COACHES’ COPING WITH STRESSORS: HARDINESS IN COACHING

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Kyle Shawn McDonald

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Kyle Shawn McDonald, candidate for the degree of Master of Science in Kinesiology & Health Studies, has presented a thesis titled, *Coaches’ Coping with Stressors: Hardiness in Coaching*, in an oral examination held on May 29, 2015. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

External Examiner: *Dr. Kent Kowalski, University of Saskatchewan*

Supervisor: Dr. Kim D. Dorsch, Faculty of Kineiology & Health Studies

Committee Member: Dr. Cory Kulczycki, Faculty of Kineiology & Health Studies

Committee Member: **Dr. David Paskevich, Adjunct**

Chair of Defense: Dr. Christopher Oriet, Department of Psychology

*via SKYPE

**Not present at defense
Abstract

In the field of competitive sports there is an emphasis on the growth of technical, tactical, and physical aspects as it relates to coach performance. However, little emphasis is placed on how coaches cope with stress and adversity that accompanies their career choice. The purpose of the present research is to establish the background of coping with the stressors by professional (paid to coach) hockey coaches using the conceptual model of hardiness.

Hardiness has been used to describe stress resistant individuals (Kobasa, 1979). Kobasa (1979) indicates that hardiness involves the three C’s – commitment, control, and challenge. Commitment is the ability to interpret situations as interesting and worthwhile; control is the ability to influence one’s surroundings through effort; and challenge involves the ability to learn and grow from positive and negative experiences.

Nine male coaches who were presently coaching in the Western Hockey League, Canada West League (Canadian Interuniversity Sport), Austrian Elite League, National Collegiate Athletic Association, American Hockey League, or the National Hockey League were asked to complete an open-ended survey. The survey was conducted via email to discuss individual coaching behaviours with respect to how they handle the stressors of their position. Through an interpretive lens of the experiences of nine professional coaches, a record was provided of coping strategies and experiences through the conceptual framework of hardiness.

Findings were in line with commitment, control, and challenge (hardiness attributes) and included seven subthemes that portrayed examples of experience as it relates to stressors. Subthemes were developed through a thematical analysis of the
responses within the survey. Subthemes that emerged from the commitment attribute included passion and authentic modeling. Subthemes that arose around control included communication, positivity/emotional control, and building accountability. Finally, the challenge attribute subthemes revolved around learning and flexibility.

As stated earlier, there is a premium on technical, tactical, and physical aspects as key topics in coach performance. This research attempts to bridge the gap in the mental attributes needed to keep pushing forward in times of stress for professional coaches at an elite level. The methods used do not promote or suggest if a coach that participated was hardy. What it may suggest, is that taken together, all the coaches comments would demonstrate how a “hardy” coach would deal with stressors.
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

This research, although I did not know it at the time, began when I first embarked
on my own coaching endeavours in golf at the community college level. From that point
on, I was immersed in high performance athletics with pressures to succeed and
persevere. After my coaching stint in golf, hockey became my coaching objective as I
was completing my undergraduate degree at the University of Lethbridge. In 2006 –
2007 I was named assistant coach of the Pronghorns men’s team in the Canadian
Interuniversity Sport (Canada West). At the same time, I was involved at the provincial
level with Hockey Canada’s program of excellence (14 – 17 years old). Upon
completion of my BA in psychology, like other graduates, it was time for me to get a
“real job”. I was fortunate to gain employment at the Athol Murray College of Notre
Dame where I coached Junior A ice hockey (17 – 20 years old) and moved up to being
the Bantam Coordinator overseeing the development of the school’s grade 9 hockey
players (14 years old). From Notre Dame, I moved to Ames, Iowa where I spent two
years working once again at the collegiate level (20 – 25 years old) with the hockey
program as an associate head coach.

Through these travels, I have had the opportunity to work with some great
coaches (and some not so great coaches), but all of who have shape my philosophy on
success and high performance coaching. I have seen coaches construct an environment
designed to excel and have also seen coaches who displayed a lack of respect for their
players when adverse situations arose. The most important lesson I have learned through
these experiences is that in order to achieve success (no matter how you define it –
championships, wins, player movement, or development) adverse situations arise that as a coach you must be able to overcome.

Through my roles as an assistant or associate coach as well as being “the person in charge” as head coach, I have seen adverse situations arise from many sources, such as outcomes of games, pressure, parent involvement, other external sources, and internal team sources. I have seen coaches react with an act of conviction and have also seen coaches fall apart and let emotions overtake decision making.

When I embarked on the coaching profession, compared to my present outlook, my ability has changed with experience along with my philosophies when encountering competition. This notion of improvement and changing viewpoints is common – it is reality as people mature in any profession. In bridging the gap from practice to theory, my experiences have created an interpretive lens to construct my research. I believe it is important to make note of my experiences in coaching because they provide me with a background and certain philosophies with respect to coaching.

Therefore, in order to acknowledge my own biases when conducting research in a profession I am very close to, it is important to make note of the interpretive lens through which I am looking. Schram (2006) maintains that “as an interpretivist researcher, your aim is to understand … complex and constructed reality from the point of view of those who live in it” (p. 44). He further elaborated, “generating and synthesizing these multi-voiced and varied constructions requires that you engage at some level in the lives of those around whom your inquiry is focused; it is through direct interaction with their perspectives and behaviors that you focus and refine your interpretations” (p. 45). Taking the time to analyze experiences is beneficial. A qualitative interpretive lens gives
one the ability to have a structured record of experience in an area (stressors and coping) that accompanies today's high performance athletics.

Undoubtedly, because of my coaching background, I view the world in certain ways and in an effort to acknowledge my biases and in an effort to overcome them, a researcher must develop an intellectual identity in this research acknowledging their views and attempting to interpret the data without bias. “The process of developing an intellectual identity … as a researcher entails building upon a stance that positions you to view the world in a certain way and deciding upon a lens through which you will be filtering your ideas and perceptions” (Schram, 2006, p. 56). In my opinion, the ability to handle stressors and persevere is an overlooked attribute of success in coaches. However with that said, this ability to cope comes from experience; but the experience of professional coaches is at times overlooked. The stressors associated with professional coaching were an area that I had no idea on how to cope with until I had the experience to do so. This research was used in an effort to explore how others in my profession coped. These stressors were aspects that I did not know how to cope with until I had to.

Initially, this research started with developing mental toughness, but it was found that although this term is widely used, it is hard to pinpoint. It was through an extensive literature search on this topic that I discovered the concept of hardiness. Hardiness appears to allow for a more concise conceptual framework; a structure to build from and ultimately use in viewing the professional coaches’ experiences, and establish an interpretive lens on an existing framework.

The concept of hardiness in coaches was therefore pursued. This research specifically investigated the experiences of professional coaches in coping with stressors
through the conceptual framework of hardiness. The following literature review will provide the reader with a more specific definition of stress, establish if stressors exist in coaching, define hardiness, examine the hardiness research in sports, and ultimately identify the need for this research in professional coaching.
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Central to this research project was the assumption that stressors are perceived by professional coaches in the sport of ice hockey and that they must, in order to remain coaching, cope effectively with these stressors. More specifically, this research was an attempt to explore how coaches cope with these experiences using the conceptual model of hardiness. Through the existing literature review, it is important for the reader to note that there is minimal research on the coach and his or her experiences as it relates to the mental attributes such as coping and handling stressors. Much of the existing literature revolves around the coach’s role in athlete development (e.g., Carter & Bloom, 2009; Connaughton, Wadey, Hanton, & Jones, 2008; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Golby & Sheard, 2004; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbury, & Peterson, 1999; Middleton, Marsh, Martin, Richards, & Perry, 2004; Sadeghi, Sofian, Fauzee, Jamalis, Ab-Latif, & Cheric, 2010; Sheard, 2010). Although limited, it has been suggested that there is the need for stress and coping to be examined in the coaching profession.

