers to:

> The process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfill the emotional requirements of a job. Through emotional labor, employees regulate their emotions as part of their professional role, often aligning their displayed emotions with organizational

expectations, even if those emotions do not reflect their true feelings." (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7)

Such findings align with literature from organizational psychology, and the work emerging in that domain that documents how stress, and prolonged stress can significantly affect the physical body. Cohen and Willis (1985) note that when it comes to experiencing stress, the physical symptoms of the emotional burden can present themselves as fatigue, headaches and sleep disturbances. These studies suggest that although impression management may offer short-term benefits in terms of interpersonal relations with others in a setting, it may also lead to reduced overall well-being in the long run.

Building on these works, this thesis employs Goffman's (1963) dramaturgical approach to examine how and why women and/or racialized high-performance sport coaches navigate aspects such as belonging, credibility and visibility within their respective high-performance environments. By understanding and analyzing the coaches' impression management strategies, this research aims to shed light on the ways in which these coaches perform and negotiate their identities amidst the intersecting pressures of race and gender in high-performance environments, and the effects of this work.

The following section will provide a snapshot of sport coaching in Canada with particular attention paid to the landscape of sport coaching work to underscore its precarity as explained in this section.

2.2 A Snapshot of Sport Coaching in Canada and Its Complexities

According to McLoughlin (2024), one in four Canadians have been involved in coaching sport in some capacity, whether as volunteers or as paid workers. Approximately 76% volunteer (unpaid) their personal time to be coaches. Sport coaches who volunteer are mostly involved at

the grassroots, youth sport, school, community and amateur club levels (McLoughlin, 2024). In these environments, these sports are often coached by teachers, community members or parents, with minimal financial support from government bodies for the teams or clubs (McLoughlin, 2024). Whilst these volunteer positions may allow for those playing the sports to experience positive outcomes of sport, such as community building or increased physical activity, the lack of compensation for these sport coaches raises important concerns, especially as these coaches must balance their responsibilities of coaching several hours per week with full-time work and/or other personal commitments (Taylor & Garratt, 2010).

Only about 24% of sport coaches receive some form of compensation for their sport coaching work in Canada. 14% of these coaches earn an hourly income, 4% earn a salary, and 6% receive an honorarium (Taylor & Garratt, 2010). Typically, remunerated sport coaches are mostly situated within high-performance sport contexts and, as noted by Safai and Krahn (2024), Canadian universities are typically the top employer for working sport coaches. It is important to highlight that most coaches are employed through short-term contracts, which creates a lack of long-term career security as their contracts are routinely linked to their ability to produce winning athletes/teams (Norman et al., 2018). There is great pressure on high-performance coaches to ensure their athletes and teams perform as well as possible, and this often requires coordination with other professionals (e.g., in sports sciences or sports medicine) to implement specific training and competition regimes into their practices (Own the Podium, 2024, p. 4). Moreover, sport coaches are often required to complete significant education and continuing education programs to be able to work with elite athletes. For example, the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) requires extensive, multi-level training requirements (e.g.,

Making Ethical Decisions, Managing Conflict, and Sport-Specific Technical/Tactical Training) that often involve considerable time, effort, and ongoing evaluations. Additionally, coaches wanting to complete trainings for high-performance contexts complete multi-model training across psychology, strength and conditioning, performance planning, and leadership. Furthermore, the NCCP points out that sport coaches are consistently evaluated through portfolio submission, in-person observations, and written/oral assessments. Kenttä et al. (2024), highlight that the intense and routinely fast-paced nature of sport in combination with sports' performance imperative, and 'win-at-all-cost' ethos, readily contributes to coaches engaging in behaviours such as working long and irregular hours, taking on additional roles out of their scope of work, and having poor work-home balance. This aligns with Banwell and Kerr's (2016) argument that, in high-performance sport coaching, one's credibility is assessed solely on winning, which places a vast amount of pressure on coaches due to its implications for job security and increased amounts of respect and attention given to those who win.

Corsby et al. (2022) note that sport coaching is a profession characterized by many strains and tensions, emphasizing how their study participants alluded to the profession as one that offers little job security, where one is under constant judgment, and is precarious in nature overall. In her examination of sport coaches working in the Canadian university sport system, Krahn (2024) similarly highlights her study participants' experiences of their work as precarious, boundaryless, and qualified. Rankin-Wright et al. (2017) also highlight that marginalized bodies, specifically those who are women and racialized, are disproportionately represented in volunteer roles, and even less represented in paid high-performance sport coaching roles. LaVoi (2016) states that barriers such as limited mentorship, networking, and organizational biases are some of the various reasons as to why this disparity exists. As a result, the pathways to high-performance

and professional coaching remains a career that is inaccessible to many bodies, reinforcing exclusionary trends in sport leadership, and reinforced by sport organizations and systems that set both formal and informal norms of credibility, leadership, and unequal labour demands (Banwell & Kerr, 2016; Joseph & McKenzie, 2022; Kerr & Ali, 2012; LaVoi, 2016; McCullogh & Safai, 2023; Norman, 2010).

As alluded to earlier, the demands on high-performance sport coaches are widely understood as substantial and complex. Banwell and Kerr (2016) highlight that high-performance coaches are often pulled into multifaceted roles that exceed traditional sport instructions. The authors note that coaches are expected to manage not only aiding athletes with skill development or game strategy, but also routinely tasked with managing team dynamics or relations with other key sport participants (e.g., parents, administrators, etc.), completing administrative work, offering mental health support, serving as a mentor, talent recruiter and a cultural/social facilitator within their organization and teams (Banwell & Kerr, 2016). In some instances, the sport coach even takes on the additional work of being a chauffeur, nutritionist, fitness trainer, or even medic. These examples showcase the range of emotional, cognitive, and physical labour that sport coaches take on that often goes unrecognized by other sport participants (e.g., athletes, parents, administrators), but can still be seen as essential to what it means to be a highperformance sport coach (Cassidy et al., 2009; Duffy et al., 2004; Gearity & Metz, 2017; Nascimento, 2020; Roderick, 2006; Taylor et al., 2025). Where emotional labour refers to how sport coaches display, manage, and navigate their emotions to meet the professional expectations of their work, cognitive labour encompasses the problem-solving and decision making required to ensure positive performance outcomes (Cushion et al., 2006; McKenzie et al., 2023; Potrac et al., 2021). Physical labour refers to the day-to-day responsibilities of the sport coaches, as well as

what their profession requires of them overall. For example, Taylor and Garratt (2010) describe how sport coaches are often setting up and dismantling training environments, maintaining equipment and other important materials, and demonstrating techniques for athletes to utilize while playing. Although many individuals may understand these aspects as 'part of the job,' emotional, cognitive and physical labour is often devalued by sport organizations, particularly when performed by coaches who do not align with dominant ideals of credibility and professionalism that continue to shape high-performance sport cultures (Carter-Francique, 2016; LaVoi, 2016; Singer & Cunningham, 2018). As a result, the legitimacy of this labour is not evenly granted, and its recognition often reflects broader dynamics of race, gender, and power within high-performance sport (Norman, 2010; Rankin-Wright et al., 2017; Joseph & McKenzie, 2022). These dynamics highlight the need to analyze how power, race and gender intersect to understand how exclusion is sustained and reproduced within high-performance sport coaching.

2.3 Exclusion and Discrimination in Sport Coaching in Canada

As noted in Chapter 1, Canadian high-performance sport coaching is dominated by white male sport coaches. To date, there have been several studies that unpack why such a situation remains prevalent in sport leadership or coaching in the Canadian sport context (e.g., Barnes & Adams, 2021; Kerr & Ali, 2012; McKenzie et al., 2023). Bishop et al. (2023) examine how the continued entrenchment of whiteness and masculinity in the profession and support for white males in sport coaching positions by key decision-makers reproduces existing racial and gender inequities within sport leadership broadly, and in sport coaching specifically. The authors further highlight that, while in sport coaching roles, white males have a tendency to utilize normative and functionalist coaching methods and do little to acknowledge their own privilege, the racialized identities of athletes and staff they work with, as well as the need for cultural

awareness and competency within the sport coaching space (Bishop et al., 2023; see also DeJaeghere & Murphy-Graham, 2022; Kochanek & Erickson; 2019). As Gearity et al. (2019) note in their work, white men "normalize whiteness at the expense of diversity, difference, and multiculturalism" (p. 251).

Within Canada, very few studies have centered on the experiences of racialized populations in sport coaching, and even less have focused on such experiences through an intersectional lens whereby attempts are made to take both gender and race/ethnicity into account. One such effort that speaks directly to this gap is Joseph et al.'s (2021) study examining the experiences of racialized sport participants in a university sport setting. In a first of its kind report, the authors provide a snapshot of racial demographics in the OUA system (e.g., 72% of the people in U Sports—the governing body for intercollegiate sport in Canada—identify as white), stories of sport coaches who have experienced racial discrimination in sport, and helpful tools for anti-racist change. This is a significant report insofar as its central aims were to highlight lived experiences of racism, and to offer "a strong foundation to support future strategic action and help make U Sports a more inclusive and safe community for all" (Joseph et al., 2021, p. 2). However, the report does not specifically draw attention to the complex ways in which race, gender, and other markers of social status intersect, and how multiple axes of privilege and oppression operate within systems of power to facilitate and/or constrain the participation of certain bodies in sport coaching.

Alongside research on racial discrimination within sport coaching, issues of gender discrimination have been the subject of numerous sociocultural sport studies in recent years. The literature indicates that, with sport being a male-dominated domain, it has been challenging for women to navigate their way through a system designed to discriminate against them,

contributing to their lack of representation, if not outright exclusion, from sport leadership positions (Surujlal & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2015). Research findings have consistently concluded that the reasoning behind the lack of females in sport coaching can be attributed to a variety of factors such as biased hiring practices (Hoeber & Dahlstrom, 2021; Kidd, 2013), lack of support for women who have families (Kerr & Marshall, 2007), minimal amount of peer support (Demers, 2015), and poor recruitment of previous female athletes into coaching high-performance sports (Kerr & Banwell, 2014). The research has also suggested that current Canadian initiatives and programs in place to help women's development in coaching are "presented as options, rather than requirements… to participate in or implement" (Hoeber & Dahlstrom, 2021, p. 218). Thus, despite decades and decades of research and advocacy, sport remains contested terrain for women, as leaders/coaches (cf., Messner, 1988). Sport remains a gendered institution with ongoing systemic and structural barriers and inequities, along with negative stereotypes and gender biases towards women, contributing to the under-representation of women in sport leadership or sport coaching roles (Burton & Newton, 2021).

As discussed by McKenzie et al. (2023), highlighting the multifaceted interactions between race and gender through an intersectional lens is required as, for example, racialized women often experience discrimination differently than their racialized male counterparts due to the dual Othered (i.e., women and racialized) identities that racialized women possess (Joseph & McKenzie, 2022). This is in line with other scholarship on this topic, within and outside of the Canadian sport context, which similarly highlight how that racialized women coaches' sense of belonging and inclusion within sport coaching is routinely compromised due to their race, gender, and other markers of their identity. Specifically, this scholarship demonstrates how Black

women coaches often feel the need to live "double lives" to navigate their way through sport coaching (Olushola-Ogunrinde & Carter- Francique, 2021; Symons, 2021).

As noted, there are some important concerns with regards to racial and gendered exclusion and discrimination in Canadian high-performance sport coaching that cannot be ignored. With these experiences in mind and the overall precarity of the sport coaching profession, sport coaches may feel the need to employ various practices and strategies to keep their work. One such example of this is highlighted by Corsby et al., (2022) who state that to match the laboured demands of the sport coaching profession, coaches must keep "the appearance and expression of a certain persona" (Corsby et al., 2022, p. 323). Put differently, their study participants felt the need to manage their impressions when engaging in their sport work.

2.4 Impression Management in Sport Coaching

In the sociology of sport coaching literature, several scholars have explored the ways in which coaches engage in impression management within their sport workspaces (Jones et al., 2010; North et al., 2018; Potrac et al., 2021; Ronglan, 2010; Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2014). For example, Jones et al. (2010) specifically touched on impression management in the context of the athlete-coach relationship, highlighting how athletes' expectations of their coaches—that is, athletes' presumptions of how a coach should or should not behave—influenced the style of coaching and presentation of self taken up by the coach. In particular, the authors touched upon Goffman's work by illustrating that this act of determining what is expected of them and putting on 'an act' (i.e., type of coaching style) for the audience (i.e., athletes), while trying to avoid being considered inauthentic, is one of the many ways in which sport coaches engage in impression management. Potrac et al. (2021) similarly focused on the performative work of

impression management; in this case, in the context of community sport coaching. The authors highlighted that due to the heightened competition for work contracts in community sport coaching, their study participants felt the need to manage all their actions and reactions in relation to what they anticipated the public's reaction (i.e., athletes, other coaches, stakeholders, etc.) could or would be (Potrac et al., 2021). In other words, knowing that they were being closely observed, and that contracts would be given only to those deemed the 'right people,' the study participants took every opportunity to ensure that they were socially desirable. As explained by the authors, this entailed that sport coaches act robotically in situations, such as shutting down emotional problems, or always conducting themselves in a courteous and professional manner, since they are in other words, expected to take professionalism to a concerning extreme.

However, what is important to note amongst this scholarship is the significant role of identity as multifaceted and shaped by overlapping social categories such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity plays in framing an individual's experiences and perspectives (Crenshaw, 1989). Of the very limited research on markers of identity (e.g., race, gender sexual orientation, etc.) in relation to sport coaching and impression management, there is consensus among researchers that markers of identity influence how and why coaches engage in impression management (McDowell & Cunningham, 2009; Rankin-Wright et al., 2017; Sveinson et al., 2022). For instance, McDowell and Cunningham (2009) discuss that African American coaches in the United States often felt compelled to overcompensate through emotional control to counteract racialized stereotypes they faced in their sport work environments. Rankin-Wright et al. (2017) similarly highlight the experiences of Asian and Black women coaches in the United Kingdom and how they felt they needed to employ impression management tactics such as adjusting

speech, dress, and leadership styles to navigate the racism and sexism they faced in their sport institutions. And yet, as noted in Chapter 1, there are no studies that examine the ways in which sport coaches from under-represented groups within the Canadian sport context use impression management to navigate the uncertainties and expectations of their sport workspaces. The absence of this knowledge is disconcerting given what is known about the harmful consequences for sport coaches in constantly having to undertake the emotional labour of impression management. Hamblin and Crisp (2022) point to such harmful effects as emotional exhaustion and stress, while Hinojosa-Alcalde et al. (2023) call attention to how upholding a certain image, and the demands of sport coaching work can exacerbate work-life conflicts. The authors further that the stress in doing so can strain personal relationships and diminish overall well-being. Furthermore, the significant psychological impact of impression management is interconnected with the stress these high-performance sport coaches experience. Many studies have also shown that, mentally, high-performance sport coaches experience cognitive overload when having to face and manage the work specific tasks that need to be done (e.g. completing trainings, attending practices, training athletes), all while taking measures to ensure that they are 'playing the part' of their profession accurately so that they do not seem weak, become excluded or judged (Gould & Dieffenbach, 2002; Hambrick & D'Innocenzo, 2018; McLaren & Cushion, 2010; Pope et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2023). According to Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, this mental load leads to mental fatigue and discomfort as well as experiences of internal conflict and a decreased understanding of the personal self. Having to engage in impression management means that one must change their whole or part of their true identity, and this practice can lead to heightened feelings of depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders (Smith et al., 2016).

