Coaches’ use of and impressions of computer-mediated communication (CMC) media
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ABSTRACT
The purpose of the study was to examine coaches’ use of new computer-mediated communication (CMC) media (e.g. text messaging, email, instant messaging, social networks) in their interpersonal communication with their players. Coaches’ opinions and impressions of the effects of these new media on the coach-player relationship were also explored. The research was grounded in CMC theory, which has roots in traditional constructs of interpersonal communication (Walther & Parks, 2002). Data was collected by surveying Ontario-based male baseball coaches who coach players that are between 15 and 18 years old (n = 86). Predications were made regarding how age and coaching experience affected coaches’ CMC use and their opinions of CMC were collected. Results indicated that over two-thirds of respondents never use CMC media other than email and team websites when interacting with their players. Email is used frequently by over 83% of respondents; primarily to deliver impersonal communication such as schedule changes and game information/results. A primary finding of this research is that coaches’ usage rates contrast with both their perception of players’ use of the media and their opinion of the usefulness of the media. For example, 71% of coaches believed that players frequently use instant-messaging to interact with each other and 65% said that instant-messaging would be at least somewhat useful for coaches – but only 2% said that they frequently use this medium. Despite the increase of CMC use among players, coaches characterized most CMC media as limited, unnecessary, and sometimes inappropriate. Future research should investigate players’ use of and opinions of CMC in the coach-player relationship.

PURPOSE and HYPOTHESES
• Understand how and how often coaches use CMC
• Explore coaches’ opinions of CMC in the coach-player relationship
• Fill Literature Gap: No investigation of CMC use within the coach-player relationship

Hypothesis 1 – Coaches of coaches who use new CMC media in their interpersonal communication with their players, coaches characterized most CMC media as limited, unnecessary, and sometimes inappropriate. Future research should investigate players’ use of and opinions of CMC in the coach-player relationship.

Hypothesis 2 – Younger coaches use new CMC media more frequently than older coaches

Hypothesis 3 – Coaches with little coaching experience use new CMC media more frequently than coaches with more coaching experience

Hypothesis 4 – Younger coaches are more comfortable than older coaches when they use email and new communication media

Hypothesis 5 – Coaches use new CMC media only for impersonal interactions such as explaining schedule changes

Hypothesis 6 – Coaches are unaware of the potential dangers or problems that may result from using the new media

COACH - PLAYER RELATIONSHIP
Developing the characters of young people is an important yet sometimes overlooked responsibility for coaches. With the position of coach comes an immediate amount of influence on the lives of young athletes. Coaches cannot be ignorant of these athletes’ individual personalities, wants, and feelings.

The nature of the coach-player relationship is such that the coach has a measure of authority over the athlete. Since both the coach and athlete are interested in the same sport, it is likely that a friendly relationship would develop. However, it is often suggested that coaches and athletes should not become ‘friends’ because of the possibility for breaking or misusing the authority boundary – such as through intimacy, favoritism, exploitation, special treatment, or other moral violations (Bergmann Drewe, 2002; Indig, 2005; Thomas, 1987). Coaches must manage to become close with their athletes without crossing certain social and personal boundaries.

COMMUNICATION IN COACHING
In Martens’ (1997) coaching textbook, the process of communication between a coach and an athlete is illustrated by two giant heads talking to each other. Communication between an athlete and a coach consists of more than just this Face-to-Face (FF) contact. Now that communication in the coach-player relationship can take place through email, team websites, instant-messaging, social networks, and text-messaging, the classic theories of interpersonal communication are no longer sufficient to inform studies about the coach-player relationship. Instead, computer-mediated communication (CMC) theory, as developed by Walther and Parks (2002), is more appropriate. Since coaches are still able to use a number of communicative cues in their CMC interactions with their players, the most appropriate approach to studying CMC theory in this context is to assume that cues are filtered into the communication. The Cues Filtered In approach accounts for the transfer of the authority dynamic from FF interaction to CMC interaction, as well as the possibility that communication between two like personalities can become hyperpersonal – which means that thoughts or feelings not normally expressed in person would be more readily expressed via CMC.