2.1 What do Coaches Perceive as Stressful?

Before attempting to understand how coaches cope with the stressors they experience in high performance sports, it is important to first understand the concept of stress. Folkman and Lazarus (1985) defined stress as “a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as relevant to his or her well-being and in which the person’s resources are taxed or exceeded” (p. 152). This definition is central to the transactional theory of stress (Lazarus, 1966) that suggests that there is a relationship between the demands (i.e., stressors) and the individual’s ability to cope with
them (i.e., coping ability). So, the foundational question for this thesis is what do coaches perceive as stressful? More importantly, how do they cope with these stressors?

As early as 1992, Taylor advocated for the use of psychological coping skills, behavioural, and cognitive measures for coping with stressors in the coaching profession. Yet in 2007, Frey was still stating that coaches of elite level athletes have received little attention in the research field as it relates to their experiences. Subsequently Thelwell, Weston, Greenlees, and Hutchings (2008) researched stressors from a coach perspective. Building upon this and still stating the lack of research and attention to stressors in the elite coaching field, Levy, Nicholls, Marchant, and Polman (2009) continued research in coaching stressors identifying “organisational stressors, coping strategies, and perceived coping effectiveness with an elite coach” through a qualitative diary methodology. Once again in 2012, Olusoga, Maynard, Hays, and Butt still found that the “factors that enable coaches to cope with the demands of elite coaching and perform successfully in a highly pressurized, world class environment have received limited attention” (p. 230). Consequently, it seems more research is required with coaches in this area. The research found to date is summarized in Table 1 below.
Table 1

Coaching Stressors Identified in Previous Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Identified Stressors</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Frey (2007)                     | Ten Division 1 (NCAA)            | • Communication with athletes  
• Lack of control over athletes  
• Recruiting  
• Subsequent roles and responsibilities associated with coaching at this level  
• Lack of free time  
• Lack of family time  
• Losing the passion to coach |
| Thelwell, Weston, Greenlees, & Hutchings (2008) | 11 Elite Athlete Coaches | • Decision making  
• Results  
• Delivery to athlete  
• Organization expectations (self/stakeholders)  
• Officiating |
| Levy, Nicholls, Marchant, & Polman (2009) | 1 Elite Athlete Coach           | • Organizational stress (administration, overload, competition environment, athletes, and team atmosphere) |
| Olusoga, Butt, Hays, & Maynard (2009) | 12 Elite Athlete Coaches        | • Conflict  
• Pressure  
• Expectation  
• Managing the competition environment  
• Athlete concerns  
• Coaching responsibilities to the athlete  
• Consequences of sport status  
• Competition preparation  
• Organizational management  
• Sacrificing personal time  
• Isolation |
In Frey’s (2007) work involving the profession of coaching and stress, 10 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division 1 coaches were interviewed. The semi-structured interviews encompassed the perceived effects of stress on the individuals’ coaching performance. Common stressors that arose included communication with athletes, lack of control over athletes, recruiting, and subsequent roles and responsibilities associated with coaching at this level. Other stressors associated with these coaches included the lack of free time, family time, and losing the passion to coach. These life-changing stressors were key indicators of leaving the coaching profession. Frey also stated that coaches are seen as “problem solvers” rather than those who can succumb to stress, which ultimately increases the stress associated with this profession. In this work, Frey established the types of stressors that coaches of elite amateur athletes face, yet did not attempt to examine the strategies used to cope with these situations.

The research by Thelwell and colleagues (2008) involved 11 participants who coached elite level athletes and gave a retroactive account via interviews. Key stressors that were found included decision making, results, delivery to athletes, organization expectations (self/stakeholders), and officiating. Levy et al.’s (2009) research consisted of one elite male coach and examined organizational stressors, coping, and perceptions of coping effectiveness over a 28-day period through a diary log method. The researchers found five themes as it relates to organizational stress, including administration, overload, competition environment, athletes, and team atmosphere. The five main coping
responses included communication, preparation, planning, social support, and self-talk.

Levy et al. results identified key subthemes as it relates to organizational stress:

For instance, preparation for training sessions/competitive games, transport problems, travelling long distances, poor coaching standards, accommodating new players, communicating with athletes/management, and player discipline were reoccurring first-order themes. Additional organizational stressors are evident in the current study. For example, disruptions to competition schedule, meetings with management, not spending enough time with family, tiredness, standard of management, player concerns, and staffing/squad issues. (p.40)

Applying the tenets of the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus, 1966) to sports coaching, Olusoga, Butt, Hays, and Maynard (2009) state:

The various elements of the stress process require detailed attention and, therefore, when studying stress, it is important to consider stress responses and the processes of appraising and coping. Nevertheless, based on existing literature, before their overall experiences of stress can be fully understood, it is clear that within the arena of world class sport, a detailed understanding of the demands facing coaches is necessary. (p. 444)

Consequently, in their examination of stressors in six male and six female coaches with international experience in a variety of sports from the United Kingdom, Olusoga et al. (2009) found “that world class sports coaches experience a diverse range of stressors” (p. 457). They categorized these stressors into 10 higher-order themes: conflict, pressure and expectation, managing the competition environment, athlete concerns, coaching responsibilities to the athlete, consequences of sport status, competition preparation, organizational management, sacrificing personal time, and isolation. Olusoga et al. (2009) stated all 12 coaches indicated, “conflicts within the sport organization were stressors” (p. 447). To further distinguish the type of conflict, the researchers elaborated three lower order themes: management cohesion (conflict between staff, lack of trust, tensions with
previous coaches and perception of other staff wanting them to fail); interference (having to deal with outside sources that took away from their coaching roles and responsibilities); and forced collaborations with other organizations (such as city council). Pressure and expectations was identified by 11 of the 12 coaches in the form of self-imposed pressure and outcome pressure. Managing the competition environment was discussed by seven of the 12 coaches. These coaches defined this aspect in two lower themes: being able to cope with unforeseen events (officials and unclear rules in competition), and managing time at the competition (having no “down time”). Athlete concerns was reported by 10 of the 12 coaches as a stressor. Subthemes that emerged included a lack of professionalism from the athletes, commitment of athletes, and performing to potential. In describing coaching responsibilities to athletes, Olusoga et al. (2009) found two emerging subthemes that were determined as stressors. The first being meeting athletes training needs (time and working in large groups), and the second as managing athletes psychologically (managing athletes who were also stressed). Consequences of the sport’s status included budget concerns and amateur status as well as recognition (their sport’s minority status). The researchers found competition preparations stressors came in the form of maintaining elite standards and preparation for major events, such as tapering and competitive practice matches. Organizational management included the ability to oversee and be responsible for all aspects of the team as a stressor. Sacrificing personal time (e.g., family) and isolation (e.g., lack of a support system) were also described as stressors. As established by Olusoga et al. (2009), Levy et al. (2009), Thelwell et al. (2008), and Frey (2007) there is reasonable grounds to presume coaches do experience
stressors in their coaching profession and although this research is fairly new and sparse, it still speaks to the need of this research in today’s high performance setting.

In viewing past research of stressors associated with coaching, it appears the assumption asserted at the beginning of this section (i.e., that stressors are perceived in high performance coaching) has been supported. The goal of the present research however, is not to specifically identify coaching stressors, but to use the conceptual model of hardiness to explore a related area of coach performance – the ability to handle the stressors that are present in the profession of coaching.