However, although these feelings can be experienced by all high-performance sport coaches, those from under-represented groups (e.g., women and/or racialized coaches) may have a more difficult time in dealing with the impacts of impression management. This is because those who are often marginalized in sport coaching may not only feel the need to partake in impression management to ensure they are perceived as competent and successful coaches but must take on the extra work of ensuring that their racial and gendered identities 'fit into' or "fit in with' sport's gendered and racialized cultural norms. For example, for self-identifying women coaches, they may feel the expectation to conform to the hegemonic masculine norms that are entrenched in sport coaching to not seem fragile or incompetent to their sport coaching peers, athletes, administrators, spectators, and many others working in the high-performance sport coaching atmosphere (Murray et al., 2020). Similarly, those who are racialized may feel the need to adapt to the whiteness of the profession by suppressing cultural markers, adopting dominant coaching styles perceived as neutral or professional, and/or modifying their speech (Nesseler et al., 2020). Both experiences can lead to a lost sense of personal identity regarding race and gender. This may cause feelings of sadness, confusion and an overall understanding that acceptance only comes when they change themselves. Joseph and McKenzie (2022) also found that the lack of support and mentorship for those who are women and/or racialized coaches in Canada leads to feelings of loneliness and a sense of being 'out of place.' These feelings can be significantly damaging to one's overall sense of self and mentality. In other words, the psychological cost of managing one's image while being held to different standards can lead to high levels of stress and dissatisfaction with one's professional life.

Chapter 3: Theory, Methodology and Methods

This third chapter of this thesis focuses on the theory, methodology and methods utilized in this study. This chapter begins by unpacking intersectionality as a theoretical framework in efforts to highlight its suitability for this particular study. Following this, the chapter will briefly explore phenomenology, before delving into the data collection and data analysis methods employed in the study. This chapter will conclude with critical reflections of my own journey as a researcher in this study.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study aims to gain a more in-depth understanding (1) do Canadian high-performance sport coaches engage in impression management to navigate their sport work environments. If so, how, why and what are its effects?; and (2) how do race and gender inform and get informed by sport coaches' impression management work? To explore this, it is essential to utilize critical theories that aid in understanding individual experiences as informed by and informing broader structural and cultural considerations. This is especially relevant given this project's focus on impression management as impression management is not just about an individual's personal idiosyncrasies but about their efforts to present themselves as they are situated within various systems of power that are at play in the context of Canadian high-performance sport coaching. Considering these factors, the theoretical framework that has guided this research project is intersectionality as it well accounts for how power, identity, and inclusion/exclusion intersect.

First coined by Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality draws attention to the ways in which people experience discrimination differently depending on the multiple overlapping social identities (e.g., race, class, gender, etc.) one holds. As Crenshaw (2018) states in an interview:

Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ+ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things. Intersectionality is focused on and calls for matters of oppression, discrimination, and marginalization to be analyzed through a holistic approach that recognizes how individuals are often affected by multiple forms of oppression (Atewologun, 2018).

Cho et al. (2013) dive deeper into this theory by explaining that this theory can be used through three main approaches. They articulate that the first approach "applies an intersectional frame of analysis to a wide range of research and teaching projects" (p. 785). This, simply put, discusses how intersectionality is integrated into various research topics. The second focuses on "discursive investigations of intersectionality as theory and methodology" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 785). This field of inquiry focuses on the criticisms of intersectional theory and methodology itself. Finally, the third approach "reflects the reality that while intersectionality has been the subject of disciplinary travel, it is far for being only an academic project" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 786). Given the nature of this work, the first approach was utilized in this thesis, as the purpose of this study is to understand the ways in which one's identity (i.e. race and gender) impact the context-specific inquiry of Canadian high-performance sport coaching and how these sport coaches may engage with the phenomenon of impression management. However, it is imperative to note that the other two approaches are not entirely irrelevant. As Hill Collins (2019) highlights, intersectionality pays attention to how knowledge is being mobilized, taken up, and understood.

Building on Crenshaw (1989), Hill-Collins (1993; 2000; 2019) emphasizes the importance of going beyond additive analysis as she calls to attention for us to "reconceptualize race, class and gender as categories of analysis" (p. 27) away from dichotomous thinking and rankings. To more fulsomely comprehend the ways in which intersecting oppressions shape individuals' lives, Hill-Collins (1993) outlines how oppression functions at three interlocking levels: institutional, symbolic and individual. The institutional level of oppression refers to the oppression that is built into different structures and systems. Following this, the symbolic level of oppression involves the stereotypes, understandings and ideologies given to individuals by others. Lastly, the individual level of oppression refers to how these understandings shape the ways in which we treat others and how we perceive ourselves to be. Rather than functioning in isolation, it is important to note that these levels interact with one another which can produce varying lived realities for those who are positioned differently within systems of power.

This framework is relevant to studying high-performance sport coaching as these levels help with understanding racialized and/or women sport coaches' experiences. For example, at the institutional level, several scholars acknowledge the presence of hiring biases in sport coaching that favour white men (e.g., Joseph & McKenzie, 2022; Norman, 2016). At a symbolic level, research has long pointed to the negative and inequitable consequences of essentializing gender stereotypes (i.e., women as fragile, emotional and frail, and men as strong, dominant and 'natural' leaders) that get taken up in the construction of what it means to be an 'ideal coach' (Burdsey, 2011). At the individual level, those coaches who are minoritized are forced to navigate these biases to appear credible and competent (Kilty, 2006; Norman, 2010; Potrac et al., 2017). This can also involve how minoritized coaches are understood and treated, and how these coaches understand themselves and navigate their identities—given the focus of this study,

through impression management strategies—within their sport workspaces. Joseph et al. (2022) and Norman (2016) highlight that the inclusion of minoritized sport coaches is based on conformity to dominant norms, creating their inclusion conditional rather than steady. Intersectionality then can be understood how belonging in this context is not solely regarding access, but also the ways in which legitimacy and steadiness is contested and withheld based on one's gendered and racialized identities. By holding awareness of these multiple dimensions of oppression and privilege through an intersectional lens, we reinforce how impression management is not just as personal trouble but a larger, public issue in high-performance sport.

Given the focus of this research project, intersectionality as a theoretical framework is especially well suited for this study as it permits us to attend to individual, symbolic, and institutional levels of oppressions to better explore how systemic inequalities and multiple intersecting identities influence interpersonal communication and self-presentation dynamics. Although impression management has been discussed in sport by some scholars (e.g., Jones et al., 2010; Potrac et al., 2017), few scholars deeply analyze how these practices are connected to intersectional understandings of power. Much of the extant literature does not get into the racial and gendered dynamics at play with impression management. Aside from sports, scholars have emphasized the importance of how impression management is influenced by intersecting power systems in professional environments. As Johnson et al. (2016) and Wingfield (2010) note, gendered and racialized professionals utilize impression management and change their self-presentation to blend into their specific environments. The authors point out that is a result of normative workplace cultures based in whiteness and masculinity. Although there is a lack of this perspective and understanding of impression management in sport coaching research, it does not reflect the importance of using intersectionality to understand and unpack impression

management in high-performance sport coaching workplaces. By centering intersectionality as the theoretical lens through which to examine participants' experiences in this study, I emphasize the need to highlight that impression management is a phenomenon that is framed by broader power relations and structures, rather than just individual choice.

3.2 Methodology

This study draws on phenomenology as its methodological framework given its research foci: (1) do Canadian high-performance sport coaches engage in impression management to navigate their sport work environments. If so, how, why and what are its effects?; and (2) How do race and gender inform and get informed by sport coaches' impression management work? As discussed by Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenology attempts to expand our understanding of shared lived experiences of a certain concept or phenomenon. Phenomenology offers two main strands: descriptive and interpretive. Descriptive phenomenology, as put by Giorgi (2009) and Moustakas (1994), aims to identify the universal essence of lived experiences, where researchers set aside their biases and knowledge to describe the participants' experiences as purely as possible through a systematic approach. On the other hand, interpretive phenomenology, is described as understanding personal lived experiences, and exploring individuals' relatedness or involvement in an event or process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It contains two complimentary commitments with the first being to give voice to and understand the experiences of the participants, and the second commitment being contextualizing and making sense of the participants' experiences.

Interpretive phenomenology is well suited for this study as the research questions are concerned with why, when, and what exactly the coaches do when employing impression management, how they experience and make sense of the process, and how race and gender

inform their impression management work. What is most notable about interpretive phenomenology is that it is "relatively sensitive to describing and exploring differences in experiences across participants" (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 126); a trait that renders it particularly suitable for this study given the potential range of experiences amongst participants. This is critical when working with participants who hold diverse identities shaped by race, gender, and other markers of difference. The method allows space for varied interpretations of what impression management feels like, means, and demands within environments that are often experienced as exclusionary or surveillant.

This methodology has been utilized in other sport coaching scholarship to demonstrate the ways in which individuals experience and navigate phenomena including power, identity and marginalization in institutional settings (Adams & Sparkes, 2007; Denison & Avner, 2011). For example, McMahon et al. (2020) discussed on this phenomenological approach to study how female coaches experience and navigate gendered power relations in sport setting. Furthermore, Culver et al. (2003) discussed how interpretive phenomenology aids with understanding meaning making in sport which is shaped by broader social structures such as culture, power, and institutional norms. Thus, its emphasis on situated meaning-making makes it a critical and valuable approach for this research since studying the experiences of minoritized coaches with impression management are not just personal lived experiences, but a way in which these coaches may navigate their broader, exclusionary sport workplaces. This makes interpretive phenomenology especially well-suited to examining the strategies and negotiations undertaken by racialized and/or women coaches who must continually assess how they are being perceived to maintain legitimacy in their roles.

Although phenomenology centers on the participants' meaning-making process, and is the base of the analysis, it has been critiqued for a lack of a critical lens (Finlay 2002; Moran, 2000; Schutz, 1967). This is because phenomenology focuses heavily on subjective experiences as they are lived by individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and less on a systemic or structural analysis. This can cause a lack of acknowledgement around privilege, oppression, power dynamics and other important aspects that shape subjective experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, this study's use of intersectionality as its theoretical framework aids with ensuring critical depth and breadth to data analysis as it (i.e., intersectionality) emphasizes the complexities and interdigitations of such factors as race, gender, socioeconomic status, power dynamics, social structures, historical contexts, etc. Since interpretive phenomenology aims to better our understanding of an individual's meaning of experiences within their particular contexts, intersectionality enriches this contextual understanding by emphasizing the diversity, complexity and impact of different social structures and power relations on and across the experiences of individuals (Collins, 2000; McCall, 2005). This approached allowed for the investigation into the systemic inequities and power dynamics at play when aiming to understand how participants may have employed impression management in their respective sport workplace environments.

3.3 Methods

3.3.1 Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with eight current English-speaking racialized and/or self-identifying women Canadian high-performance coaches. Semi-structured interviews were particularly useful as they involve questions that are "typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but interviewers are allowed the

freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact, expected) to probe beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions" (Berg, 2004, p. 81). As noted by Roberts (2020), semi-structured interview guides provide focus and structure to the interview, while still allowing the participant freedom to expand on answers in their own ways. Additionally, interview guides are helpful for novice and/or interviewers seeking more experience (Roberts, 2020) as, quite often, novice researchers may compromise the quality of the interview by posting overly lengthy, unclear or leading questions that can limit participant openness.

As Smith and Sparkes offer: "Interviews are an occasion for conversation" (Smith & Sparkes, 2016, p. 107). This is noteworthy as humans by nature are conversational beings and, through these conversations, we can hopefully better understand others and their experiences (Brinkman, 2013). The interviews served as an opportunity for participants to share their experiences with an emphasis on the tactics of impression management they use to navigate their sport coaching environments within their specific sporting context (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Interviewing is also considered to be flexible by allowing the researcher to build upon the conversations taking place by asking impromptu questions (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Thus, interviewing sport coaches assisted with capturing a range of experiences and in turn the nuance that exists within these experiences; and further led to answers that are most meaningful to the participants. By assisting participants in sharing their own experiences and in directing the conversations, these interviews "show[ed] the flesh…behind all of the garments they wear in everyday social life" (Hermanovwicz, 2002, p. 480).

3.3.2 Recruitment and Data Security/Management

Eight participants were recruited through the York University Athletics Department, the Coaching Association of Canada, social media posts on LinkedIn and Instagram, and snowball

sampling. Inclusion criteria were that participants were English-speaking racialized and/or women Canadian high-performance sport coaches. Canadian high-performance sport coaches were defined as those working at a Canadian university, Provincial/Territorial Sport Organization (PTSO) or National Sport Organization (NSO) level). Participants were compensated $20 through a gift card of their choice.

Following ethics approval (certificate #STU 2024-090), I emailed the York University Athletics Department and the Coaching Association of Canada a letter of introduction that included information about the nature of my study, confirmation of my ethics approval, and a description of participants I was seeking to recruit. Once approved by both organizations, I shared a study information sheet (see Appendix A) for the coaches to view. For the York University's Athletics Department, I was advised to directly email the sport coaches (via the email addresses available on the relevant YorkU webpage) with a letter of invitation. Furthermore, I utilized LinkedIn and Instagram as additional ways in which to recruit participants. Posts outlining the nature of the project and participant inclusion criteria were posted on my personal (public) LinkedIn account. I created a public Instagram account (username: @mastersstudy.wr) where the recruitment posts were shared. To further increase exposure and to cast a wider net for participant recruitment, I also reshared the Instagram posts on my own private Instagram. In addition to the above recruitment strategies, snowball sampling also occurred since participants were asked to share the study details with coaches in their networks. Prior to the interviews, participants were given a brief background on the research project and were provided an opportunity to ask questions about the research project. Participant recruitment was completed in mid-January 2025, following a determination that thematic saturation was reached.

All information during the study was held in confidence, unless specifically indicated otherwise by the participant in their informed consent form. Participants' names will not appear in any report or publication of the research (unless otherwise permitted by the participant). A link was kept that identifies participants to their coded information, but this link was kept secure and available only to the principal investigator and my supervisor. For quotes used in the thesis or subsequent publications, all identifiers are either removed and/or modified to ensure participant anonymity. Data was safely stored in a password-locked digital file and only the researcher and supervisor had access to this information. The data will be destroyed one month after the thesis has been submitted to the university. Recordings (audio) are saved in a password protected file to principal investigator's local computer, not the cloud-based service. An Informed Consent form was provided for the participants and addressed areas such as confidentiality, potential risks, and benefits of the project, as well as highlighted the voluntary nature of participation; reminding participants that they may cease participation at any point during data collection and that they reserve the right to refuse answering any question they are uncomfortable with.

3.3.3 Participant Demographics

A total of eight self-identifying women and/or racialized high-performance sport coaches were interviewed for this study. The sample reflected diverse experiences across varying levels. Five participants identified as women and three identified as men. Participants identified their racial and/or cultural identities as: Métis (n= 1); Trinidadian-Canadian (n= 1); White (n= 1); Chinese (n= 1); Indian (n= 1); African American-Caribbean (n= 1), Guyanese-Irish (n=1), and Trinidadian-Greek-Irish (n=1). Three participants identified their age as 24 years old, however, the others did not disclose their age. In describing their time spent coaching, it is important to note that the longest time spent coaching across all participants was 35+ years. All the

participants coached team sports including basketball, volleyball, soccer, field hockey, and figure skating. The coaches were situated in Alberta (1), Manitoba (1), or Ontario (6); however, they briefly mentioned having some experience travelling between cities and/or provinces for games. All coaches were high-performance sport coaches in urban settings. All coaches met the criteria for being Canadian high-performance sport coaches, and some held previous experience at the community and grassroots levels. At the high-performance level, coaches held positions at universities, and/or were involved in national and provincial levels of competition. Four coaches in total had NCCP certification which ranged from Level 3 in Volleyball, C License in soccer, and NCCP Train to Compete. With this being said, it is critical to recognize the significance of geography and that this study may not capture what coaches outside of these provinces experience. To fulsomely explore regional differences as it may relate to sport coaches' opportunities for work and their work experiences, future research would benefit from having participants who are situated in different areas, provinces and/or territories of Canada.

3.3.4 Interviews

The interviews with participants ranged from 45 – 90 minutes to give participants ample time to discuss their experiences. As noted above, a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B) was utilized to help guide the conversations with study participants. Through the questions, efforts were made and encouraged coaches to discuss their experiences in sport, their experiences in navigating their sport workplaces, the different strategies they have employed in their sport workplaces, and their reflections of the impacts of these strategies they feel they need to use during their sport coaching work. Although there were minimal risks to this study, the topic of this study and sharing experiences may create emotional responses from participants. To ensure care for participants, the participants were reminded at the beginning of the interview if

any discomfort occurs, they are allowed to withdraw consent to participant at any given period. Furthermore, if the participant wanted to continue despite the discomfort, they were provided a short break if needed to emotionally regroup themselves. Moreover, as a researcher, I acknowledge how important it is to also continuously validate the experiences and emotions of the participants to ensure that they feel safe and know that their experiences are important. During the interviews, conceptual notes were made using an online system (i.e., Microsoft Word) and further notes (including any organic and/or emergent ideas about themes and connections) were recorded immediately after an interview had been conducted. Interviews were digitally recorded (i.e., through Zoom or the voice memos iPhone application). The saved digital recordings were listened to multiple times and transcribed verbatim using online software (Otter.ai). The interviews were permanently deleted from the account following completion of the transcripts. Where participants elected to be anonymous, pseudonyms are employed in this thesis in lieu of their real names.

3.3.5 Data Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of this research project, reflexive thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the data. Braun et al. (2016) describe that reflexive thematic analysis is a commonly used method of analysis that accommodates different theoretical frameworks and is an analytic technique that helps identify patterns and concepts within a given dataset. However, Braun and Clarke (2021) differentiate reflexive thematic analysis from other coding-based approaches by putting an emphasis on researcher subjectivity and reflexivity. With this being said, reflexive thematic analysis is an approach that is well suited for studies where the goal is not to uncover solid truths within the datasets, but rather explore how meaning is shaped, constructed and conveyed by the participants. This approach embraces the active role of the

research in theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As highlighted by Sparkes and Smith (2014; see also Smith et al., 2009), several of the data collection and analysis steps involved in this study align with an interpretive phenomenological methodology. For example, as will be discussed in greater detail below, data was collected through semi-structured interviews as this type of interview format allows flexibility for participants to discuss and/or emphasize what they feel is important to them and share. This aligns with the methodology's core purpose of honouring participants' voices and resist reducing their experience to just surface-level descriptions. As another example, rigorous reading and re-reading of transcripts following the interviews allowed for the opportunity to see patterns and tensions (or the lack of) in participants' perceptions and experiences.

The data analysis process was guided by the six-phase process of reflexive thematic analysis and described by Braun and Clarke (2019). In phase one, I had familiarized myself with the data. This consisted of thoroughly reading through the transcripts, listening to the audios, and note taking. This step was imperative to ensuring that I was understanding the participants' narratives and the creation of preliminary notes. In phase two, I began to create initial codes for all the datasets. This meant that I drew on my theoretical framework to unpack surface level and deeper meanings. I was understanding and noting down how participants made sense of impression management within institutional and cultural contexts, by focusing on what was being said, what was not being said, and the tensions in their responses. Codes were not applied rigidly or extracted mechanically, but rather developed through close attention to how participants articulated tensions, contradictions, silences, and emotional tones. The goal of coding in interpretive phenomenology is not to categorize or quantify experience, but to interpret how experience is made meaningful in context (van Manen, 2016). During this process, the

research questions were relied on. Phase three consisted of creating preliminary themes by putting together related codes and finding the patterns between the data sets. I approached the data as interpretive outputs which were constructed through my engagement with the data, positionality, research questions, and the frameworks I used for this thesis. This was done since as Braun and Clarke (2019) note, themes are not to be seen as just summaries of what participants explained in their interviews, but rather are analytical stories that are capturing something significant in relation to the research aims. Sparkes and Smith's (2014) underscore that interpretive phenomenological analysis requires recognizing that participants may share structural conditions.

For phases four and five, I started to refine and define the themes; while ensuring I was re-reading and engaging with the datasets to ensure I had understood the data well. I ensured to draw upon the current literature surrounding impression management and sport coaching. In this process, I paid attention to the diversity across the different data sets and to highlight the complexities of the participants' perspectives, especially around race and gender. Themes were shaped through the research questions, and the theoretical framework of intersectionality, allowing for a layered understanding of how impression management was both practiced and felt. In this process I also considered how my own perceptions and interpretations was leading to the creation of these themes by continuously reflecting on my decisions, the research questions and the literature. Finally in phase six, I finalized the themes with supporting quotes, literature, theoretical insight, and analytic interpretation. Each theme aimed to provide an understanding of what the current conditions of the participants' sport coaching contexts were, how impression management came into play within their environments, the effects of engaging in this practice, and how race and gender informed the impression management tactics they used.

Utilizing reflexive analysis allowed for a rigorous, yet flexible approach to understand, unpack, and present the data. However, as explained before, since reflexive thematic analysis allows for the researcher to be a part of the process, I ensured to be reflexive during this process. The following section highlights the steps I took to ensure this.

3.3.6 Rigour and Reflexivity

As Tracy (2010) notes, for "qualitative research to be of high quality, it *must* be rigorous" (p. 841; emphasis in original). As such, I undertook several strategies in efforts to ensure rigour. For example, I paid particular attention to the number of times I reviewed individual transcripts, and routinely checked in with myself to question whether themes and analytical ideas: 1) were grounded in and emerged from the data; and 2) reflected the whole dataset, and was not limited to an individual participant's experience (in other words, I consistently checked in with myself to ensure I was not cherry-picking data). Another strategy to ensure rigour involved member checking. Participants were invited to reflect on the themes I gleaned from my analysis (as opposed to reviewing/verifying their individual transcripts) and were asked to confirm whether the themes resonated for them; they were provided time and opportunity to provide any feedback, suggestions, comments, or raise any questions they may have. Thus, after transcripts and preliminary themes or interpretations had been identified, the information was sent back to the participants to confirm that the results were accurate and reflect their experiences. Furthermore, I consulted regularly with my supervisor, and had check-ins with my supervisory committee throughout the data analysis process in efforts to ensure that my analysis remains grounded in the data. This involved going over potential themes, analyses, interpretations, and findings with my supervisor to reduce personal bias.

Bracketing was also used, as it as a specific technique utilized with phenomenology. As put by Creswell and Poth (2018), “bracketing is a process of setting aside one’s beliefs, feelings and perceptions to be open or faithful to the phenomenon” (p. 453). This was completed by documenting assumptions I had about my study prior to conducting interviews. While bracketing is a technique that is often used, it has been critiqued as an idealized and perhaps unattainable goal (Finlay, 2002). With this in mind, my assumptions were not fully suspended. For this research, bracketing was utilized as a preliminary step in which I documented my assumptions, experiences, and preconceptions about the topic before conducting interviews in effort to recognize what I was bringing to the process. Given the critiques of bracketing from Braun and Clarke (2019) and Finlay (2002), bracketing was not my only or primary strategy. It was complemented by a deeper and ongoing process of reflexivity. Reflexivity is defined as “the act of examining one’s own assumption, belief, and judgement systems, and thinking carefully and critically about how these influence the research process” (Jamieson et al., 2023, p. 1). In this way, bracketing helped me identify my assumptions early, while reflexivity allowed me to engage critically with how those assumptions influenced the research.

To achieve this, I engaged in two different forms of reflexivity: personal and interpersonal. Before starting any form of data collection, I conducted a personal reflexivity exercise (Mann et al., 2009) where I kept a reflexive research journal about my personal experiences with the research topic, and how they might influence the research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Furthermore, after every interview, I engaged in this practice as well in which I documented what I learned, any positive/negative reactions I had, and my perceptions of the impact of decisions I made during the interview. Additionally, I described where I believe my biases were manifested during the interview and attempted to examine the information from the

perspective of the participant. As part of this process, it was my intention to reflect on the experiences of participants and note what I felt I learned from them.

The reflexive journal was used with regards to interpersonal reflexivity. This involved reflecting about the power dynamics at play between myself and the participant, about the participant's experiences juxtaposed with mine, and the ways in which these influenced how I interpreted the research results. One important aspect I noted was the influence of my own long-term immersion in the sport coaching scholarship. Although this engagement served as a strength while completing my thesis, it required me to actively question my assumptions about what is commonly understood (or not) in sport coaching and sport coaching research, and what individuals know (or do not know) about these topics. Given that it is not just myself in this research process, and I am working in collaboration with my supervisor, interpersonal reflexivity also occurred for this relationship. As put by Olmos-Vega et al. (2023), "reflexive research collaboration involves active and ongoing exploration of the interplay between team members' motivations, expectations, and assumptions, while examining how these perspectives and dynamics can be leveraged or managed" (p. 244).

Chapter 4: Canadian High-Performance Sport Coaching Context

This study was guided by two central research questions: (1) do Canadian high-performance sport coaches engage in impression management to navigate their sport work environments? If so, how, why, and what its effects; and (2) how does race and gender inform and get informed by sport coaches' impression management work. However, following data analysis, it became clear that any fulsome discussion of these questions needs to be preceded by the study participants' accounts of their journeys into sport coaching, and a description of their sport work environments. While their accounts in this chapter do not yet speak to the impression management strategies they use, their experiences offer crucial context for understanding the institutional environments in which their coaching takes place. It is critical to first analyze these experiences before answering the research questions to gain a better understanding of why and how participants might choose to employ certain impression management tactics, and their experience in doing so. Where participants are first introduced in this chapter, the ways in which they self-identified in terms of gender and race/ethnicity will also be noted.

4.1 Becoming a Coaching: Entry Pathways and Personal Drivers

All participants in this study shared that coaching was not just a job to them, but something that was deeply rooted in personal connection and enjoyment. Each participant described strong connections to sport whether through their own athletic experiences, family involvement, or an early exposure to these spaces. For many participants, sport was a part of their lives since they were young, and was a constant presence throughout their lives, such that sport coaching was but a new facet of their larger and longer sport experiences. For example, Shanice (Trinidadian Canadian coach) described getting into coaching after facing a life altering

injury as an athlete. She stated: “I love this sport. I’ve been involved for so long, so it feels pretty second nature [to be a coach].” For Prabhtej (Indian coach), coaching also became an extension of his time as an athlete: “I started teaching as soon as I got a little better [at the sport]. I love coaching.” Katie (White coach) shared a similar experience given her mom was a national-level athlete and her father was a coach. She reflected: “I was always in a gym. Sport was just part of my life.” For Bill (Trinidadian-Greek-Irish coach), he began coaching more so as a hobby and a way to get high school volunteer hours. However, after involving himself in coaching, he stated that: “[He’s] been coaching ever since [his first involvement with coaching].” In sharing these experiences of how they entered coaching, all the participants made clear that sport coaching was not just an obligation or chore, or even just a career path chosen to earn income, but rather a personal, meaningful part of their lives.

Family involvement and support played an important role in shaping and influencing the participants’ coaching journeys. Justina (Guyanese-Irish coach) recollected how her father would be going over basketball plays on the living room floor with her and using different methods to get her on top of her game. She stated: “My coaching career started because of [my dad]… one of my favorite stories about my coaching career is like it started when I was a kid, because him and I would, like, sit on the floor, we would like, get like, five quarters and five pennies, and then make like, plays just like, moving them around. And it’s like, okay, so what would you do if the defense does this? And then just move them around. So, like, I feel like that's where my coaching journey began.” Katie also touched on the influence of her father on her development as a coach as she explained how her father’s coaching and collaborating with women was what started her interest in coaching. She specifically stated: “There were always women coaching, my dad was often an assistant coach to a woman, and I was always a part of that environment.”

Nick (African-American Caribbean coach) also had a similar experience with his father when he explained: “I learned coaching from him, even when I wasn’t playing, I was watching and learning.” The significant influence of parents, and especially fathers, for the study participants is not necessarily surprising given what is known about both the reliance on parent volunteerism in grassroots and community sport across Canada as well what is known about the typical gendered division of labour among sport volunteers in Canadian sport. However, what is important to note here is that through these stories, the mothers were often not included in their accounts. This is itself a meaningful point that scholars have highlighted. Trussell (2016) describes that sport parenting is deeply gendered. This highlights that fathers tend to assume visible, authoritative roles, like in sport coaching, whereas mothers often perform the invisible, but essential care work such as coordination, providing emotional support and, managing logistics behind the scenes. These early dynamics of visibility and invisibility reflect what LaVoi and Dutove (2012) describe as structural and cultural barriers to women in coaching; barriers that shape not only who enters coaching, but how they learn to present themselves within it. This foundation later informs the impression management work participants engaged in to navigate gendered expectations.

The participants deeply cared for sport and recognized the value of their early experiences through sport and sport coaching as positive, transformative, and contributing to their confidence and sense of belonging in sport. Participants made clear in their interviews that they saw their efforts as sport coaches as a way to give back to their sport communities, and to support others in having a positive experience in sport. This sense of purpose was shared by Justina when she described: “Coaching is the best way [she] can give back, the sport gave [her] so much.” Jayme (Métis coach) highlighted: “I enjoy being in positions where I can be a bit of a role model or help create safe sport places.” For Prabhtej, in a full circle moment that returned to

his acknowledgement of the important role played by his father in getting him into sport, he stated: “I hope to get other kids into sport the same way my dad got me into it.”

By examining how participants understood their journey into coaching, there is valuable insight gained into the ways in which they respond to, manage, and understand the duties and pressures they perceive in their current work. In other words, although impression management tactics are not foregrounded in this section, the experiences of the participants with sport lays the groundwork for understanding how and why participants might later manage their impressions. However, before getting into these ideas, it is first critical to understand what the participants’ sport work entails, which will be covered in the next section.

4.2 What Sport Work Entails: Duties of Participants

The coaches in this study held roles across a range of high-performance sport contexts, such as university, national, and provincial levels. Although the sport and level varied, a consistent thread across all participants’ experiences was the range and intensity of duties they undertook. The participants described that the base of their coaching work entailed preparing athletes, designing drills, analyzing and improving athlete performance, and offering feedback. For example, Jayme specifically stated: “My day starts with checking on equipment and prepping the place, going through practice plans, and making sure everyone on my team knows the expectations for the day. That’s the baseline.” Katie also shared: “We run structured sessions almost daily, and between planning drills and reviewing footage, I feel like I am constantly thinking about how to get our athletes to the next level.” Bill shared: “I’m at practices five days a week, and then games on the weekend. I’m planning every drill, every warm-up and every setup.” Shanice similarly stated: “We don’t just show up and coach. I have to prep everything before, make sure the space is good, check on athletes, then execute the session.” These duties

explained by the participants are often mischaracterized as the entirety of sport coaching work. These experiences underscore the cognitive labour that coaches routinely perform (e.g., planning, adjusting, evaluating).

Alongside the work done in person with the athletes, the coaches also described having to complete lots of administrative tasks, such as scheduling, reports, organizing travel, and communicating with the sport organization. Prabhtej discussed the hidden nature of this work when he specifically stated: “People just see me on the field, but a lot of my day is emailing, organizing tournaments, planning sessions. It’s a lot of logistics.” Jayme also said: “I’m often the one figuring out funding stuff, uniforms, team snacks. Things that people don’t see.” Hannah further explained that: “There’s a lot of paperwork for everything. Consent forms, travel forms, game sheets. Sometimes it feels like half of my job is just admin.” For Nick, this meant: “There’s so much scheduling, coordinating who’s at which practice, booking gyms. It’s all stuff you don’t think about when you sign up to be a coach.” For Bill, this meant: “[He] had to learn how to use budgeting software and file expense claims. That was never in the job description.” This labour reflects what McKenzie et al. (2023), and Potrac et al. (2021) discuss as the managerialism in coaching, which is described as the bureaucratic responsibilities coaches are increasingly getting tasked with alongside their technical roles. Thus, this labour becomes even more precarious, especially in the absence of institutional support, leaving coaches to navigate complex systems on their own.