2.2 Defining Hardiness

Originally introduced by Kobasa (1979) as a set of personality dispositions, hardiness has been used to describe stress resistant individuals (Bartone, 1999; Bartone & Snook, 2002; Maddi, 2006). Maddi (2006) established that hardiness can be seen through the “courage to remain involved with the events and people around you, no matter how stressful things become” (p. 160). The conceptualization of hardiness revolves around three dispositions – known as the three C’s – commitment, control, and challenge (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982).

Kobasa et al. (1982) described those high in the commitment disposition as having a tendency to “involve oneself in (rather than experience alienation from) whatever one is doing or encounters” (p. 169). Committed persons tend to identify with the events, things, and persons in their social environment; so much so that the strength of the meaning and personal investment they give to this identification allows them to actively approach potentially stressful experiences as compared to avoiding them.
Kobasa et al. (1982) described the control disposition as an expression of “the tendency to feel and act as if one is influential (rather than helpless) in the face of the varied contingencies of life” (p. 169). Individuals high in the control disposition feel that they can, through their personal knowledge, skills, and creativities, transform events into those that fit with their life’s plan. Consequently, potentially stressful events are not perceived as overwhelming as the perception of these experiences is mitigated by a personal sense of influence. The control disposition does not refer to one’s actual ability to control a situation, but rather their sense of internal power over their abilities to influence the situation.

Kobasa et al. (1982) described the challenge disposition as being “expressed as the belief that change rather than stability is normal in life and that the anticipation of changes are interesting incentives to growth rather than threats to security” (p. 170). Consequently, individuals demonstrating the challenge disposition will feel stimulated and excited as opposed to threatened by the adjustments necessary when facing new situations. They will view these situations as opportunities to transform themselves, learn, and grow as a person rather than trying to maintain and protect their current self.

To summarize, commitment is an approach in which people initiate instead of react; the approach for control involves people influencing what is going on around them through effort; and finally the challenge approach involves people continuously growing in wisdom and learning from negative and positive experiences (Kobasa et al., 1982; Maddi et al., 2002). Maddi (2006) also suggested that the three C’s “provide the courage and motivation to do the hard work of turning stressful circumstances from potential
disasters into growth opportunities instead” (p. 160). This includes “effectiveness in carrying out difficult tasks, taking a leadership role, being creative, increasing awareness, and wisdom, and avoiding rule-breaking and other conduct problems” (p. 161).

The concept of hardiness was initially introduced by Kobasa in 1979 as she believed that “by avoiding stress, modern persons may be turning away from a chance to better their lives” (p. 2). Recognizing the need to further understand the link between stress and illness, Kobasa (1979) set out to try to understand the personal characteristics of those who felt stressed yet were healthy. In this seminal work involving 670 married, middle-management males, she found support for three main hypotheses revolving around the personality dispositions of hardiness. The first hypothesis specified that individuals with a greater sense of control “over what occurs in their lives will remain healthier than those who feel powerless in the face of external forces” (p. 3). Secondly, individuals who are committed to all areas of their lives will remain healthier because of the “belief system that minimizes the perceived threat of any given stressful event” (p. 4). Finally, Kobasa’s third hypothesis indicated, “those who view change as challenge will remain healthier than those who view it as a threat” (p. 4).

In an attempt to explain her findings, Kobasa (1979) provided an example of a male executive having to deal with a job transfer in which he will have to “cope with new subordinates and supervisors, finding a new home, helping children and wife with a new school and neighborhood, learning new job skills, and so on” (p. 9). Based on her findings she argued that a hardy executive would approach this situation with a “clear sense of his values, goals, and capabilities and a belief in their importance [commitment] and … a strong tendency toward active involvement with his environment [control]” (p.
Further, the hardy executive has “an unshakeable sense of meaningfulness and ability to evaluate the impact of the transfer in terms of a general life plan with its established priorities [challenge]” (p. 9). In other words, while the executive may feel that the decision to transfer may have been made without his knowledge, he now engages fully in the new opportunity to fulfill his life goals and provide stimulating opportunities for his family; using his internal resources to interpret the new situation positively and become active in determining its consequences. A less hardy executive would approach the transfer feeling victimized and more personally stressed. Kobasa’s (1979) conceptualization of hardiness and subsequent research, although not sport-related, does provide a strong foundation for what coaches may go through in their career and their ability to cope with these circumstances. This link will be made clearer in an upcoming section.

As stated above, the hardiness model emphasizes involvement (seeking out commitment, control, and challenge) and is typically examined in occupations that are perceived as being stressful, such as policing, military, firefighting, and business (e.g., Bartone, 1999, 2006; Bartone & Snook, 2002; Maddi, 2006). It is asserted that the stress perceived by individuals in these occupations is increased due to high paced changes, competition, threats to life, as well as the high stakes involved (Maddi, 2006). For example, Westman (1990) examined men and women engaged in officer training in the Israeli military and found that individuals who displayed higher levels of hardiness, while having the tendency to perceive the training as stressful, graduated successfully when compared to those with lower levels. It was concluded that in order to graduate successfully from military training, coping with stress was a necessity and being high in
the hardiness dispositions facilitated successful outcomes. In general, these studies showed that when success requires complex coping strategies, hardiness is a strong mechanism. The conceptual framework of hardiness provides a foundation when dealing with stressful situations; however, little research has been conducted in the sports world, let alone in the coaching profession.

2.3 Hardiness in Sports

The concept of hardiness was introduced to the sport context through its application to understanding the performance of athletes. In order to justify the exploration of hardiness in a sport context, Hanton, Evans, and Neil (2003) stressed that “the elite sporting environment place(s) the athlete into highly stressful situations, be it physically and psychologically” (p. 167). Consequently, they suggested that the conceptualization of hardiness into its three original dispositions (i.e., commitment, control, and challenge) would be beneficial when examining perceptions of athletes. Indeed, they found that “the elite/high hardy individual athlete was predicted to demonstrate lower competitive anxiety intensity levels, a more facilitative response and higher self-confidence levels” (p. 178). These findings could be interpreted that the hardy athlete manages adversity much better than their counterparts with lower levels of hardiness. Hanton et al. further claim that hardiness is a positive psychological construct. They explain that this construct is accompanied by effective appraisal and coping strategies because competition outcomes will not always be one of success.

The utility of exploring hardiness in the sport realm was further established through Golby and Sheard’s (2004) work comparing the predictive validity of the conceptualizations of commitment, control, and challenge with the more popular notion
of mental toughness. In their attempt to discover the psychological constructs that could distinguish the level of proficiency of professional rugby athletes, they found that “the hardiness construct … as opposed to mental toughness … has greater explanatory prowess” (p. 940). Golby and Sheard’s concise and realistic definition of hardiness involved the fact that hardiness attributes were concrete and represented key development aspects as opposed to the vagueness of mental toughness.

Sheard and Golby (2010) continued their research into athletic performance and hardiness and found hardiness to be “a psychological characteristic that distinguishes elite-level sport performers from their sub elite counterparts” (p. 166) while controlling for athletes’ age, type of sport, category of sport, and gender. Despite finding a more modest influence of the hardiness dispositions on performance in this multi-sport study than they did in their previous single sport study (Golby & Sheard, 2004), the authors suggested that their findings “may shed further light on the relationship between hardiness and stress management and the mechanisms by which hardiness exerts its ameliorative influence” (p. 166) and as such should be extended to coaches.