Through the interviews, it was also clear that having to manage relationships with various people was an integral part of the job. Katie stated: “I deal with parents every week. Some are amazing, but some don’t understand boundaries, and that becomes emotional work in itself.”

Nick shared that with his experiences: “There’s a lot of politics. You have to be really careful about how you talk to certain people, especially when you’re not a white man. You have to earn respect before you get it.” Jayme similarly shared: “I spend a lot of time liaising with the board, with administrators, making sure everyone’s on the same page, but I also have to constantly prove my worth.” These accounts highlight what Gearity and Metz (2017) discuss as coaching being a deeply relational profession, meaning that coaches not only are training athletes for success, but are managing the emotional of a wide network of individuals to maintain trust, authority and legitimacy. Nick’s experience points out how this work can also be related to one’s identity, particularly their race.

Although participants shared clear examples of what exactly their work entailed, they also emphasized that a lot of their work is having multiple roles and doing what needs to be done in the moment. Katie summarized the scope of her work as: “It’s like being a coach, therapist, administrator, and teacher all in one.” Shanice shared: “One day I’m a coach, the next day I’m taping ankles, the next I’m driving a kid home because no one else could. You just do what needs to be done.” Bill described himself as a “full operations manager” when describing his work. He specifically stated: “I’ve fixed uniforms, cleaned up after practices, sorted team gear, handled conduct. Some days I feel like I’m running the whole program by myself.” For Jayme, she felt that in her experience when it comes to completing any task: “You can’t say no. There’s this expectation that you’ll figure it out, no matter what it is.”

Together, these narratives emphasize that high-performance coaching is embedded in care, management, and logistical labour. Taylor and Garratt (2010) point out that sport coaches often absorb responsibilities beyond their job descriptions and the normalization of completing any types of work, especially those not shown in the job description, makes coaching work

unstainable. The next section explores how the work that the participants do often comes at a cost.

4.3 Fueled by Passion, Drained by the System: Coaching at a Cost

4.3.1 Overwork and Burnout

While all the participants consistently described their high-performance coaching careers as one that was fueled by passion and love, they also described the demands of their roles as overwork, and as contributing to stress and burnout. Shanice described the reality of her workload: “Planning themed matches, doing fundraising, recruiting. It’s like five jobs in one.” Shanice noted that: “[She does] feel like [she’s] overworking in some ways.” And yet, in order to manage her workload, she did not share the ways in which she pushed back being required to take on “five jobs in one”, but how she would sacrifice her time off to attend to her work: “Even on Sundays, I’m in the office trying to get caught up on some video for next week.” This sense of constant work was echoed by all participants. Bill stated that his work is: “Seven days a week. No days off. Even Mondays are for planning or returning emails.” Justina put it as: “The job doesn’t stop when you leave the court. It follows you home.” Despite their expressed commitment to their roles, all the participants indicated that this work in the high-performance sport setting demanded degrees of energy, time, and emotional bandwidth that went well beyond the court and/or field.

What stood out across all the interviews with the participants was not just the sheer volume of work that the coaches were completing, but how they normalized their workload as ‘just the way things are’ within their sport work environments, and how they understood their taking on of such disproportionate amounts of work as expected of them in their coaching roles. The sport coaches described how deeply embedded overwork was in their everyday lives. In her

work environment, Shanice casually stated: “I’m technically full-time, but I’m doing a lot more than what’s in the job description.” Nick similarly highlighted: “You’re doing full-time work on a part-time contract.” Bill went further to justify the overwork: “You end up taking on more because it’s for the participants, but it is not sustainable.” None of the participants expressed enthusiasm for all the work they constantly were doing; however, neither did they express resistance to the beliefs or systems in which they were expected to take on overwork. Taken together, these experiences underscore that overwork has become embedded in the culture of sport coaching, where saying yes to more is not only normalized by coaches themselves, but also may be subtly reinforced by organizational structures and expectations (Lee & Cho, 2020; Norman, 2010).

It is critical to point out that, by no means, were the participants unaware of the tolls their overwork was taking on them even as they chose to continue their overwork. Bill described: “I think I’m ahead of my years, but I’ve already started thinking, how long can I stay at this pace?” He further added that: “There are days when [he] gets home and can’t remember that [he ate]. That’s not normal.” Hannah (Chinese coach) shared her own questioning: “I still love it, but there’s moments where I ask, like am I burning out already?” These quotes highlight that participants are not naïve or unaware of the consequences of their work, but their continued endurance reveals how powerful sport systems demands compliance. Rather than being blindly committed, these coaches a re-navigating a context where saying no can mean negative outcomes such as lost opportunities, reputational damage, or even being seen as replaceable. Additionally, sense of unsustainability the coaches were experiencing was not solely surrounding workload, but the unstable nature of coaching work itself being often insecure, underpaid and lacking formal protections.

4.3.2 Job Insecurity and Precarity

Alongside the intense workloads described above, participants routinely shared examples of the instability of their sport coaching work. Job precarity and insecurity emerged as a defining feature of sport coaching across different sports and levels. This ranged from part-time contracts, minimal pay, and little long-term security. For Jayme, finances were a big concern. She indicated: “I make ten grand a year from coaching. That’s not enough to live on, but I do it anyway.” She further indicated that she must work outside of coaching to get by. She specifically explained: “I’m lucky to have other work that helps, because coaching alone wouldn’t be enough.” In Bill’s case, he shared: “My funding comes from a mix of grants, club money and fees. It's not stable.” This was like Nick’s experience as he recounted: “I am not salaried. It’s like a mix of honorariums and freelance stuff. You’re kind of patching it all together and hoping the money holds out.” Although high-performance sport coaching is overall depicted as valuable, important, and skillful work that is critical for team success (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Cushion et al., 2003; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Rynne & Mallet, 2012; Taylor & Garratt, 2010), the perspectives shared by the study participants made it clear that coaches are extremely underpaid for the work/overwork they are taking on in service of ensuring the success of their athletes and teams. Their perspectives reinforced that sport coaches often work amidst financial risk and instability because of the lack of full-time work, steady income, a living wage, and basic employment protections within the sport system more broadly (Duffy & Starr, 2022). Additionally, such instability is not just incidental but rather reflects how high-performance sport coaching operates through short-term, expendable labour models that keep an unstable workplace for coaches (McKenzie et al., 2023). This reflects what Taylor and Garratt (2010) note as the contradiction in sport coaching whereby it is treated by many as a profession with high status and recognition, but within a job market and employment structures that are informal,

unregulated, and precarious. Instead of offering stability, the sport system leverages short term and unstable contracts to maintain flexibility for those organizations and institutions that rely on sport coaches' labour to produce winning results (Taylor & Garratt, 2010).

In their interviews, the participants highlighted multiple instances where their work was very precarious. Justina bluntly stated: "You do all this extra stuff and still don't know if you'll be back next season." Justina further added: "There is not a path to stability. Just keeping your head down and doing your job. You do what's asked, but you also know you're replaceable. That's just how it is." Prabhtej said: "I travel all across [his province] for coaching gigs, but they're all short-term. Like two days here, four days there." In addition, he shared that: "There is no guarantee from month to month. I just yes to whatever comes in." This uncertainty was also true in Bill's case when he stated, "My contract technically ends every year. There's always that question of are they going to renew?" Although it may seem inherently commonsensical that greater sport coaching experience and/or a longer period of tenure with the specific team would provide security, Katie explained that this is not necessarily the case: "Even after 15 years, it's like I'm still stitching things together season by season." Clearly these are not isolated experiences, and the participants' quotes make clear this job precarity is not the result of inexperience or individual mismanagement. Rather it reflects a broader sport system that functions through short-term contracts, and unstable funding models. Even experienced or long-serving coaches were not immune to these conditions, highlighting how systemic and normalized job insecurity has become. Such conditions are also not unique to these eight participants but align with broader critiques of the casualization of sport coaching work. Taylor and Garratt (2010) note that the professionalization in coaching has occurred unevenly, where roles remain unpredictable, unregulated, and informal; this may benefit the institutions paying for sport

coaches but certainly leaves the sport coaches in a vulnerable position (see also Rynne & Mallett, 2012).

The study participants repeatedly raised that they would be in doubt as to whether their contracts would be renewed. Even more poignantly, connected to their feelings about doubt was the feeling that they could not fully express their concerns to the administrators in their sport organizations due to fear around whether their questions will be taken negatively. Shanice captured this fear succinctly when she recounted: "If you ask for too much, there's always a chance they'll just replace you." This fear of being replaced reflects how institutional cultures within sport may reinforce compliance through unspoken norms of tolerance, discourage advocacy, or even silence dissent—what Norman (2010) describes as the mechanisms that sport organizations utilize to maintain control. With coaches feeling fearful to express concerns due to being seen as incompetent, ungrateful, or disruptive, their silence may reinforce the institutional cultures that reward compliance over critical engagement. This is particularly worrisome for those from under-represented groups as Rankin-Wright et al. (2017) note that under-represented groups in sport coaches (such as women and racialized bodies) are often left to navigate sport systems where their professional survival depends on such things as compliance and silence. Overall, these quotes highlight how high-performance sport coaching is filled with precarity and job insecurity. Despite their centrality of their work for athlete, team, and institutional success, these coaches are operating in conditions that are sensitive and volatile. These experiences of instability reveal just one layer of how unsupported many coaches felt – a theme that became even more apparent in their reflections on mentorship, support, and professional development.

4.3.3 Lack of Mentorship and Institutional Support

Across the interviews, participants shared that they had entered high-performance coaching roles where they had to learn 'on the job' and through hands-on, in real time experience without formalized support or mentorship from the organizations in which they were working. Jayme shared: "I didn't really have anyone to show me the ropes. You just get handed the role." These experiences were echoed by Nick who also stated that: "You just get handed the role," and Hannah, who emphasized that, with coaching, it is seen as an environment in which: "You learn by doing it. That's it." Similar accounts were expressed by other participants as well when it came to support and help. Prabhtej claimed that in his work environment: "You're kind of on your own unless someone decides to offer help." Given her experiences, Katie shared: "You're supposed to already know. Asking for help feels like a weakness. There's no formal mentorship, it's not bult into the system." These quotes reflect what Townsend and Cushion (2020) argue as sport organizations' assumption that good coaches will emerge through experience, rather than providing mentorship as a necessary resource. This leaves coaches without much critical feedback and points to the overall lack of sustainability of coaching as a profession.

Without the formal mentorship, guidance, and support in place, the participants felt that they had to navigate their roles largely on their own. Although they did not always describe themselves as fully isolated, their accounts reflected the absence of regular, institutionalized support. Shanice explained: "You end up taking on way more because there's no telling you how it is supposed to go," while Nick stated: "I didn't have a structure. I just did what made sense and hoped I wasn't screwing up." Justina added: "You become your own mentor. Nobody's checking in." This dynamic reflects that while some participants may have had some support, the burden of direction-setting and learning often fell on them individually. This absence of mentorship is what Denison and Avner (2011) discuss as the myth of the self-made coach, which entails that

coaches are expected to cultivate expertise through trial and error rather than a guided path to development and support.

The next chapter will build on the experiences and stories shared within this chapter, by turning to the study's central research questions: (1) do Canadian high-performance coaches engage in impression management to navigate their sport work environments? If so, how, why and what are the effects?; and (2) how do race and gender inform and get informed by participants impression management work. examining how participants managed the pressures of their sport environments through impression management practices.

Chapter 5: Participants' Experiences with Impression Management

As Chapter 4 aimed to contextualize the participants' sport coaching work experiences, this chapter delves into the participants' experiences with impression management. In so doing, this chapter aims to address the research questions that have guided this study: (1) do Canadian high-performance sport coaches engage in impression management to navigate their sport work environments. If so, how, why and what are its effects?; and (2) how do race and gender inform and get informed by sport coaches' impression management work? This chapter will first explore the impression management strategies employed by the participants (and, to state the obvious, confirm that participants did engage in impression management) before then delving more deeply into the ways in which gender and race informed the impression management tactics utilized by the participants. This chapter ends with a discussion of the costs of impression management work for the participants, such as the mental, physical, and emotional toll on the participants.

5.1 Surviving the System by Managing the Self

To be clear, all participants in this study confirmed through their detailed accounts that they modify their behaviours, practices, and/or mannerisms to shape the ways in which they were seen and perceived by others in their sport workplaces. Although the participants did not explicitly state 'Yes, I engage in impression management,' their stories and experiences made it evident that they all carefully managed their outward-facing appearance, mannerisms, and language for others. This is a noteworthy observation of how deeply accepted, tolerated, and normalized impression management strategies have become for them within their sport workplaces. For example, Bill stated: "You learn quickly what works and what doesn't. I don't act the same in every space. I can't." Nick also shared: "Sometimes I just mirror the vibe in the

room. That way I don't stand out too much." Hannah also explained: "I had to figure out what version of myself would be taken seriously." These experiences taken together point to how the participants felt the need to modify and change themselves for various reasons.

While Goffman's (1959) and Leary and Kowalski's (1990) model of impression management has shaped foundational understandings of impression management and self-presentation, what emerges from this study is that impression management was not always overtly calculated with an emphasis of conscious or strategic intent. Instead, in some ways, it appeared as a normalized part of the sport coaching job, adding to critiques of individualized models by highlighting how impression management can become embedded in intuitional cultures. While Goffman's (1959) concept of the 'front stage' helps illustrate how participants carefully curated their presence in response to context, this study extends his work by showing how those performances were shaped not just by interpersonal dynamics, but by broader gendered, racialized, and organizational power structures that made such self-monitoring necessary in the first place. However, before highlighting this critical piece, it is essential to first understand how the participants practiced impression management, which will be discussed in the next section.

5.1.1 The Work Behind the Image: Practices and Purposes of Impression Management

When probed further in the interviews on how and why they engaged in impression management, the participants' anecdotes and perspectives highlighted: (1) a tendency to modify their appearance and language (the how) in their sport coaching workplaces; and (2) a range of reasons why they perform different versions of themselves in their sport workplaces including a desire to project authority, to present as competent, and to assert control in their environments where legitimacy was constantly negotiated (the why).

Adjusting one's appearance in terms of clothing was discussed by all participants as one of their go-to impression management strategies and was often rationalized as a way for them to establish their presence and legitimacy with and among others (e.g., their athletes, their coaching peers, etc.). As Goffman (1959) notes, this type of change constitutes the 'front stage' and a curated version of the self-designed for public consumption. During her interview, Katie described that she: "Always made sure to show up polished. That was part of [her] credibility," whereas Jayme highlighted that: "[She] has a presence. The way [she] walk[s] into a room, [she] make[s] sure it commands attention." Jayme further stated: "I made sure to wear a blazer when I met with admin. It shifts how they see you." Nick shared similar experiences by recounting that he "Never walks in casual, even if it's just a team meeting. That stuff matters." Hannah also described changing her physical appearance: "I always had my hair done and wore my best tracksuit for game. Like clean lines, crisp look." Shanice shared: "I always made sure I was sharp. Hair done, outfit clean, nothing sloppy." Furthermore, for Bill, it was about being aware of what he referred to as "the details." He explained that he: "[Keeps his] sneakers clean on purpose. It sounds dumb, but it matters. Like being sharp." Lastly, Shanice claimed that her modifying her physical appearance was critical since "...how you show up physically, like your look, it sets a tone for how people treat you."

The significance placed on polished appearance and dress also suggests a deeper concern: that coaches' credibility must be reflected and sustained visibly. This reflects Cushion et al.'s (2006) argument that coaching involves constant sense-making and self-regulation but extends it by showing that these processes begin before a coach even speaks through aspects such as blazers, clean sneakers, and subtle aesthetic choices. Banwell and Kerr's (2016) work on occupational precarity also resonates here, as participants described appearance not as personal

branding, but as a protective tactic against professional vulnerability. This highlights that it was not enough for these participants to be a coach with remarkable grasp of sport technical knowledge, a winning record, or to be gifted in managing athletes and teams in terms of interpersonal relations. Rather, changing their look was silently signaling a form of credentials where their expertise was not assumed. The participants did not articulate that dressing in a particular way was formally expected of them, nor did they suggest that their appearance was considered in formal performance evaluations. And yet, all the participants understood that performing credibility through their appearance was essential work to do in their precarious environments.

In addition to adjusting their physical appearance through clothing, the sport coaches also described intentionally managing and modifying their tone of voice, and language (i.e., what to say) to shape the ways in which they were perceived and to ensure they were perceived as capable, competent, and as a good fit for the organization/institution. For Katie, she reflected on how she always engaged in mentally rehearsing what she was going to say to others, especially if those others were male head coaches or senior staff: “I practiced in my head before meetings. There’s a way to say things so you don’t look like you’re questioning authority [i.e., of male coaches and senior staff].” This quote reflects a certain degree of calculation infused into even just routine communication, and the use of the word ‘practice’ is critical to note here since it suggests how even her everyday communication required practice because she was always anticipating the consequences of being misinterpreted. Hannah also reflected on how she would modulate her voice and words to avoid any negative unintended consequences: “Even if I disagreed [with others], I kept my tone level. There’s this thing where if you’re too assertive it gets twisted.” This strategy was also echoed by Jayme: “I held back what I actually wanted to

say. I had to present it in a way that sounded diplomatic, or it would just come off the wrong way." For Nick, he claimed: "I changed how I spoke depending on who was in the room. With admin, it was way more controlled and polished." With Prabhtej, he expressed how the pressure to perform well shaped when and if he spoke: "I try not to speak unless I'm sure what I'm saying sounds good." These examples reinforce that coaches constantly engage in the work of "curating" (cf., Leary & Kowalski, 1990) which is what they say in anticipation of being judged, misread, or undermined. The participants' perspectives suggest that when the reputational stakes are high, they engage in forms of impression management that help project control, competence, and moral legitimacy—what Jones and Pittman (1982) refer to as exemplification. This tacit pressure to self-monitor creates a system in which credibility is contingent not on expertise, but on the successful performance of a narrow, controlled identity.

The participants in this study also described how controlling body language played an important role in their workplaces. This was due to their understanding of the fact that even their body language could be read as a reflection of competence. This aligns with Hochschild's (1983) notion of emotional labour, where workers are expected to regulate not only what they say, but how they physically present and perform to meet institutional expectations. Unlike the customer-facing roles Hochschild (1983) originally studied, the stakes here were tied to long-term legitimacy in spaces where participants' authority was always conditional. These forms of bodily control were not always recognized as skills, yet they were critical to maintaining credibility. This resonates with Ni et al.'s (2022) notion of hidden coach labour but also suggests that such labour is not only institutionally expected, but left for individuals to manage on their own, revealing an unspoken code of invisible professionalism. The findings in this study builds upon

the current literature of impression management to show that credibility in high-performance sport is not only performed but silently rehearsed through the body.

Participants described vivid examples of the ways in which they regulated their body language. Justina shared an overwhelming and intense account during one the practices she was holding for her team in their regular court. What stood out during this conversation was how she stated: “I felt like crying, but instead I just nodded and smiled.” Bill had a similar response regarding his work: “Even if everything is falling apart, you can’t let them see it. You hold it together.” This pressure was reinforced by the understanding that one wrong move could carry career consequences. Jayme stated: “I knew I couldn’t lose it. Not in front of them. That would have ruined everything.” At one point in his interview, Nick emphasized: “It’s not just about what you say, it’s how your face looks, how you move. You can’t look shaken.” What renders this pressure of performance particularly troubling is instead of expressing normal emotions such as fear, frustration or exhaustion, these participants’ reaction was to suppress emotion. As Goffman (1959) highlights, impression management, particularly ‘front stage’ performance, is not solely about changing aspects of the self, but embodying expectations to the fullest extent so that the performance is indistinguishable from the self. With participants describing situations in which they felt overworked, and the need to constantly manage themselves, they also highlighted the tolls that came with engaging in this labour. The next section will unpack the various effects that impression management caused for the participants.

5.2 The Inner Cost: Fatigue, Dissonance, and the Emotional and Psychological Toll

5.2.1 Inauthenticity and Identity Dissonance

As discussed thus far, impression management serves as a strategic tool for these participants as they navigate their sport workplaces utilized in different ways and on different

occasions to frame or reframe how they are perceived by others, and to ensure what they (i.e., the participants) perceive as alignment within their sport work settings. This related to what Leary and Kowalski (1990) discuss about how individuals engage in impression management to meet the expectations of their given environments. However, the data from the participants' interviews makes clear that their impression management efforts, including the feeling of obligation that they must present different versions of themselves on the daily, take a toll on their well-being. For several participants, the ongoing pressure to manage impressions led to a sense of disconnection from their authentic selves. For Hannah, this meant: "It's like I play a version of myself at work. Not totally fake, but not totally me either." She expanded further: "Sometimes I leave practices feeling like I don't even know who I am anymore." This sense of not understanding one's identity also resonated with Shanice. When discussing impression management, she explained: "It's a mask. And after a while, it's hard to tell when you're performing and when you're not." What was particularly noteworthy about the participants' sense of disconnect and feelings of inauthenticity was that all the participants understood their need to play a version of themselves at work as something that just needs to be done. For example, Justina stated: "I know what they expect to see, so that's what I show them. Doesn't matter if it's who I am." Jayme expressed: "You have to walk into the room and become someone else. Someone sharper, someone tougher," and "I wasn't always like this. I just learned what worked and stuck with it." These participants' excerpts suggest that this is not merely a single instance of performance, but rather a distinct identity shift that occurred over time and one that blurred self-perception.

As Costas and Fleming (2009) suggest, professional inauthenticity is especially problematic because it fosters conflict due to the discrepancy in the identity being performed

externally, and the one internally embraced, which is often neglected. Bill, for instance, captured this sentiment when he noted: “At some point you realize people aren’t seeing you. They’re seeing what they’re comfortable with.” Impression management, then, not only affected the way other people viewed these coaches, but it also affected the ways in which they viewed themselves. Katie clarified: “It's not that I'm lying, I just don't think I'd be taken seriously if I presented fully as myself.” What starts out as a somewhat voluntary, strategic effort to create credibility can, over time, blur the distinction between role and self. This blurring of role and self expands Goffman’s (1959) notion of role performance by illustrating that, over time, impression management can become so routine that the performed self feels more natural than the authentic one. Unlike temporary ‘front stage’ performances, these participants describe a long-term identity shift shaped by structural expectations, not just individual choice.

5.2.2 Mental Health and Self-Doubt

Along with feelings of inauthenticity, participants felt a negative mental toll when engaging in the practice of impression management. Hannah reflected on the emotional toll when she noted: “There were times I’d go home and cry after practice. Just from holding everything in all day.” Justina shared a similar experience: “I’d smile in meetings, act calm, and then spiral as soon as I got home.” For these coaches, their carefully curated masks in their workplaces hid their true feelings, and they could only reveal their authentic selves once they were away from their sport workplaces. A tremendous amount of emotional labour was involved for the participants in maintaining a particular outward-facing demeanour and sense of composure and, in essence, hiding any interior struggles from others.

One such inner struggle for some participants was the feeling of self-doubt. The participants consistently spoke to how the need to prove and reprove themselves to others

significantly impacted their sense of self and their own sense of their capabilities. For many, self-doubt was constantly in the background, like background noise, making it difficult for them to feel confident even when they were clearly demonstrating competence. As Hochschild (1983) notes, this kind of self-monitoring does not just show up as a mental strain, but an embodied one, where individuals suppress authentic reactions to sustain a socially acceptable image. Justina reflected: "You second guess yourself so much. And no one sees that part." Even with years of experience, this internalized insecurity continued to surface in subtle but constant ways for Hannah: "I started second-guessing myself constantly. Like, 'Did I say that right? Did I look like I knew what I was doing?" The participants' recounting of their own self-doubt could be understood as reflective of imposter syndrome or impostor phenomenon (Clance & Imes, 1978), where high-achieving individuals, especially women and racialized folx, doubt their accomplishments and fear being exposed as frauds. As described by the participants, impression management strategies were utilized to feel competent and accepted in their sport workplaces. However, what is important to note is these same strategies can reinforce the feeling of being fraudulent due to the need of a continuous projection of a hyper-competent self that may not align with how participants feel. This cycle can thus mask exhaustion and also cause it.

This emotional weight was compounded by the pressure to always seem emotionally unaffected. Coaches were expected to stay composed, rational, and consistent, even when they were mentally unraveling. Shanice noted: "I'm exhausted. Not just from coaching, but from constantly trying to seem like I have it together." For her, the fatigue did not stem from the job itself, but from the unspoken expectation that she could never visibly struggle. Jayme similarly shared: "There was a point where I was mentally just done. But I had to keep showing up like nothing was wrong." These accounts point to a deeper kind of burnout, one not caused by

physical workload per se, but by the continuous performance of emotional control. Gonzalez and Griffin (2020) note that emotional labour is a key predictor of psychological strain, and eventual disengagement. Thus, the daily suppression of emotion from these participants becomes not just a coping strategy, but can also become a source of harm. Noblet and Gifford (2002) argue that burnout in elite sport is frequently misunderstood as physical overtraining when, in fact, emotional depletion plays a central role. These reflections suggest that impression management, while necessary in many ways, creates a significant toll. Despite the tolls these sport coaches were facing, all coaches continued to show up, perform, and persist, often without anyone knowing the depth of what they were carrying.

5.2.3 Isolation and Loneliness

Even in environments surrounded by athletes, colleagues, and staff, many participants described feeling emotionally and socially alone. Coaches were often regarded as composed, competent, and in control, but that perception came at the cost of not being seen or understood for their authentic selves. The need to appear unshakeable not only exhausted participants internally but also distanced them from others who might have offered support. Hannah reflected: “I think that was probably the hardest part. Feeling like I was the only one going through it. It felt like no one actually saw how hard it was.”

For some, this sense of isolation came from the fear that expressing vulnerability would reinforce the very doubts they were trying to silence. Justina shared: “You can’t talk to anyone about it. No one wants to hear that you’re struggling.” Similarly, Jayme noted: “Everyone thinks you’ve got it under control. So, you stop trying to explain.” Emotional withdrawal was not rooted in a lack of desire for support, but in the cumulative exhaustion of trying to maintain appearances. As Kahn (1990) notes, people often disengage emotionally from their work when

they do not feel psychologically safe to be themselves. Jayme added: “You feel like you’re putting on a show for everyone. Players, staff, admin. It’s not that you don’t want to be real, it’s just not safe.” Even when surrounded by others, participants described a profound sense of disconnection. “I’m surrounded by people,” said Hannah, “but it doesn’t feel like I can actually talk to any of them about what’s really going on.” Shanice similarly shared: “There are days where you show up, do your job, leave. No real check-in, no real community. It’s like, you’re there, but you’re not.” Even participants who did not describe the same emotional exhaustion acknowledged that connection was difficult. Nick explained: “I don’t really talk to anyone about that side of it. Like, what’s the point? Everyone’s just trying to keep their head down.” While his tone differed from some of the women participants, the cultural logic remained the same: emotional self-containment is expected in these sport work environments.

The participants’ accounts reflect a form of loneliness that is not about being physically alone but about being emotionally unseen. This echoes Brown’s (2012) recognition that vulnerability is a prerequisite for connection, and when vulnerability feels dangerous, isolation becomes the norm. In these sport work environments, the participants’ emotional labour was compounded by emotional distance. Shanice explained: “It gets really lonely. Especially when you’re trying so hard to keep it together.” Justina shared: “It’s weird how lonely it gets when you’re not allowed to just say ‘I’m not okay today.’ Like you’re not supposed to even think that.” These reflections are not about lacking relationships, but about not having their authentic selves seen, received, or understood within those relationships. Poulos (2021) writes that impression management can produce a kind of internal fragmentation not just from the self but from others, especially when the version of the self that is publicly visible is incomplete. For many of the coaches in this study, being taken seriously meant withholding parts of themselves and, over

time, that withholding became internalized. As Prabhtej reflected: “You learn early on not to expect support. Not in that way. You just keep going.”

This kind of isolation is reinforced in high-performance sport environments that prioritize toughness, consistency, and control characteristics often viewed as incompatible with emotional openness. Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2011) argue that the culture of sport coaching valorizes stoicism which makes honest expression of difficulty not only rare, but risky. Participants in this study were not only aware of that risk, but they also structured their social and emotional behaviour around it. What made this solitude particularly difficult was its invisibility. Unlike physical fatigue, there were no obvious markers of this loneliness; it was quiet, often unnamed, and experienced behind the surface of functionality. Coaches were present, reliable, and composed but many were quietly carrying the weight of being unseen, unsupported, and emotionally alone. As Hannah put it: “You carry so much, and no one even knows you're carrying it.” Impression management did not simply shape how participants were viewed; it shaped how they related to others. In always being on, many found themselves increasingly disconnected. The emotional labour of impression management does not just suppress authenticity; it actively erodes the conditions needed for connection to occur.

To this end, given that the participants did engage in impression management work in various ways and in efforts to perform various dimensions of competence, credibility, and authority, it is now opportune to shift our attention to how gender and race informed and was informed by the participants’ impression management work.

5.3 Never *Just* a Coach: How Race and Gender Affect Self-Presentation

5.3.1 Gendered Experiences

To recap, and as noted in Chapter 3, five of the participants in this study self-identified as women and three self-identified as men; none of the participants identified as gender nonconforming or -diverse. During the conversations with the participants, it became evident that one's sense of gender identity played a central role in why and how participants engaged in impression management. Specifically, the women coaches expressed more consistently their feelings of being unwelcomed in their sport workplaces and being seen by others in their sport workplaces as incapable or incompetent coaches. To be clear, the male participants in the study also shared different examples of how they felt they had to perform different versions of themselves to help ensure they were received as competent, confident, and authoritative. However, none of the men in this study spoke of needing to perform in a such manner due to their gender identity.

At numerous points in the interviews with the women participants, they referred to needing to engage in impression management work to somehow mitigate their gender identity in the male-coded sport workplace, and in comparison to what male coaches can do. For example, Justina stated: "I don't raise my voice. A guy can yell, and he's passionate. If I do, I've lost control." Such an experience was echoed by Jayme, who described the additional behavioural boundaries that are performed by women sport coaches: "There's this thing where if you're too soft, you're weak. But if you're too direct, you're a bitch." This connects with Claringbould and Knoppers' (2008) recognition that women coaches are often forced to manage contradictory expectations around femininity and authority. Similarly, Hovden (2010) and Krane (2004) argue that male authority in sport spaces is often perceived as natural, while women must perform legitimacy through visible emotional and behavioural discipline. The female participants in this

study recognized their double bind in that they need to be seen as similar to or comparable to their male counterparts, but could not present themselves in the exact same manner as their male peers since what would be received for their male colleagues as positive, assertive, and commanding would be read as problematic, emotional (in a negative way), and unprofessional for them.