More recently, Mehrparvar, Moghaddam, Raghibi, Mazaheri, and Behzadi (2012) compared female athletes to non-athletes and found “psychological hardiness of athletes is significantly higher than that of the non-athletes” (p. 820). The authors suggested that “years of competitive experience and higher physical fitness can be the reasons” (p. 820) for higher hardiness attributes in athletes. They advocated that competition and training experience develops hardiness in athletes; however do not actually test this assumption in their research.
Based on this previous research, Kobasa’s (1979) hardiness framework appears beneficial when trying to understand coping experiences of athletes. However, as Golby and Sheard (2004) cautioned “the literature on the relationship between hardiness and sport success is extremely limited” (p. 940). But, as Crust and Lawrence (2006) urged “extending hardiness and mental toughness research … should be encouraged since it is apparent that some managers thrive on the pressures of the job while others succumb to the stress and appear ill at ease” (p. 38). It is anticipated that the theoretical framework for hardiness will prove beneficial in viewing the experiences of professional coaches.

2.4 Hardiness and Coaching Experiences

The following vignette can be used as an example to apply the hardiness model to coaching. In the 2011 playoffs of the National Hockey League, the head coach of the Detroit Red Wings, Mike Babcock, saw his team facing a 3–0 deficit in the second round versus the San Jose Sharks. Heading into the fourth game, Babcock was quoted as saying:

I just think I'm going to disarm the bomb, I've always thought that. That's how a coach thinks. I guess if I sat back and I went through everything negative, then I could make a case. But what I choose to do, and that's just in my life in general, is that I choose to pick out what's positive. What's positive is we have a game at home tomorrow. We thought we played real well yesterday. (Allen, 2011)

Babcock’s remarks could be interpreted using the conceptual framework of hardiness. For example, Babcock discussed the concept of challenges ahead in facing the 3–0 deficit and the positive mindset needed. He showed his commitment to remain involved through his acknowledgement of the upcoming game and the positive aspect of it being a home game, and in moving forward as a team they can only control their preparation for the next game. This example speaks to his sense of hardiness and the
impact it has on his ability to cope with the situation that may stem from the experiences coaches are involved in.

Although limited research has been conducted using hardiness in sport in general and coaching in particular, Sandhu, Sharma, and Singh (2009) did investigate the hardiness of Indian coaches based on age and coaching experience. Their research was conducted with over 400 coaches between the ages of 30 – 55 years and with experience between 5 to 25 years in a variety of sports. The researchers divided the coaches into three age groups and three experience groups to investigate the three dimensions of hardiness. This research is important because it included the notion of experience and it concluded that coaches with 20 years or more experience are “more committed, better in control and challenge dimensions of hardiness as compared to the coaches with experience of less than 10 years and between 11 – 20 years” (p. 41). Despite the numerous limitations that are apparent in this paper (e.g., lack of reliability measures, manipulation checks, and interaction effects), their research is important to the present study because it shows a relationship among hardiness, age, and experience in coaching. The current research was established to place a premium on the stories experience can tell in viewing stressful events. It was believed that hardiness could be seen realistically through coaches’ experiences and how they have learned to buffer the effects of stressors.

2.5 Purpose of the Study

In moving forward, the purpose of this research is to view the coping experiences of coaches through the conceptual framework of hardiness. Understanding hardiness as it relates to coping in stressful occupations is crucial. In this interpretive thematical analysis research it was suspected that high performance coaches experience situations
they perceive as stressful and experience provides an opportunity to cope. In order to remain in the coaching realm, it is suspected that being a coach is an integral part of their identity (commitment), that they will perceive themselves as being an integral part in the development of the environment they are working in (control), and that they must learn from experiences both positive and negative (challenge).
CHAPTER 3: Method

3.1 Participants

The sample for this study included nine coaches who were considered, at the time, professional coaches (paid to coach male athletes) at the junior (3), college (3), minor professional (1), and professional levels of hockey (2). All participants were male, were currently or previously in the role of head coach, within an age range of 35 – 45 years old, and with a minimum of five years and a maximum of 20 years of coaching experience. A brief snapshot of the coaches is listed in Table 2.

Table 2  
Coaches’ Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Age/Experience (years)</th>
<th>Average Win Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Western Hockey League</td>
<td>47/15</td>
<td>536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>National Hockey League</td>
<td>41/9</td>
<td>614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Canadian Interuniversity Sport</td>
<td>40/10</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>National Hockey League</td>
<td>47/13</td>
<td>495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Western Hockey League</td>
<td>38/20</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Canadian Interuniversity Sport</td>
<td>41/10</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>National Collegiate Athletic Association</td>
<td>44/15</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Western Hockey League</td>
<td>41/11</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Austrian Elite League</td>
<td>48/15</td>
<td>562</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 Procedures

Potential participants were recruited through the researcher’s professional contacts (made possible by his role in the coaching profession). Potential participants were contacted via phone and invited to participate in the project. Phone numbers were available through the main researcher’s previous interactions with the participants.

Once contacted, the participants were advised that the researcher would like to explore the concept of hardiness in coaching. They were told that if they choose to participate, they would be asked to take part in an email questionnaire. Upon acceptance of the invitation and following informed consent, the researcher and participants established a time frame for email questionnaire.

After participants verbally agreed to participate through initial contact, the participants were sent an information form and email questionnaire (see Appendix A). Participants’ completed submission of the email questionnaire implied informed consent. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire within two weeks of the initial email containing the questionnaire. Follow up reminders were provided 10 days post original email if a response had not been received. Replies to the questionnaire were within the original email message and through the attachment. Participants were informed that they could expect the total time for participation (including information form and questionnaire) to be between one and one-half hours to two hours.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

An application was made to the University of Regina’s Research Ethics Board and subsequently approved (Appendix B). Included in this application, and as part of the informed consent, it was noted that confidentiality would be at risk through the use of
email. Although all necessary precautions were taken to maintain confidentiality (described below), as with anything sent over the internet, there was a possibility that confidentiality could be lost. Upon completion of the questionnaire, pseudonyms were used to aid in confidentiality. The researcher removed the coach’s name and other identifying information, such as team names and places, from any printed data. Email correspondence was printed with names blocked out and the original email deleted to help maintain confidentiality.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection tool. For this research, an electronic survey was the only type of information collection used (Appendix A). All questions were developed by the main researcher in an effort to obtain the most accurate feedback on coping with stressors as a professional coach.

Coach demographics and philosophy. The first section of the survey included demographics (e.g., age, years of coaching and playing experience, number of championships achieved) and developed into asking about coaching philosophy. These questions were asked as a means to establish experience and background of each coach. As established by Carter and Bloom (2009) it is important to understand what knowledge coaches have before asking how they acquired it, which is why it is important to note the background of coaches as an important element to their philosophies and how they establish their coping strategies.

Coaching stressors. The second part of the survey asked participants to identify stressors in their coaching environment and their reactions to these stressors in a more open and general sense than in the upcoming section. While the identification of
stressors in the coaching environment was not the primary aim of this study, it was necessary to ask the coaches to think about and identify stressors that they faced in order to examine their subsequent coping strategies.

*Perceptions of hardiness strategies.* The primary goal of this thesis was to examine coaches’ experiences of coping with stressors through the conceptual framework of hardiness. Consequently, coaches were asked to define and provide concrete examples of the three hardiness attributes - commitment, control, and challenge. As a means of obtaining data that could be linked specifically to each of the three attributes, the conceptual definition of each construct was provided. Finally, coaches were asked to rank the importance of each of the three attributes when dealing with adversity on a scale from 1 *Most Important* to 3 *Least Important*.

*The data.* As established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) qualitative research needs to decrease the likelihood of misinterpretation or mishandling of data and enhance trustworthiness. In an effort to create trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba suggest a member check method be used. As per the method of Carter and Bloom (2009) member checks were used at different times throughout the data collection. First, at the submission of the email survey participants were asked if they would like to alter any comments. Then, after a preliminary analysis was completed, all participants were sent a summary of findings and were invited to comment on their accuracy, strengths, and limitations.