To meet what they perceived as the expectations of them, the women participants described the exemplification strategies (cf., Jones & Pittman, 1982) they used to convey control, competence, and moral authority, and to counter being underestimated or misread. Hannah shared: "I stood tall, even if I didn't feel confident. I had to look like I was in control." For Justina, this meant: "I kept my face calm, even when I was panicking. If they see you flustered, you lose them." Jayme also spoke to the importance of presenting herself in the best manner through her posture and body language: "I made sure to walk in like I owned the space. That's the only way they take you seriously." She later added: "I was careful about what I said and how I said it, especially in front of the guys. I didn't want to be seen as unsure." This desire to avoid being misunderstood extended to having to over-prepare and over-perform: "I always had to know my drills inside out. Like, there couldn't be a single question I couldn't answer, or they'd question why I was there" (Justina). Justina furthered: "I was always careful to lead with fact. Not opinions, not feelings. You don't want to give them any reason to doubt you." Katie mentioned: "I didn't laugh too much in meetings. You want to seem personable, but not too casual. It's a line you walk." Jayme shared a similar calculation when she stated: "With male colleagues, I was always a bit more composed. Less joking, more direct. I didn't want to give them a reason to not be taken seriously."

Although these performances may not have been reflected their internal feelings of lack of confidence, the study participants strategically enacted such performances to meet the expectations of their workplace environments that does not automatically confer authority on women coaches. These remarks from all the participants underscore how gendered power structures shape not only what women say, how they say it, and what they look like to show and maintain authority. This is, as Norman (2010) describes, the second shift of female coaching. The second shift entails the invisible labour of having to prove, reprove, and continue proving one's competence, unlike their male counterparts, whose legitimacy was most often assumed, whereas women sport coaches had to earn theirs repeatedly. This echoes Sartore and Cunningham's (2007) concerns about the deeply embedded nature of gendered expectations in sports as they continue to exist through unconscious actions of both women and men which complicates efforts to challenge them.

This gendered labour stood in stark contrast to the experiences of the male participants in the study, who did not describe needing to manage certain aspects of themselves because of their gender identity. In fact, Nick explicitly stated: "Honestly, I've never really thought about gender. I just coach. It hasn't been an issue." Bill offered a similar reflection: "I think it's different for women, I've always felt like people respected me right away." Prabhtej also shared: "I just show up and get to work. No one's ever asked me if I'm the head coach. They just assume it." The absence of concern around being perceived as credible prepared, present, and authoritative also stood out in the conversations with the male study participants. Nick explained: "I don't really worry about how I come across. I just do what I've always done." Bill expands on this idea when he stated: "I never had to prove myself to anyone. Once you're in, you're in." Their comments make clear that they did not feel the need to engage in exemplification measures to be seen as

competent and in charge because their male gender identity within the context of sport automatically conferred such traits to them. As Katie pointed out: “There’s an authority they [men] just have. I have to project mine.” Such experiences are what Shaw and Hoeber (2003) argue as the gendered organizational logics that come into sports organizations, logics that make women feel ‘out of place’ in roles usually associated with men and masculinity. In efforts to avoid certain types of stigma (e.g., the bitch, being too soft or too weak), the female coaches in this study were required to modify their external-facing selves in the context of their work as sport coaches and in their workplaces. In so doing, they simultaneously understood such impression management work as assisting them in maintaining their professional roles within the existing sports structures—put differently, maintaining their social acceptance within sport—and also existing as a barrier that they needed to overcome and that which their male counterparts didn’t have to deal with. Impression management functioned as a compulsory practice that women in high-performance sport coaching had to execute while dealing with scrutiny and invisibility as well as biases about their competence. Yet, gender is only one lens through which sport coaches were interpreted. The following section will reveal how race impacted the ways in which sport coaches performed impression management.

5.3.2 Racialized Experiences

The interviews with the participants made evident that racialized identity also informed why and how the sport coaches engaged in impression management strategies. As will be unpacked below, those coaches who identified as racialized employed impression management to neutralize what they perceived as negative preconceptions of their race/ethnicity, to challenge prevailing narratives about their identity, and to ‘prove’ and ‘re-prove’ prove their legitimacy in a context where whiteness and white privilege exists as the standard. These dynamics reflect the

institutionalized whiteness of Canadian sport settings, where whiteness remains the taken-for granted norm (Hylton, 2010). For many of these coaches, simply existing in these spaces invokes a hypervisibility that Puwar (2004) describes as being a space invader, marked as out of place and constantly under watch. To recap, seven of the participants in this study self-identified as racialized.

In the interviews, several participants discussed how race impacted their daily lives. Shanice reflected: “I’ve been mistaken for everything except the coach. Trainer, manager, assistant, you name it. I don’t think they expect someone who looks like me to be the one in charge.” Similarly, Jayme shared: “I know when I walk into the room, people don’t expect me to be the head coach. So, I lead with calmness. I don’t give them a reason to see me as too much.” For Prabhtej, he reflected on his race and how this shaped his performance. He stated: “I’ve had to be extra careful with how I present myself, especially when I’m the only Brown guy in the room. You feel like you have to soften yourself a bit just to avoid being misread.” His experience underscores how racial difference activates hyper-surveillance, requiring extra behavioural labour to appear credible. He further elaborated: “When I’m speaking to white parents or admin, I switch my language a bit. More formal, more technical. It’s not fake, it’s just strategic.” These accounts align with what McCluney et al. (2019) describe as code-switching: a racialized self-presentation strategy used to reduce bias and improve perceived professionalism. For these coaches, language itself became a tool of impression management, both a bridge and a defense. Furthermore, Jayme stated: “I’ve had to train myself to not sound too emotional. Because if you’re a woman of colour, that stuff gets flipped on you real quick.” Her awareness of how emotion and tone are policed through racialized and gendered lenses reinforces what Wingfield (2010) terms “racialized feeling rules” or the unspoken expectations for how racialized

professionals are supposed to behave—less assertive, more contained, always composed. Furthermore, Bill explained, “I don’t raise my voice, even if I’m hyped. I keep it at a level. A white coach can yell, and he’s fired up. If I do, I’m angry.” Similarly, Prabhtej added: “You learn to kind of read the room. If it’s all white people, you dial things back a bit. Be more technical, more prepared. Because the minute you slip, they’re going to wonder if you’re actually supposed to be here.” These comments illustrate what Sue et al. (2007) define as racial microaggressions: the subtle, yet persistent, expressions of racial doubt which are often internalized and anticipated before they even occur. As described by the study participants, their impression management strategies are not about managing their self-doubt, but rather about managing other peoples’ perceptions of their worth and value in evaluative environments that privilege whiteness. The sense of having to work harder than their white colleagues went beyond just language as well. Shanice explained: “I’ve seen white coaches show up late, dressed casually, speak super casually and no one blinks. I do one of those things and suddenly I’m not professional.” Her experience aligns with Sartore and Cunningham’s (2007) concept of informal gatekeeping which are the unwritten standards that disproportionately regulate marginalized professionals. While such rules may not be codified, racialized coaches learn to adopt, adapt, and follow them or risk exclusion. Although there was only one white participant in the study (i.e., Katie), her experience was quite different from the racialized participants’ experiences. With the racialized participants in this study discussing how their racialized identity affects them and how they may use impression management to navigate their sport workplaces, when prompted about how her race affects her daily work, Katie simply stated, “I don’t think being white affects me negatively in this space at all. If anything, it probably makes it easier.”

For those participants who were both racialized and women, impression management involved having to be aware of how these identities worked together rather than separately, and how this shaped their experience as coaches in their sport work environments. Their accounts revealed that the expectations tied to gender became even more complicated when layered with the racialized ways they were read in coaching spaces. Shanice described this dual scrutiny, stating: “I have to be careful not just because I’m a woman, but because I’m a Black woman. That comes with things. How people think I’ll act, how loud I’ll be, how serious I am.” Her impression management was not just about appearing professional, it was about disarming stereotypes tied to both her race and her gender. Justina echoed this complexity: “You have to come across confident, but not too confident. And for someone like me, a woman of colour, that’s tricky. Because too confident becomes arrogant real fast.” These coaches were not simply trying to be respected; they were strategically managing how they were seen in the first place. As Shanice noted: “There’s just less room to mess up. You’re being looked at in two ways all the time.” The strategies they described—for example, softening their tone of voice, altering their dress—were not only meant to establish authority, but to get by in spaces where being both racialized and a woman placed them outside of the default image of who gets to lead. Their labour was not just impression management—it was impression correction to constantly work against both their invisibility (as women in a predominantly male-coded space) and hypervisibility (as racialized women in a male-coded white space).

5.4 Summary

In summary, the results outlined in this chapter address the study’s two research questions: (1) do Canadian high-performance sport coaches engage in impression management? If so, how, why, and what are its effects?; and (2) how do race and gender inform and get

informed by sport coaches' impression management work. As noted above, participants felt the need to modify their behaviours in their sport workplaces; however, this labour came at a cost. As participants worked to meet the expectations of their environments, many of them discussed the tolls that it took over time. In so doing, they shared the deeply felt costs, pointing to the fact that not only was impression management a strategic practice for these coaches, but also one that was extractive and negatively affecting participants' sense of authenticity and well-being. The participants' accounts and stories highlight that impression management served as a necessary response to precarity, unequal access, and marginalization within their sport coaches' impression management work (as more fully highlighted in Chapter 4). In this chapter, participants described utilizing a range of impression management strategies such as adjusting appearance, tone of voice, and language to navigate their complex sport work environments. Additionally, one's identity, particularly race and gender, shaped the ways in which participants employed these strategies. For the women participants, this meant understanding and navigating the maleness of their environments whereas, for the racialized participants, this involved having to adjust themselves to the whiteness of their sport workplaces. And for racialized women coaches, this meant having to manage both the maleness and whiteness of their workplaces. In the next and final chapter of this thesis, I will further the discussion by considering the larger implications of these participants' experience before then offering reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the study.

Chapter 6: Concluding Thoughts

Drawing on intersectionality and reflexive interpretive phenomenology as its theoretical and methodological frameworks respectively, this study explored two key research questions: (1) do Canadian high-performance sport coaches engage in impression management to navigate their sport work environments? If so, how, why and what are its effects?; and (2) how do race and gender inform and get informed by sport coaches' impression management work? Semistructured interviews with eight participants illuminated several key themes in relation to the research questions including acknowledgement from all participants that they did and do engage in impression management to navigate their sport work environments. Following a discussion of related literatures in Chapter 2 and an overview of the theory, methodology and methods utilized in this study in Chapter 3, Chapters 4 and 5 unpacked the nuances shared by participants about their impression management work. In this concluding chapter, I will first summarize the key findings explored in Chapters 4 and 5, before then pulling the threads of the study together in efforts to highlight the implications of the findings for our understandings of the experiences of high-performance sport coaches from under-represented groups. In this chapter, I will also identify the strengths and limitations of this study, followed by recommendations for future research in this area.

6.1 Discussion of Key Findings

6.1.1 The Everyday Working Realities of Sport Coaching

Before offering a summary and analysis of the data collected in this study, it is essential to first draw attention to the necessity of outlining the conditions within which participants arrived to sport coaching, broadly, and to their current 'jobs' as sport coaches, more specifically. As data collection and analysis unfolded, Chapter 4 emerged as necessary to contextualize the

participants' working conditions and to better understand the lived experiences and meaningmaking process of impression management discussed in Chapter 5, as their stories helped uncover the 'why' aspect of employing impression management tactics. Put differently, a discussion of the broader context of their experiences (including the precarity of their work, job in/security, and perceptions of lack of support) that shaped the environment in which participants were operating within was warranted.

This decision to separate the contextual findings was both a methodological and analytical choice, as my methodological framework (i.e., interpretive phenomenology) called for emphasizing the importance of context in meaning-making. This separation also reflects my analytical commitments to intersectionality as my intention was to demonstrate not only that impression management occurs, but also why it becomes necessary for those navigating overlapping systems of gendered and racialized exclusion. In order to do justice to an intersectional analysis, it was thus necessary to provide an in-depth understanding of the participants' work contexts. Through this writing structure (i.e., Chapter 4 setting the stage for Chapter 5), I aimed to ensure that the reader would experience a layered journey, moving from the structural context into the identity-based emotional and interpretive lived experiences that emerged in part as a response to that context. This allowed for a demonstration that impression management is not a personal choice, but rather as a response to systems that do not hold space for authenticity, and a form of emotional labour shaped by broader patterns of exclusion.

Building on this rationale, Chapter 4 begins by tracing the participants' journeys to sport coaching and how it often began through personal connections, particularly through the participants' fathers and other significant men in their lives. For some, this meant transitioning from athlete to coach. For others, it was a continuation of a family tradition, or longstanding

involvement in sport and sport coaching. These experiences align with previous research which describes coaching as a field that is quite often entered through informal and relational norms (Cushion et al., 2003; Erickson et al., 2007). This research points to and mirrors the organic and relational pathways that the participants touched upon when getting into sport coaching. Through these experiences, the sport coaches in this study developed a sense of belonging and community within their respective sport environments.

However, as the interviews progressed, it became evident that this work did not come without a cost. The coaches explained their roles as one that is intense, constant, and requires lots of energy and work, which corresponds to Taylor and Garratt's (2010) arguments around the fundamental contradiction of coaching work. The authors describe that sport coaching work is often framed by a role that requires expertise, passion, and love for the sport, but is delivered through precarious and informal labour arrangements. This was described by the participants by drawing upon the daily duties of their positions. Aspects such as planning, adjusting, evaluation, training stellar players, relationship management, paperwork, administrative work, and logistical work were highlighted by the coaches. When discussing these responsibilities, the coaches made it clear that some of these tasks extended beyond from what they understood their sport work to be. These demands echo what Potrac et al. (2017) describe as 'invisible labour,' which is work that remains under-recognized within performance-oriented systems, alongside Norman's (2010) argument that coaching cultures often normalize overwork and self-sacrifice.

With their roles, the participant touched upon the various tolls their work took on them. For example, burnout was a predominate theme when sharing their experiences. Given that their roles required work that was not listed in their job descriptions, this caused an abundance of exhaustion. This reflects with the findings of Kavanagh et al. (2017) where they state that

emotional and invisible labour of coaches often leads to fatigue and psychological strain. Gearity and Metz (2017) also point this out when discussing that coaching involves lots of emotional investment and identity management which is labour that is central to the role but which, more often than not, goes unrecognized. Furthermore, the coaches described having to work on the weekends, completing full-time work on a part-time contract, dealing with little pay, and navigating the uncertainties and instability of their roles. As Denison and Avner (2011) note, this constant work, wearing multiple hats in their coaching roles, and the expectations to always be available, can amplify stress, ultimately wearing coaches down. In addition, the sport coaches touched upon the fact that there is minimal support that they receive. The participants stated that the role is just handed to them with an expectation that they know and can do everything, alongside any additional work that needs to be completed. The coaches described this as a role that is often exhausting and lonely. Moreover, Werther and Trudel (2009) note that when these formal support structures are absent, coaches rely on trial and error, which can lead to feelings of isolation, uncertainty, and stress overtime. Through these accounts, stories were shared regarding the ways in which participants navigated these complexities and why they employed these tactics. The next sub section will directly touch upon research question one, followed by a sub section on research question two.