*Data analysis.* It is the role of an interpretivist researcher to “seek to describe and understand members’ meanings and the implications” (Gephart, 2004, p. 457). As such, the interpretive method is used to clarify explanations and perspectives of
individuals (Holt, Tamminen, Tink, & Black, 2009; Lin, 1998). As outlined by Walsham (1995) the interpretivist method recognizes a relationship between the researcher and the topic. Furthermore, Walsham states that interpretivist research aims to create an understanding of the occurrence and process.

Deductive analysis was used initially as a guide. Sparkes and Smith (2014) state that the researcher moves from general to specific. More specifically, “researchers start with a general theory from which a conclusion is conducted” (p. 26). As this research started with the general theory of hardiness, data were collected using that framework and specified key themes. The subthemes established was the specific conclusion. A thematic analysis was used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 82). As Braun and Clark established, a thematic analysis is a 6-step process of analyzing and interpreting the data. The process includes (a) familiarizing yourself with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) generating themes in a systematic fashion, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining themes, and finally (f) producing the report. Most importantly thematic analysis is not a linear process and is produced over time (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997). Thematic analysis is a flexible method however requires the researcher to be clear and explicit in what you are doing (Braun & Clark, 2006).

To summarize the use of thematic analysis this research took a data set from the email surveys and found repeated patterns of meaning and developed specific themes related to the hardiness framework. As outlined by Braun and Clark (2006) a 6-step
method was used when reviewing the data set. Initially the transcripts were read thoroughly by the author to gain an understanding of the data. Secondly, initial codes within the three hardiness attributes were identified using the data from the latter two sections of the survey. Third, more specific themes under the three C’s took place. The fourth step involved reviewing the themes to ensure thoroughness. Fifth, the themes were refined and specificity grew ensuring an overall analysis was produced in line with the research questions. The final step involved producing a report where all data portrayed represent the participant’s experiences with stressors.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline that to enhance trustworthiness peer debriefing is beneficial. To keep in line with this method, specifically in step 4 of the above, the first author and supervisor engaged in extensive discussions to discuss the validity of the themes created until consensus was achieved. The supervisor also worked with the author in step six in identifying the most descriptive quotes from participants that best represented the experiences of dealing with stressors.
CHAPTER 4: Results

Data analysis revolved around the two main sections of the survey. The first category revolved around identifying stressors associated in coaching at a high level of ice hockey. The second category involved exploring the concept of hardiness and how the commitment, control, and challenge dispositions were portrayed in the careers of the participating coaches. As stated previously, the primary purpose of this study revolved around the responses to the third category in the questionnaire (i.e., examples of hardiness strategies). Typically, these results would be presented first; however, due to the fact that the identification of stressors is necessary before one can examine coping, these responses are presented first in the upcoming section.

4.1 Identifying Coaching Stressors

Three main themes were discovered when identifying stressors of the participating coaches. The first theme involved those situations coaches deemed as uncontrollable. Secondly, coaches discussed in more detail stressors associated with the game itself. Finally, the third stressor the participating coaches discussed revolved around playing personnel. For example, Coach B discussed concepts of stress related to in game situations, where Coach F discussed the concept of recruiting.

Uncontrollable stressors. The coaches interviewed (50% of the sample) briefly emphasized that some of the most stressful areas they perceived are areas that are out of their control; areas such as injuries, travel, equipment problems, referees, and university academic schedules or assignments. This aspect was not further developed by the coaches as they stated that as these are uncontrollable they seem to try and move on.
**Stressors associated with the game.** Coach D commented that a particular aspect or failure in games such as power play, penalty kill, high goals against are key stressors. Coach A discussed the press (e.g., media) and how through good and bad times your job is always broadcasted. Coach I narrowed down his sources of stress indicating that “stressful situations are obviously when you lose a few games in a row, the media jumps on board it is always a tough place to be.”

Coach A further discussed losing and losing streaks in general. He mentioned the term “coaching scared” and that there is no feeling worse than this aspect as you start feeling pressure from your general manager and as a coach you start second guessing yourself. Coach I also discussed management and possible factors in the organization as a major source of stress where in “situations I have encountered were dealing day-to-day with a management that I knew were undermining my authority behind my back, and consistently lying to me and my players.”

**Stressors associated with players.** Coach B discussed two main areas that he deemed stressful when dealing with playing personnel. In particular, he mentioned scratching a healthy player, as well as dealing with aging players who feel they can compete at a level they are used to. Coach E discussed the fact that treating each player individually can be stressful. “Finding ways to help players reach their goals which will ultimately have the team reach its goal. Every individual is different. When you have players that are a challenge = stress”. Coach A also discussed that trying to satisfy players increases stress. “When top end players aren’t performing they look to you for reassurance. Do you now treat them different or go harder on them or soften up to them to lighten their mental pressure always affects you as a coach.”
4.2 Hardiness Dispositions

Table 3 represents the definitions of the subthemes that emerged from the hardiness dispositions (commitment, control, and challenges). Each subtheme is explained in more depth below.

Table 3
Definitions of Hardiness Dispositions Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hardiness Construct</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>The love of career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic modeling</td>
<td>Leading by example in a way that is true to one’s values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Key skill that involves the daily verbal and nonverbal, honest and sometimes difficult, respectful interactions with all stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivity and emotional control</td>
<td>The ability to deliver messages in a calm and positive manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building accountability</td>
<td>Identifying and creating ownership among players of individual and team strengths and weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>A reflective process of the challenges previously faced and changing based on those experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Being open to new approaches and ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Commitment.** As Kobasa et al. (1982) described, those high in the commitment disposition have a tendency to “involve oneself in (rather than experience alienation from) whatever one is doing or encounters” (p. 169). Committed persons tend to identify with the events, things, and persons in their social environment; so much so that the strength of the meaning and personal investment they give to this identification allows them to actively approach potentially stressful experiences as compared to avoiding them. Commitment was displayed through coaches discussing their passion, and authentically modeling values in difficult times.

**Passion.** The majority of coaches interviewed described the commitment factor coinciding with passion – loving their work. Coach C wrote:

I love what I do. It is easy to commit to something you believe in. I believe in my players and what I'm trying to do for the program. I learn from stressful situations so I can deal better with them in the future.

Coach B also commented that “coaches have a passion to stay at a task until you have a level of success, when you enjoy what you are doing commitment is easy.” Coach I discussed that it is more than a game as it relates to being committed – “I do it for my name, my family, and my passion.” Finally, Coach F remarked that he was lucky to be in coaching and that it is something he enjoys on a day-to-day basis so being committed during stressful situations comes naturally. Based on these comments the subtheme of passion is defined by the coaches interviewed as love of career.

**Authentic modeling.** Coach A and Coach B both noted that one of the key ingredients in dealing with stress is that as a coach you have control of what your players see from you and that these behaviours need to reflect your values. For example, Coach A said,
You must let your own values come through so the players can get a “feel” for your beliefs. If you send mixed messages, then the team will see right through that. If you stay true to what you believe in (i.e., don’t be late, work ethic, communicator, openness, pursuing the highest level) then you will be able to effectively control your environment.

Two more coaches discussed the fact that in order to be successful you have to lead by example or “you must model the behaviour desired” (Coach D). Coach E further elaborated that

You are a leader and you have to lead by example, your commitment is shown or revealed by your work ethic. When things go sideways, you have to show your players that a high work ethic is the way to get on track again.

Coach H discussed the fact that he is in coaching because in working with a group of players it is always a challenge to attain a common goal. In being committed you have to focus on the details (simplify versus complex). Coach D elaborated:

When you are challenged as a coach you fall back onto your foundation as a coach/team. Stay with the plan if it is one that has proven to work. The solutions are usually simple, do not try to reinvent the wheel.