6.1.2 Addressing Research Question One

As explained previously, the first research question of this thesis was to understand: do Canadian high-performance sport coaches engage in impression management? If so, how, why, and what are its effects? The data presented in this study demonstrated that all the participants engaged in some form of impression management, or ‘front stage’ performance (Goffman, 1959), adjusting their physical appearances, their clothing choices, language, and their tone of voice, or

differing reasons shaped by their positionalities within their professional sport work environments. What stood out in these interviews was the fact that the participants highlighted that these impression management tactics they performed were directly correlated to how others in their sport work environments treated them. In other words, although looking and acting in a professional manner is often an expectation in many workplaces, the participants stated that they felt the need to engage in the impression management tactics to ensure their legitimacy and competence in their profession. This aligns with Leary and Kowalski's (1990) and Jones et al.'s (2004) observations that individuals engage in impression regulation when they anticipate evaluation, particularly in environments that are uncertain, image-conscious, and where credibility must be constantly earned, rather than assumed; conditions that mirror the sport coaching environments as described by the sport coaches in this study. The participants in this study perceived their workplaces as sites where it was not enough to be a knowledgeable and effective coach, but one that consistently had to fit into other unspoken standards of their environments. As highlighted by the participants, knowledge and efficacy did not automatically gain them respect, legitimacy or credibility, and thus they were always trying to be 'one step ahead' in their workplaces by modifying their clothing, body language, tone of voice, etc. to 'hold it together,' not reveal frustration, or to hide exhaustion, to name but a few examples. Through the perspectives they shared, the participants understood that their success in their role comes with self-monitoring and performing a controlled and socially acceptable identity. Through the interviews, it became clear that impression management was being deeply internalized as a part of their professional identity. Impression management was external facing as participants performed different elements of themselves for those around them such as other

coaches, athletes, and administrators but, as shown by the data, their impression management strategies shaped how the coaches evaluated themselves and their place within the sport system. This reflects what Malcom (2017) describes as the 'moral economy' of sport, in which pushing forward through the hardships of the work are normalized. Denison and Scott-Thomas (2011) also suggest that sport in Canada is structured around the fact that emotional control and patience grants legitimacy. In this way, we can see that impression management went beyond a tactic that was employed by sport coaches but became the standard for them internally as well. Although participants did not always explicitly frame their actions as something they also internalized, their narratives revealed the acceptance of emotional regulation, invisibility, and relentless composure as natural parts of the coaching role.

However, engaging in these practices came at a cost for the participants. Putting on these performances took a personal toll: a growing dissonance between the participants' authentic selves and the version of themselves that they felt expected to perform. This tension had several coaches feeling as if they had to tone down parts of their true selves. The coaches also described feeling like they were wearing a mask, silencing key parts of themselves, or carefully editing how much of their personality to reveal, which became exhausting over time. As Kreiner et al. (2006) suggest, impression management can lead to strain when individuals feel the need to present a self that is not aligned with how they experience themselves internally. For these coaches, the work of impression management involved not just self-monitoring, but the ongoing negotiation of who they felt they were allowed to be in professional spaces, and who they permitted themselves to be in their sport workplaces. This chronic in/authenticity work was not always named, but it was always felt, and it shaped how participants moved through their roles and related to their work. The performance became exhausting not just because it was constant,

but because it was distancing. Coaches were left with a version of themselves that felt professional, but not personal; a self they did not always recognize.

6.1.3 Addressing Research Question Two

The second research question of this study was: how do race and gender inform and get informed by sport coaches' impression management work? The data revealed that impression management labour was neither experienced nor distributed equally among the participants. It was clear that the performances they put on and the strategies they utilized were shaped by how they perceived how they would be socially read, with race and gender profoundly influencing the strategies they used, the issues they were faced with, and how much legitimacy they received. Those coaches who were women and/or racialized described feeling as they were navigating their workplaces amid even heightened surveillance, fear of being perceived as incapable, or unprofessional. This analysis echoes what Norman (2010) and Joseph (2017) highlight in their work, in which they state that legitimacy in Canadian coaching cultures is bound to whiteness, and masculinity. The strategies used by the women and/or racialized coaches used were in direct response to the negative stereotypes which comes with being minoritized; they modified themselves to avoiding being seen or perceived as 'too much,' too difficult, hard to deal with, unreasonable, emotional, or unable to be professional. The coaches performed on the 'front stage' in ways that were intended to counter or compensate for their identities, as these coaches noted that their actions were not just read in isolation, but rather through racialized and gendered frameworks that shaped how their actions were interpreted.

For the racialized coaches in this study, impression management was experienced through the understanding of how they would be interpretated in predominantly white spaces. For these coaches, the stakes were often higher, and the margin-for-error was smaller. The experiences these participants had revealed how race (and not their actions as a coach) shaped

perception. This echoes what Forde and Bertram (2019) highlight when discussing that racialized coaches are expected to perform leadership in ways that align with white-coded expectations. Carter-Francique (2011) further builds on this idea when noting that, for Black and minoritized individuals, impression management becomes an embodied strategy to avoid misrecognition, challenge deficit-based assumptions, and maintain safety. Shanice and Jayme's experiences reflects this through their experiences when they shared that their actions are interpreted or policed more closely than their white counterparts. These stories and experiences from the racialized participants reinforce Singer's (2005) argument that whiteness operates as the baseline of credibility in sport institutions, leaving racialized professionals to navigate what he terms 'epistemological racism,' where their ways of knowing, leading, and presenting are often questioned.

Much like how racialized coaches had to navigate themselves and be aware of how their presence was read, the women coaches in this study also encountered issues that shaped how their identity was perceived. Impression management for the women participants in this study often involved having to balance their authority and presence while avoiding the risk of being seen as a stereotypical woman—that is, mild/meek, soft, or too emotional. These gendered traits and essentialized expectations of women solely as nurturers (i.e., not leaders) shaped how they delivered feedback, communicated confidence, and even how much space they felt entitled to take up. As previously stated, both Justina and Katie reflected on how they adjusted their tone, posture, and self-presentation to be taken seriously, and to be prepared if their authority is questioned. These narratives reflect what Norman (2010) identifies as a double bind for women coaches: they must be relational enough to seem approachable, but also assertive enough to appear competent, a balancing act not equally required of their male colleagues. The narratives

shared from the women participants in this study further aligns with Kilty's (2006) observations that women coaches are frequently tokenized within high-performance environments which, in turn, increases pressure on women to always perform flawlessly. In this context, impression management became a strategy for the women participants to try to fit in and be accepted in a predominantly male field. LaVoi and Dutove (2012) expand on this by pointing to the structural and relational barriers that force women coaches to do additional labour to be taken seriously. For the women in this study, the ability to approximate what male coaches do in a composed manner while keeping their sense of likeability were survival strategies employed constantly to meet institutional expectations.

While race and gender revealed the differences in the pressures that were faced within the workplace, it is crucial to also approached these narratives through an intersectional lens as race and gender interact together to shape the ways in which these participants navigated in their sport workplaces. As May (2015) describes, intersectionality is not just a theory of identity, but a method of understanding how social structures compound inequalities in everyday life. For those participants who were both racialized and women, impression management was shaped by both identities that cannot be understood in isolation. These coaches did not simply experience and navigate two separate forms of marginalization but rather experienced a compounded burden which shaped how they were perceived and how they responded to perceptions. Coaches (like Shanice, Jayme, and Hannah) described that feeling highly visible and yet routinely overlooked describes what Collins (2000) terms a space of controlling images, where racialized women are read through stereotypical understanding such as being unqualified or emotionally unstable. Jayme specifically stated on how she had to work twice as hard to prove herself. Carter-Francique et al. (2015) touch upon a similar point in which Black coaches need to engage in self-

monitoring to challenge stereotypes while still maintaining legitimacy and authority, which as explained by the authors is emotionally exhausting work. These forms of anticipatory labour reflect how impression management for racialized women is not just a practice they engage in at work but is a structural response to the power dynamics at play. Impression management was not only a strategy of survival, but was a way of existing in their workplaces that consistently asked them to be more, while offering them less. The coaches spoke of environments that, from their perspectives, often demanded more from them such as, emotional restraint, more relational detachment, and more hyper-awareness of self. Within these perceived dynamics, impression management emerged as a key strategy where the intersections of race and gender were actively negotiated. Based on participants' reflections, they felt they were expected to embody composure, competence, and diversity, often simultaneously, even while operating within systems where they did not always feel structurally empowered or safe.

6.1.4 Reading Between the Performances: The Broader Implications of this Study

While this study does not claim to provide an extensive explanation of the systemic under-representation of women and/or racialized coaches in Canadian high-performance sport workplaces, it is important to recognize that the participants' experiences and accounts offer critical insights into the everyday dynamics that may contribute to these inequities. As explained in Chapter 2, statistics continue to show that sport coaches are predominantly white and male in Canadian high-performance work settings (Joseph, 2017; Norman, 2010). Within this context, it is not surprising that the participants stated the need to perform controlled and curated versions of themselves to develop and maintain a sense of credibility and legitimacy to feel greater belonging and acceptance in their sport workplaces. These experiences, as put by the participants, indicate that the need to perform and, in fact, performing these impressions are the

ways that systems of exclusion can be reproduced. While the presence of women and/or racialized coaches may appear to signal some degree of positive change in the sport system, their qualitative experiences showcase that their visibility as women and/or racialized coaches often comes at the cost of not being able to be their authentic selves with others freely and indiscriminately. This intense degree of constant self-monitoring and self-regulation serves to maintain, rather than disrupt, the ways in which the white- and male-dominated sport system remains exclusionary. Importantly, for the participants who identified as both racialized and women, the pressures they discussed were not experienced as isolated to gender or race, but as intertwined forces that shaped visibility, vulnerability, and legitimacy in their sport coaching workplaces. In other words, we must understand that impression management served and serves as a requisite survival strategy for these sport coaches because of the cultural and structural barriers for minoritized coaches in high-performance sport in Canada.

The participants' experiences highlight the exhausting and often invisible labour required for minoritized sport coaches to get in and remain in existing sport workspaces. Instead of feeling as though they could be their authentic selves with athletes and colleagues, the participants spoke of how they performed different versions of themselves in order to create and maintain space for themselves in their sport workspaces, requiring us to appreciate how their sport work environments prompted them to adapt themselves to fit into established systemic norms rather than being able to challenge the systemic norms through being their authentic selves. This aligns with Ahmed's (2012) reflections on how diversity efforts can result in affective compliance, where those who are under-represented are often expected to perform things such as gratitude and alignment, rather than critique. In the case of these participants,

effective compliance often included performances of calmness, professionalism, and controlled emotions.

Two key points need to be emphasized. The first is that the participants' impression management efforts were not described as occasional or intermittent work, but rather work that was constant, ongoing, and inescapable. The participants' words underscored time and time again a sense of: 'This is just the way things are.' However, this inescapable experience came at a critical cost for the participants: exhaustion, emotional fatigue, feelings of isolation and, in some cases, a desire to exit coaching altogether. The participants' experiences also strikingly revealed the troubling paradox of performing impression management to fit in, but the performance itself deepening feelings of exclusion and invisibility. Yoshino (2006) describes that impression management enables a strategy that creates survival but comes with a significant personal cost. What felt like success on the outside often felt like self-erasure on the inside. The more that participants engaged in performing their impression management tactics, the more invisible their internal struggles became; not only to others, but even to themselves. In this way, for the participants, impression management was a shield, but also a trap. It offered temporary safety but also created feelings of imposter syndrome; the very outcomes impression management was intended to prevent. Imposter syndrome in this context was not just a psychological by-product, but a relational and political response to navigating coaching systems that may have not been built with marginalized coaches in mind. Using Crenshaw's (1991) concept of structural intersectionality, the emotional toll of this paradox can reflect the cumulative efforts of operating within spaces where both race and gender shape how legitimacy was granted. As Puwar (2004) argues, individuals who enter institutions where they have historically been excluded, often find that their presence is highly visible, while their perspectives remain marginalized. This was

shown through the participants' realities where they experienced imposter syndrome, not due to the lack of capability, but because of the disconnect between individuals and institutional expectations.

The second key point is that the established systemic norms that frame and inform the participants' impression management efforts reproduce male and white privilege. As shared through the participants' experiences, the ways in which they modified and performed their physical appearance, body language, words, tone of voice, etc. were all to ensure greater proximity or alignment with male- and white-coded sport leadership norms. The participants spoke of containing their real selves as they understood their authentic selves would be received as 'too much' by others in their sport workplaces. Although as demonstrated in this study as well as by other critical sport coaching scholars that all sport coaches experience a certain pressure to perform competence, credibility, expertise and so on, we cannot lose sight of how the womenidentifying and/or racialized coaches in this study described added layers of complexity and tension around impression management due to their gendered and racial identities. In the interviews, the participants highlighted the importance of telling their athletes and coaches to be authentic, take up space, to be themselves and to not hold back. However, in practice, they themselves could not embody this advice they gave. It is critical to note that this dissonance is not a reflection of hypocrisy, but a marker of how deeply institutional expectations shape professional behaviour and how the burden of sustaining representation in sport workplaces is both structurally embedded and unequally distributed. As Goffman (1961) suggests, 'front stage' performances can become internalized over time, subtly reshaping how individuals come to see and experience themselves within institutional roles. This tension underscores the cumulative

constraints of impression management not only as an ongoing performance, but as an internalized coping mechanism that is difficult to unlearn, even when wanting to do so.

The expectations that the sport coaches found themselves navigating were shaped by the ways in which race and gender co-constructed one another in context, which produced complex and often conflicting demands. This was especially pronounced for racialized women participants, who had to navigate and perform in ways that aligned with white and male standards of sport leadership, while avoiding traits that might be read as too aggressive, unlikeable, or unfeminine. At the same time, they were often expected to visually or symbolically embody diversity, without disrupting or challenging dominant norms. This required a continuous and contradictory balancing act where they had to appear competent and assertive, but not threatening, different, but not too different. Their impression management was not simply more work, but it was different work. In line with Crenshaw's (1991) framing of structural intersectionality, their labour reflected how institutional norms placed particular constraints and expectations on those at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, making their performance of self both highly visible and highly constrained.

These findings raise important questions about the current approaches (e.g., increasing representation) to increasing diversity in high-performance sport coaching in Canada, as well as the broader inequities that underpin sport coaching in Canada. With regards to the latter, sport coaching in Canada is precarious work. Many participants described working on short-term, seasonal, or part-time contracts, with limited guarantees of renewal and little institutional support. This instability created a constant sense of vulnerability, where job security felt contingent on staying quiet, being agreeable, and proving one's worth repeatedly. Several coaches noted that speaking out, challenging norms, or even expressing frustration risked being

perceived as disruptive, ungrateful, or unprofessional. This precarity served to intensify their impression management efforts, making the performance of competence, loyalty, and likability not just about fitting in, but about staying in.

Without attending to the structural cultures of sport coaching (i.e., a culture that privileges whiteness and masculinity) that may produce the need for impression management, efforts for inclusion risk remaining surface-level. For the participants, impression management imposed negative tolls for minoritized coaches such as isolation, burnout, and self-doubt, which are all factors that make it increasingly difficult to thrive in workplaces. If these systemic issues are not addressed, the equity strategies (i.e., hiring more minoritized coaches) may reproduce the very exclusion it seeks to fix. To transform these norms, we must rethink how leadership, professionalism, and success is defined and rewarded in coaching environments in Canada (Norman, 2010). This can include valuing diverse forms of leadership and coaching, creating intuitional supports, challenging exclusionary workplace norms, and creating more accountable employment structures that reduce precarity driving impression management. However, fostering truly inclusive coaching environments requires that decision-making bodies (e.g., hiring committees, leadership teams, and policy councils) reflect the diversity of those they seek to serve. Without addressing the systemic nature of this labour and its unequal distribution of costs, institutional efforts towards equity (e.g., hiring those individuals who are women and/or racialized) become performative, rather than providing safe and inclusive spaces for minoritized coaches.

6.2 Strengths and Limitations

In research, it is critical to reflect on the strengths and limitations on a study, since in doing so enhances the credibility, transparency and rigour of the research process. One of the

major strengths in this study is the use of qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Given that the research questions and topic aimed to understand the experiences of the participants, this approach allowed them to discuss and share the nuanced accounts of their experiences navigating impression management in their sport workplaces. The open-ended structure of the interviews also allowed for the participants to express and share what they felt important while still capturing rich data surrounding the deeper emotional, relational and political dimensions of the participants' work. This approach was specifically well suited for capturing the complexities that come with employing impression management, due to the subtle, context-dependent experiences participants were sharing, and may have been difficult to capture through quantitative methods. Another strength in this study is the use of an intersectional framework. With one of the main purposes of this study aiming to understand how gender and race frame the ways in which participants utilized impression management in their sport work environments, using this framework aided with moving beyond additive models of identity and offered a more complex understanding of the structures of power operating with high-performance sport. Using intersectionality added depth to the analyses regarding how multiple forms of marginalization overlap and compound participants' experiences, instead of treating race and gender as isolated factors. The use of this framework contributed to a more critical exploration and understanding of participants' experiences highlighting the multiple layers of exclusion, belonging, and credibility (to name a few) in their workplace environments.

A final strength of this study is the fact that it centered the voices of racialized and women coaches, which are traditionally groups that remain under-represented in much of the sport coaching literature surrounding this topic. This study thus contributes to a growing but still limited body of research that challenges the normative whiteness and masculinity of

highperformance sport leadership spaces, by foregrounding their experiences and understanding how systems of power shape who is granted legitimacy and authority within high-performance sport leadership settings. By focusing on their voices, this study allowed for a critical, complex and layered exploration of resistance, belonging and credibility. Furthermore, this allows for a better understanding of how marginalized bodies operate within this white and male-dominated space. As such, this study advances the field's understanding of both the challenges and the acts of agency that characterize the experiences of under-represented groups in high-performance sport coaching.

While the study offers critical insights into the concept of impression management in relation to women and/or racialized high-performance sport coaches, it is still important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. To begin, this research study had a relatively small number of participants. The experiences of these participants allowed for a deep exploration and analysis of their circumstances but, given the small number, it may have not captured the full range of experiences with impression management across different places or sports. With this being said, it is also important to acknowledge that a low number of participants can also be seen as a meaningful finding in itself. The (relatively) small number of participants points to the reality of the underrepresentation of women and racialized individuals in high-performance coaching roles (shaped by systemic exclusion, overwork, job precarity, etc.), highlighting that the pool of potential participants is limited to begin with. Furthermore, for those coaches who are in these roles, they are more often than not overworked and stretched thin; making time to participate in a voluntary study may be understood as just yet another demand of their impoverished time and energies, especially since this study involves reflecting on deeply personal experiences which may lead to an increased level of vulnerability and emotional labour.

Thus, the limited number of participants does not only represent a methodological constraint but also reflects the very inequalities this study seeks to unpack. Nonetheless, future research in this area would benefit from an expansion of the sample size, types of sport and in different contexts/regions to broaden the understanding of impression management in Canadian high-performance sport settings.

Furthermore, there was a limitation of regarding research positionality and interpretation. Given the study is qualitative, there may have been an influence of my own social positioning and experiences. To help lessen this, reflexive practices were done throughout the analysis and research study. For example, during the interviews, I found myself drawn to certain situations and stories shared by the participants. One particular example was when Jayme reflected on cultural safety. In my reflexive journal, I had written how my own commitments to inclusion as a South Asian Muslim woman and recognized that the story shared may have amplified how I interpreted her comments. With this, I proceeded to re-read her transcript multiple times to ensure I was not overstating her story. Similarly, Bill discussed how he felt that he needed to tone things down in white-dominant spaces. My initial reaction was instantly having a strong identification with this statement. This prompted me to revisit the coding and ensure that my analysis was not just affirming my own point of views, but actively engaging in what the participants were sharing. This approach reflects with what Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasize in reflexive thematic analysis as subjective and interpretive processes, where the positionality of the researcher is seen as a resource, rather than just a bias.

In this way, reflexivity shaped my analytic decisions in which I constantly asked myself: How might my assumptions be guiding what I am interpreting? What might I be missing? However, it is still important to recognize this limitation. This, however, does not speak to the

validity of the findings, but rather brings to light the interpretive nature of qualitative research and how critical it is to engage in reflexivity. Despite the limitations of this study, this research study offers important contributions to analyzing and understanding how marginalization, systems of power, and exclusion interact to shape the experiences of women and racialized high-performance sport coaches. This study draws attention to the complex nature of what impression looks like and feels like for Canadian high-performance sport coaches and underscores the need for continued research on this topic that amplify the voices of marginalized groups in sport leadership.

6.3 Future Research Directions

With structures of belonging, legitimacy and exclusion continue to evolve within high-performance sport coaching, it is critical that future research and scholarship build upon and extends these findings. Future research should also continue to look at how systems of power and identities interact to adapt and shift according to the current cultural and political pressures for when the research is being conducted.

An important area to focus on would be to expand the scope and scale of the participant samples. Though this study provided the nuanced accounts from diverse coaches, a future study would benefit from recruiting a larger number of participants, which could potentially expand the range of sports, competitive levels, and geographical locations, which may reveal additional patterns and differences in what impression management looks like. For example, although this study was focused on high-performance sport, it would also be beneficial to examine the differences and similarities between para-sport and community level sport. By analyzing these different areas, it would shed light on how the concept and experience of impression

management intersect with issues such as visibility, access and recognition beyond just high-performance sport.

A broader sample can also allow for a more comparative analysis between these different aspects. In addition to expanding the participant diversity, more under-represented groups could be included in the study. For examples, coaches with disabilities, those a part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, or newcomer coaches. By seeing how marginalization shapes the experience of impression management and the differing practices one employs based on their identities can further advance critical sport scholarship and research.

Future research may also benefit from studying the topic of impression management in sport coaching through a lens of precarious labour since studies consistently highlight that high-performance coaching roles are marked by job insecurity, instability, unpaid work, and limited institutional protection (Corsby et al., 2022; Kenttä et al., 2024; Krahn, 2024; LaVoi, 2016; Norman et al., 2018; Taylor & Garratt, 2010) . If wanting to foreground the study in precarity, it would be helpful to analyze literature surrounding gig work and impression management, due to its attention to the ways in which workers present themselves strategically to secure opportunities, prove their worth, and retain future employment in unstable or competitive labour markets. Outside of the sociological study of sport, such scholars as Kadolkar et al. (2024) and Hernandez et al. (2024) note that workers in precarious or gig-based roles often engage in intensive self-presentation, branding, and emotional labour to maintain legitimacy and access within their industries. Thus, framing impression management in high-performance sport coaching as a response to precarity, rather than solely an issue of identity or representation, may offer an even further nuanced structural analysis for understanding the labour conditions that shape impression management in sport coaching spaces.

Ultimately, future research should move beyond just documenting the experiences of marginalized sport coaches and sport leadership but rather work towards critically examining and analyzing the structural conditions that necessitate impression management as a strategy for survival, and to get by in their sport work environments. This scholarship may also examine the definition of leadership in sport, and how neutrality, merit, and objectivity are usually at the forefront of what sport coaching leadership means. By studying these aspects, there can be a continuation of foregrounding the political, emotional and relational dimensions of impression management and sport coaching. This research can also contribute to broader efforts to transform and change current sport coaching environments into spaces in which diversity, identity and belonging move beyond the surface-level and are recognized, valued and sustained.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview and critical discussion of the findings from this study, highlighting how women and racialized Canadian high-performance sport coaches navigate impression management in their sport workplaces. Drawing on an intersectional lens, the discussion situated participants' experiences within the broader systems of belonging and power, which showed how complex impression management is and can involve emotional, relational and political dimensions when employing the concept. The findings revealed that employing impression management was not necessarily an individual strategy that was utilized, but a survival mechanism that was shaped by the participants' environments. In addition to discussing the findings of the study, this chapter included reflecting on the study's strengths and limitations and providing directions for future research.

With the centering of the voices of coaches who have historically been marginalized within high-performance sprot leadership, this study contributes to challenging the dominant

norms around professionalism, inclusion and leadership. By discussing how impression management comes into play in these spaces, this study offers insight into the uneven costs of navigating elite sport environments and underscores the need for a structural transformation.

In doing so, this thesis invites a continued reflection, action, and understanding toward building more equitable sport systems that value varying identities. By illuminating these experiences, a future where all forms of leadership are recognized and respected, demands not only change in who leads, but transformation in how leadership itself is understood.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Study Information Sheet

My name is Wajeeha Rasul and I am a master's student at York University under the supervision of Dr. Parissa Safai. I am conducting research on the sport work experiences of high-performance sport coaches, specifically in relation to impression management. Impression management is loosely defined as the act of regulating or controlling information in social interactions to influence perceptions about a person, object, or event in a conscious or subconscious manner.

This project will explore how high-performance sport coaches navigate the sport coaching landscape through impression management and its effects on individuals. This project is motivated by a desire to better understand how some individuals may feel excluded in sport coaching and hopefully to support change and increased diversity in sport coaching.

I hope to interview current English-speaking racialized/and or women high performance sport coaches for this project, and **I would greatly appreciate your consideration to participate in this project**.

Your participation would involve one (1) online interview through Zoom, in-person interview or phone interview, scheduled at a mutually convenient time and lasting between 45-90 minutes. The interview is **completely confidential**. Any material used in publication resulting from this study will have identifying characteristics omitted or paraphrased to maintain your **anonymity**. Should the need arise, there may be follow-up correspondence by telephone or email to discuss specific themes, clarify issues, or discuss new findings.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed. You can stop the interview at any point in time or decline to answer any specific questions **without consequence**. The decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, the School of Kinesiology and Health Science, or York University. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, all data collected as a result of your participation will be immediately destroyed.

All research materials (notes, recordings, transcripts) will be kept under lock-and key and data collected will be accessible only to the research staff. Participants can review their transcript at any point in time during the study. By December 31st, 2025, all materials (except for informed consent forms which will be destroyed after two years) will be destroyed. The study has **minimal risks** and the decision to participate or not is **completely voluntary**.

This study offers participants the **opportunity to share their experiences of sport coaching** and impression management which in turn may help shed light on the ways in which individuals feel compelled to conduct themselves in order to navigate sport coaching workplaces.

If you would like more information, please let me know. Thank you in advance for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Wajeeha Rasul

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Script: *Before we begin, I first wanted to thank you for your participation. As you may already know, my project is focused on exploring and understanding your experiences within your sport coaching workplace as it pertains to your identity.*

I would also like to stress that there are no right or wrong answers in this interview and that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you feel any discomfort or would like to withdraw at any point of this interview/research process in general, you are absolutely free to do so. This will not negatively affect your relationship with myself, my supervisor, or the university and those who work within it.

The interview will be confidential as explained in the consent form and a pseudonym will be used so that you are not able to be identified.

Do you have any questions for me before we start the interview?

Demographics:

1. One's identity plays a crucial role in this research. With that being said, could you please clarify your racial background, gender, and pronouns?

Questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about your background in sport coaching?
   - Probes: Were you ever an athlete? How did you start in coaching? What was your coach education like and what level of coaching certification do you have? How did you come into the position you currently hold? Did you have any sport coach mentors? What has been your most significant sport coaching experience to date?

2. Tell me a bit about your work as a sport coach.
   - Probes: How did you get into your current role? What does a typical work week in sport coaching look like for you?

3. Who are some of the people you work with in your job as a sport coach?
   - Probes: Can you share with me an example of a positive interaction with the folks you work with? What about a negative interaction?

4. Reflecting on your sport coaching work experiences, what does your best self as a coach look like?
   - Probes: When have you performed your best self? For whom? What contexts?

5. How have you performed this 'best self'?
   - Probes: Was there anything specific you changed about yourself or the ways in which you presented yourself? Why did you change those aspects?

6. How is this ‘best self’ different from or similar to your ‘true self’?
    - Probes: In what contexts do you feel safe to be your ‘true self’?

7. In your sport workplaces and with those you interact with regularly, can you describe any situations where you were interacting with other people who you feel similar to in terms of your sense of personal identity?
    - Probes: What did you feel was similar between you and them? Would you describe your interactions with those individuals? How does it compare to those interactions with folks who you don’t feel that sense of shared identity?

8. Thank you for your time and is there anything else that you may feel is important about the topic in relation to your own experience that you would like to mention?

9. Do you have any questions for me that you would like to ask me?

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Date: [To Be Added]

Study Name: Managing More Than Just Athletes: Impression Management Among Canadian High-Performance Coaches

Researchers: Wajeeha Rasul, School of Kinesiology and Health Science Master's Student, wajeeha5@my.yorku.ca; Supervisor: Prof. Parissa Safai, School of Kinesiology and Health Science, psafai@yorku.ca

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this study is to examine how Canadian high performance sport coaches engage with impression management and navigate their sport workplaces. The data collected in this research study will be utilized for a master's thesis project, for publication in academic journals, and presentation at scholarly conferences.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: Participants will take part in one (1) one-onone interview, between 45-90 minutes in duration with the primary researcher. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience. The interview itself will be conducted by phone, in person or virtually through Zoom. You will also be provided an eGiftcard ($20) which will be sent to the email you contacted us with. Your contact information will be permanently destroyed and deleted by December 31st, 2025.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not foresee any significant risks from your participation in the research**.** However, given that you will be reflecting on your experiences (whether negative or positive), there is potential for such feelings as sadness, anger, or anxiety. If you are uncomfortable at any point, you can withdraw from answering a question and/or a short break can be provided for you. You have the right to withdraw consent if you are unable to continue with the interview**.** Teleconferencing/videoconferencing technology has some privacy and security risks. It is possible that information could be intercepted by unauthorized people (hacked) or otherwise shared by accident. This risk can't be completely eliminated, and we want to make you aware of this. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate, including via in person or telephone. To mitigate the risks associated with technology use, cloud services will not be utilized and will only be kept on the primary researcher's computer. Files will be password-protected and deleted from the primary researcher's computer files by December 31, 2025.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: This study aims to address a gap within the sociology of sport coaching on impression management among sport coaches. We feel your experiences will help in bettering our understanding of how sport coaches navigate highperformance sport workplaces. In turn, we hope that the findings from this study will support efforts to make sport workplaces more equitable and inclusive for all coaches.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to

stop participating, or to refuse to answer questions will not influence the treatment you may be receiving, nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete. If you choose to stop participating, you will still be eligible to receive the inducement (eGiftcard) for agreeing to be in the project, even if you withdraw without completion of the research.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. Unless you choose otherwise, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The principal investigator will keep a link on a password-protected digital file that identifies you to your coded information, available only to the principal investigator and/or selected members of the research team. Any information that can identify you will remain confidential anywhere else. If the interview is in person or over the phone, the recording function on a smartphone will be used and the recording will be saved in a password-protected digital file on the principal investigator's computer. The recording will be immediately deleted off the recording device once it has been uploaded to the principal investigator's computer. If the interview is on Zoom, it will be recorded (both audio and video recording) through the Zoom platform and saved on the principal investigator's computer with a password. All data will be safely stored in password-locked digital files and only the researcher and supervisor will have access to this information. The raw data will be destroyed by December 31, 2025. Recordings (audio/video) will be saved in a password-protected file to the primary researcher's local computer, not the cloud-based service. All data files and transcripts will be permanently deleted, and any hard copy material will be shredded by December 31, 2025.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Wajeeha Rasul at wajeeha5@my.yorku.ca, Prof. Parissa Safai at psafai@yorku.ca or the Kinesiology and Health Science Graduate Program department, kahs@yorku.ca. This research has been reviewed and received approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics in the Office of Research Ethics, York University (e-mail ore@yorku.ca). This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential**.**

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I***, (insert your name)***, consent to participate in *Managing More Than Just Athletes: Impression Management Among Canadian High-Performance Sport Coaches* conducted by *Wajeeha Rasul*. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature_____ **Date**_____

Participant

Signature _____ **Date** _____

Principal Investigator

Additional consent (where applicable)

You must seek additional consent by including check boxes or requesting additional signatures for the following:

1. Audio recording

☐ I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

2. Video recording

☐ I consent to the recording of the Zoom session for purposes of generating a verbal transcript. I am aware that the recording will be deleted as soon as the verbal transcript is downloaded.

3. Consent to waive anonymity

I, _____, consent to the use of my name in the publications arising from this research.

4. Consent to use of quotes

I consent to the use of quotations in any final reports/ publications of the research? Y / N