Coach I explained that how your players perceive you in stressful times is crucial to success – “I try to be as positive when I win 4 or lose 4 so players have confidence and knowledge that the leader remains calm and is not finding a quick fix but a solution to our issues.” Coach I also spoke of the importance as a coach to properly model his actions in relation to how the players, management, media, and fans see him. Coach I also spoke to creating stability in the environment that can come through the confidence a coach displays. Coach B asserted that one must “try to find a solution and never let frustration or fear come to the surface – stick to what you believe in.”
Coach B also discussed the ability to fall back on your team identity and that this identity must be supported by the people above and below you. Furthermore, Coach A elaborated on the importance of modeling:

A coach is a massive role model- Coaches help to define young people during sport and eyes are on you. If you snap or become out of control...so will they. If you are calm and professional...they will follow. If you are on time and organized, so should they. If a coach instills confidence and believes in players ... they will over achieve.

Based on the comments of the coaches interviewed, authentic modeling is defined as leading by example and in a way that is true to one’s values (i.e., authentic).

**Control.** Kobasa et al. (1982) described the control disposition as an expression of “the tendency to feel and act as if one is influential (rather than helpless) in the face of the varied contingencies of life” (p. 169). Individuals high in the control disposition feel that they can, through their personal knowledge, skills, and creativities, transform events into those that fit with their life’s plan. Consequently, potentially stressful events are not perceived as overwhelming as the perception of these experiences is mitigated by a personal sense of influence. The control disposition does not refer to one’s actual ability to control a situation, but their sense of internal power over their abilities to influence the situation. In their ability to focus on aspects the coach can influence in stressful situations, the coaches surveyed discussed communication as one of the most important tools to cope with the stressors associated with their profession. Some coaches discussed other key control factors were positivity and emotional control and building the team through creating accountability.

**Communication.** Approximately half of the coaches interviewed asserted that communication is the leading tool to counter stressors. Coach E commented, “you have
to always be in communication with your players and have the pulse of the room and each individual.” Furthermore, Coach F maintained “communication is the key. Bring the player or players into a comfortable setting and be a good listener. Part of being a great communicator is being a great listener.” Four other coaches also elaborated on communication as key to controlling the environment. Coach D and Coach I spoke about verbal and nonverbal communication as being critical. Coach C indicated that he meets weekly with players both individually and as a team, which he believes allows the players to know that he is invested in their wellbeing, which further helps with overcoming the stressors. Coach C responded that as a coach you must “communicate with all players to build trust and to mentor each to their fullest potential.” Furthermore, Coach A specified he believes in his approach to his profession in that “detailed scouting reports and constant communication with the players are helpful knowing that I’ve done my job as I will never cheat my effort.” Coach H spoke of the importance of honesty in their organization’s communication, as an example when a player is not playing to his potential, conversations would be direct and challenging:

You’re just not good enough last night” (we call it refocusing) – makes sense to player (they lost their dedication), prove to us you can play at that level. We can’t control anything but ice time, it is not a dictatorship anymore, we only have ice time to control.

Coach A discussed the utmost importance of communication by viewing other organizations that he has knowledge of:

Cooperation between a coach and Manager is key as this is the top of the organization. Barry Trotz and David Poile of the Nashville Predators have worked together since the beginning of the team started. They have great respect and working relationship with each other. This is great stability for any team. I’m sure Joe Torre and George Steinbrenner may have, on the surface, looked like an odd couple but certainly worked together for a few championships with
the Yankees. Open communication is vital in any cooperative management setting.

Based on the coaches’ comments, the communication subtheme is defined as a key skill that involves the daily verbal and nonverbal, honest and sometimes difficult, respectful interactions with all stakeholders.

**Positivity and emotional control.** Closely related to communication is the content and style in which the message is given. The coaching sample discussed being positive in the face of stress and adversity as having the ability to show the way through tough times. Coach A detailed that overreacting to setbacks will only hinder the process of moving forward – “with calm concise direction and reverting back to your team identity will certainly ease the tensions of rough waters.” Similarly, Coach C indicated that he reminds himself “to take a deep breath and think before I react or speak.” Coach G emphasized that at times it is important to “breathe - do not act on emotion, find a solution and execute.” Coach H discussed that in stressful situations you have to keep your emotions in check and that as a coaching staff you have to keep each other in check. Coach A also elaborated on the delivery of your message when communicating with teams going through a losing streak and how you must find the right approach:

On losing streaks you must show patience and remain calm and HELP the players not be counterproductive. Be creative and change the angle of your message or find a new way of endorsing your message.

Coach B and Coach D were very direct in their answers stating that you have to face the stressors head on and not to use the stress as excuses to poor performance. Coach B stressed the importance of positivity and consistency in their emotions and that
these concepts “keep the environment stable.” Coach I explained his process of controlling stressors in how he did not let emotions enter his thought process:

Just focusing about the outcome. During my two years in [city] I worked with the most mismanaged team I have ever witnessed in my life. I kept my cool by focusing on the bigger picture and kept telling myself that as long as we were getting results, none of the trivialities would matter in a year. It made me emotionally ready for everything. I controlled my emotions over there, sometimes had enough but finish my 2 year stint and learned that control is key to success on and off ice. There will always be problems I must learn to adapt and deal with it.

Part of this emotional control and positivity can be found in life/work balance.

Coach A was the only coach to discuss his life outside of the game as a key counter to the stressors associated with coaching and that these always seem to be controllable. He discussed that exercise and engaging with his family acted as great distractions from the day-to-day pressure. Coach A articulated that a healthy lifestyle has also helped him as opposed to resorting to alcohol to release tension. Coach A also was the only one that indicated he does not read the newspapers or watch his own interviews as he feels he is hard enough on himself and does not need to add to it.

Based on the research participants’ comments, positivity and emotional control is defined as the ability to deliver messages in a calm and positive manner.

**Building accountability.** Another subtheme coaches discussed focused on using the content of the communication to build the team through accountability. More specifically, Coach A discussed the importance of selling the team culture as players are always looking for what is in it for them when he stated:

The challenge for any coach and the best ones are able to reason and communicate in such a way that players want to get better. I believe that today’s player must be communicated with and stroked from time to time.
Coach G’s philosophy was to the point claiming that coaches need a “balance of high expectations and coach each individual to excel in a team environment.” Coach E and G spoke about establishing standards and beliefs as being crucial to the environment and that you have to hold staff, players, and yourself accountable to these standards. In order to aid in controlling the environment the players must be part of the process, “you must allow them ownership of the environment so they believe it is their own.” Coach A emphasized that structure and consistent messages enable control over the environment and that when players see that you are detailed and organized they will be the same – control is creating accountability. Coach F affirmed you must “buckle down and go to work to find answers” which is a key ingredient of accountability. Consequently, the subtheme of building accountability is defined as identifying and creating ownership among players of individual and team strengths and weaknesses.

**Challenges.** Kobasa et al. (1982) described the *challenge* disposition as being “expressed as the belief that change rather than stability is normal in life and that the anticipation of changes are interesting incentives to growth rather than threats to security” (p. 170). Consequently, individuals demonstrating the challenge disposition will feel stimulated and excited (rather than threatened) by the adjustments necessary when facing new situations. They will view these situations as opportunities to transform themselves, learn, and grow as a person rather than trying to maintain and protect their current self. Every coach discussed the fact that he continually learns and that to be successful in this profession you have to learn from every experience. You must reflect on lessons (learning) and have some flexibility in overcoming stress.
Learning. Reflection was one of the most important tools as it related to the challenges associated with the coaching profession. Coach C highlighted,

I learn how to better deal with all those situations better the next time. The outcomes through these experiences determine if you handled the situation correctly. I always take inventory of the outcomes so I know how I can better handle similar situations in the future.

Coach I also had a similar point when he stated,

I have learned that I can’t control everything. There is no playbook for every challenge that this position brings me. Each situation is unique and I make the decision that is best based on the information I have at that time always considering the team implications of my decisions.

Coach D highlighted “the fact that I have lost in important games, as well as won, provides the tools to establish a culture of excellence now.” Coach D further elaborated, “as a coach you must have the ability to look back and see what was successful and what failed in specific situations.” Coach G indicated that it is important as a coach that you learn these life lessons because you can apply how you handle challenges in the game to all aspects of your life (e.g., family). Coach D specified that he learns something new every day however also has become very aware that at the level of competition he coaches at, player behaviours can be a byproduct of many things not just directly related to you as the coach. Coach E identified that he has learned to be more patient and to think things through before reacting. Coach F looks to other coaches in other sports and how they handle themselves on the bench, with players, staff, and media. Coach B detailed that he has learned to be humble, open to criticism, and most importantly “keep moving forward, no matter what the speed, just keep moving ahead.” Coach E discussed a process as it relates to handling stressors. Taking the proper time to reflect, analyze what has taken place, come up with a plan, and move forward. In addition, it is
imperative to listen and maintain focus on what you want to achieve. Coach A provided a quote that seems to sum up the learning subtheme:

“There is no finish line” - This is a term I heard many years ago by Wayne Gretzky. At 38 years of age he was interviewed and he stated that he was still learning the game and there is no finish line, because if you think there is then you’ll never keep learning. If Wayne Gretzky can still learn the game, I think everyone can continue to learn.

Based on the coaches interviewed, learning can be defined as engaging in a reflective process of the challenges previously faced and changing based on those experiences.

Flexibility. Coach H was the only individual who discussed that in today’s game to be successful, as it relates to challenges a coach has to be flexible. “You have to be open minded, more than we have ever had to be. The game is changing, every time we go to work there is something new.” Coach H also discussed that in order to limit the challenges with players you have to share responsibility in the decision making with your group. For example, the player leadership group helps sets curfews (this shows the players they are all in it together). Coach H spoke of flexibility, although his input on flexibility was in depth for a stand-alone subtheme, flexibility could be viewed as an outlier. Flexibility can be defined as being open to new approaches and ideas as it relates to stressors.

4.3 Summary of Results

Through an interpretivist thematic analysis of stress and the hardiness dispositions two main themes around stress were provided (uncontrollable and surrounding the game) and seven subthemes emerged from the hardiness dispositions. Theses subthemes included passion and authentic modeling as part of the commitment disposition. The
control disposition subthemes included communication, positivity/emotional control, and building accountability. Subthemes of the challenge disposition included learning and flexibility. The subthemes that emerged provided insight to the experiences professional coaches have gone through with stressors and their ability to cope with these aspects of their chosen career.
CHAPTER 5: Discussion

The goal of this study was to bring forth a qualitative assessment on the experiences of professional ice hockey coaches of how they deal with the stressors they experience associated with their profession. Hardiness was used as the conceptual framework to view how the participants dealt with these stressors to sustain participation in their career. Throughout the literature review, stress was defined and more specifically previous research associated with stress in coaching was discussed. The theoretical framework of hardiness was then established and narrowed down to investigate hardiness in sports. Finally, hardiness was linked to coaching experiences to present the purpose of this study. Through this research, stressors were identified in coaching and with examination of the experiences the coaches shared about the ways in which they cope with these stressors, themes were subsequently deductively developed revolving around the hardiness dispositions. Through the qualitative process, the researcher was able to describe how the three C’s of hardiness (commitment, control, and challenge) can be used to explain methods of coping with coaching stressors. The results are discussed below in view of their theoretical, practical, and research implications.

Theoretically, the subthemes presented in this research represent an example of how coaches view their profession. Coping with stressors is definitely a part of it. It was clear that the coaches who participated in this study had experienced some type of stressor. This is in line with previous research in coaching, although the results of this study did not delve as deeply into the experiences coaches’ perceive as stressful. Frey’s (2007) research found stressors in communication, recruitment, and playing personnel. More importantly, Thelwell et al. (2008), Levy et al. (2009), and Olusoga et al. (2009)
found a wide range of stressors associated with the profession of coaching. Some stressors associated with this position may be uncontrollable such as media, injuries, and fan support (or lack thereof). Some stressors that may be associated as controllable for the coach include playing personnel decisions, tactical strategies, and holding staff/players accountable.

It was the primary intent of this thesis to use the conceptual model of hardiness to describe the coping strategies of experienced, professional coaches. Because of the methods used, it is not possible to say if the coaches that were surveyed are hardy. What is possible, based on the combined responses from all coaches surveyed, is to present a picture of what coping strategies a coach could use to be considered hardy. Borrowing from the format Kobasa (1979) presented to describe her findings of the hardy executive, let’s imagine the potentially stressful situation of a professional coach who is in the midst of an 11-game losing streak. Although only two coaches spoke directly to losing as a stressor, the other stressors identified (associated with the game and player) are presumably encompassed and enmeshed in a long losing streak.

In this example of an 11-game losing streak, hardiness theory would suggest a hardy coach continue to pursue the day-to-day operations with a clear sense of belief in their philosophy, goals, and capabilities (i.e., commitment). Based on the findings from this study, the hardy coach could deal with the stressors associated with this losing streak with passion and authentic modeling. The hardy coach could be seen treating every day as an opportunity to move the team in the right direction through the stressors associated with losing by remaining passionate about his chosen career and enjoying even the rough
times. This passion is manifested in authentic modeling. In other words, he leads by example in a way that is true to his values.

An 11-game losing streak brings to the forefront aspects that once seemed simple have now become more difficult, yet the hardy coach believes in his ability to remain influential in this environment (i.e., control). During this time, negative emotions are on the rise within all members of the team. Therefore, communication becomes more difficult to even engage in. However, the hardy coach maintains his ability to engage verbally and nonverbally, honestly, and respectfully. Players and staff are not as open as they are when wins are coming in handfuls. There is no sense in painting a pretty picture during an 11-game losing streak, many people would be filled with negativity, but the hardy coach gains perspective on the stressors and remains able to deliver messages in a calm and positive manner. A less hardy coach would look to place the blame on others and possibly tie their emotions to the outcome of losses. A hardy coach would evaluate, analyze, and react to the situation with positivity, keeping his emotions under control. He would, in an effort to build accountability, identify and create ownership among players of individual and team strengths and weaknesses, in an attempt to create an environment that is conducive to successfully dealing with the stressors.

The hardy coach would look forward to the challenges associated with the 11-game losing streak. He would engage in a learning process of reflecting on the challenges he has previously faced and changing based on those experiences. He is willing to be open to new approaches and ideas. The hardy coach would enlist the help of others that have gone through this type of stressor and throw himself into the task at hand using his resources as best he can. These resources include what he has learned in
the past and areas he can improve on in the current situation through the assistance of others. In general, the less hardy coach would probably ask himself “why me”, where the hardy coach may ask “why not me”.

A real example came to the forefront during the 2014 – 2015 season when the Edmonton Oilers were amidst an 11-game losing streak, Craig MacTavish (General Manager) spoke of coach Dallas Eakins and his authentic modeling in times of stress:

He's a good role model for our players. He's a passionate guy about the game and he's evolving as a coach. The way he deals with this situation, his resiliency as a coach, it's no easy feat in my mind to have the record that we have and still have the support of the whole group [of players] in there. (Van Diest, 2014)

In summary, by using the subthemes to view the hardiness dispositions identified through this research, commitment can be demonstrated through remaining passionate about one’s career and authentically modeling one’s values and beliefs. Control attributes are manifested through honest and respectful, verbal and nonverbal communication, positivity/emotional control, and through the building accountability among team members. Finally, because the challenge disposition involves accepting change as an incentive to improve, reflective learning and flexibility in this coping process are crucial.

Based on the hypothetical example just presented, practical implications revolving around coach development can be offered. As discussed by Olusoga et al. (2012) “opportunities for coaches to interact with each other and allowing them to learn from experience” (p. 237) is a great component to coach success and development. More importantly, they state, “experienced coaches must be willing to share their experiences and be open and honest about their own practices for other coaches to benefit” (p. 237).
This is why the interpretive thematic methodology was applicable for this research as it allowed these nine experienced, elite coaches to share those experiences through the framework of hardiness. There is definitely room for improvements in coach development. It is no longer just about X’s and O’s (i.e., the tactics of the game). The competitive environment requires a shared wealth of knowledge in areas outside of the technical and tactical aspect of the game and the aim of this research was that it would be used as a start to thinking “outside the box” as it relates to coach development models.

The research implications of this thesis project are founded in its limitations; these include the sample numbers, how coaches never developed more meaning in the uncontrollable stressors they associated with, and the fact that the hardiness definition was given in the questionnaire. It would be beneficial for future research to include larger samples from other sports and view possible coping mechanisms when the stressor is out of the individual’s control.

It could be argued that this research was one directional, meaning that the definition of hardiness was provided in the questionnaire, and consequently the thematic analysis was deductive. It was important for the research question that I did not try and discover if hardiness existed in professional coaching, but rather find great stories of coping experiences using the framework of hardiness. Hence the interpretivist thematic approach. This research was qualitative in nature and provided what it set out to do – explore the experiences of coaches and how they deal with the stressors associated with their profession. Future research could consider assessing the actual hardiness levels of coaches more quantitatively.
Continued work in this area is crucial to the development of coaches and how they deal with stressors associated with their profession. There is much to be learned about the psychological factors associated with coach development. An interesting area to explore would include the team environment and how the coach’s ability to cope with stressors establishes a culture for success or development with players. This research could be qualitative in nature in the form of a case study and the researcher being involved on a day-to-day basis. Avoiding stressors in the coaching profession is very improbable in today’s highly competitive environment therefore future research needs to involve how coaches can successfully cope with these stressors to sustain or achieve success no matter how it is defined (wins, championships, or player development).
CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, this research started because of my own experiences in the coaching profession. Angen (2000) expressed that the researcher of interpretivist research is a component of the process. Therefore his or her background is relevant to the entire procedures. My background was relevant to this research and has enabled a sense of patience as it relates to the coaching profession and the stressors involved. A portion of time in my career that this research took place had me in one of the most stressful situations I had encountered in my professional career.

This research set out to provide experiences of professional coaches coping with the stressors associated with their profession and through a qualitative, interpretivist, thematic approach key coping experiences through the conceptual framework of hardiness were discovered. Going through the process of this research and identifying other professional experiences I can honestly say it has shaped my coping ability and ultimately my professional development. Consequently my ability to engage with athletes for their development has increased as well. My background assisted this research and the results I hope, help other coaches identify with the experiences that were discussed.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Hardiness and Coaching Email Questionnaire

Before you begin, please indicate that you have read and understand the attached information form and give your consent to let the information that you are providing be used in the above named research project.

_____ Yes, I consent to be involved in this research project.

Can you list the following details of your coaching career?

   Age:

   Years Coaching:

   Professional Playing Experience: Yes/No (Circle One)

   How many championships have you won as part of a coaching staff:

   Expected Outcome of Question Asked: Demographics of coaches participating in this research.

Can you describe your coaching philosophy? Or what is your philosophy in building championship caliber teams?

   Expected Outcome of Question Asked: Establishing the philosophies of the coaches participating in the research.

What experiences come to mind that have shaped your current coaching philosophy in competing for championships?

   Expected Outcome of Question Asked: Establishing “the map” of how you got to your philosophy.

The main objective of this research is to see how you, as the coach of your team, personally deal with adversity and situations that you may perceive as stressful during your coaching career. While you may do many things to assist and teach the athletes on your team, we are interested in how you react to these situations.
Please identify some of the situations that you may perceive as stressful for you as a coach:

What do you do to control the emotions that these situations may evoke in you?

Can you define stress or adversity as a coach and give an example of how you personally deal with this type of situation?

*Expected Outcome of Question Asked: Establish the stressors that arise for coaches during their tenure or a season.*

**Defining Hardiness:**

*Hardiness has been used to describe stress resistant individuals (Bartone, 1999; Bartone, & Snook, 2002; Maddi, 2006). Furthermore Maddi (2006) implicates that hardiness involves the three C’s – commitment, control and challenge and that hardiness can be seen through the courage “to remain involved with the events and people around you, no matter how stressful things become.” Lastly Maddi, Khoshaba, Persico, Lu, Harvey, & Bleecker, (2002) state commitment is an attitude in which people initiate instead of reacting, the control attitude involves people influencing what is going on around them through effort and the challenge attitude involves people continuously growing in wisdom and learning from negative and positive experiences.*

For the next few questions, I want you to think about how you cope/persevere.

In thinking about adverse or pressure situations that arise with your team, individuals or off ice can you define the following terms as they relate to you in coping with adverse situations?
How do you remain committed? - 

How do you control your environment? – 

What lessons do you learn from the challenges (winning, losing, player behaviors, managers, off ice circumstances) involved with coaching? - 

*Expected Outcome of Question Asked: Individual coaches define the constructs of hardiness.*

Can you define your key aspects in adverse situations that would be directly related to hardiness?

Hardiness involves (commitment – initiating solutions as opposed to reacting to problems when adversity arises; control – your attitude that influences what is going on around you, furthermore how you steer the ship in rough tides; challenge – how do you react to setbacks? What are the key initiatives when you are challenged as a coach?)

*Expected Outcome of Question Asked: Individual definitions of the constructs of hardiness.*

Can you list an example of you exhibiting the following that may have influenced your environment and the players’ successful outcome?

Commitment- 

Control –
Challenge -

**Expected Outcome of Question Asked:** Realistic examples of hardiness applications.

Can you rate the commitment, control and challenges aspects of hardiness from 1 (most important) to 3 (least important) when dealing with adversity as an individual coach?

1. ________
2. ________
3. ________

**Expected Outcome of Question Asked:** Developing the importance of the hardiness attributes in stressful situations.
Appendix B

University of Regina Research Ethics Board Approval

DATE: October 16, 2012
TO: Kyle McDonald
    Apt. 335, 600 Squaw Creek Drive, Ames IA 50010 USA
FROM: Dr. Larena Hoeber
      Chair, Research Ethics Board
Re: Hardiness and Coaching (File # 1081213)

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

☐ 1. APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. For research lasting more than one year (Section 1F). ETHICAL APPROVAL MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS. Approval will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received. Any substantive changes in methodology or instrumentation must also be approved prior to their implementation.

☐ 2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB. **Do not submit a new application.** Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 3. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB. **Do not submit a new application.** Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 4. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. The proposal requires substantial additions or redesign. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.

Dr. Larena Hoeber

cc: Dr. Kim Dorsch – Kinesiology and Health Studies

**supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office for Research, Innovation and Partnership (Research and Innovation Centre, Room 109) or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca**

Phone: (306) 585-4775
Fax: (306) 585-6860
www.uregina.ca/research