METHODS
A survey was developed that asked coaches to quantitatively describe their usage rate of phone, email, instant-messaging, text-messaging, team websites, and social networks when they interacted with their players. Coaches were also asked to comment on their comfort with the media as well as each medium’s appropriateness. Questions in the survey also asked coaches to choose which medium they primarily used to deliver certain types of information. The survey was sent to 139 of the 182 male baseball coaches who coached 15-18 year-old players in Ontario in 2007. (76.4% of the population).

RESULTS
The survey was returned by 86 of the 139 possible respondents (61.9% return rate). Overall, 47.3% of the total population completed a useable survey, which exceeded Neuman’s (2003) 30% recommended response rate ratio for convenience sampling.

When communicating with your players how often do you use each of the following mediums? (n = 86)

COACHES WITH LITTLE COACHING EXPERIENCE USE NEW COMMUNICATION MEDIA MORE FREQUENTLY THAN COACHES WITH MORE COACHING EXPERIENCE

Hypothesis 2 was supported. There were 83.5% of coaches who chose that they periodically used email to communicate with players. This result is contrasted with 76.5% who said they never use text-messages, 81.3% who said they never use instant messages and 86.7% who said they never use social networks. The mean response for use of email was 3.73 with a standard deviation of .697. Combined, the mean response for the other four new media, where a ‘4’ would indicate no use of the media and a ‘1’6’ would indicate frequent use, was 5.84 with a standard deviation of 2.15. Hypothesis 2 was not supported. The Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) between age and the combined frequency of use of the five new media (including email) was -0.10 and was not statistically significant. Hypothesis 3 was not supported. The Pearson’s r between age and the combined comfort level with the media (a similar scale to frequency of use) was 0.11 and was not statistically significant. Hypothesis 4 was not supported. The Pearson’s r between age and the combined comfort level with the media was 0.33 with a standard deviation of 0.697. Combined, the mean response for the other four new media, where a ‘4’ would indicate no use of the media and a ‘1’6’ would indicate frequent use, was 5.84 with a standard deviation of 2.15. Hypothesis 2 was not supported. The Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) between age and the combined frequency of use of the five new media (including email) was -0.10 and was not statistically significant. Hypothesis 3 was not supported. The Pearson’s r between age and the combined comfort level with the media (a similar scale to frequency of use) was 0.11 and was not statistically significant. Hypothesis 4 was not supported. The Pearson’s r between age and the combined comfort level with the media was 0.33 with a standard deviation of 0.697. Combined, the mean response for the other four new media, where a ‘4’ would indicate no use of the media and a ‘1’6’ would indicate frequent use, was 5.84 with a standard deviation of 2.15. Hypothesis 2 was not supported. The Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) between age and the combined frequency of use of the five new media (including email) was -0.10 and was not statistically significant. Hypothesis 3 was not supported. The Pearson’s r between age and the combined comfort level with the media (a similar scale to frequency of use) was 0.11 and was not statistically significant. Hypothesis 4 was not supported. The Pearson’s r between age and the combined comfort level with the media was 0.33 with a standard deviation of 0.697. Combined, the mean response for the other four new media, where a ‘4’ would indicate no use of the media and a ‘1’6’ would indicate frequent use, was 5.84 with a standard deviation of 2.15.

DISCUSSION and IMPLICATIONS
This study determined that coaches realize new media may be useful and that they are frequently used (and preferred) by young people. Coaches also know there are dangers associated with using the media to interact with young people. However, using the new media may be the best way to understand players and to be better coaches/mentors. Similar issues have been raised in teacher-student relationship literature. Some teachers choose to use Facebook to communicate with students while some school boards have banned teacher-student text-message contact. Ethical guidelines for new media use are currently set by the individual - which can invite rebuke, criticism, and even jealousy between members of the same group. New media are revolutionizing how coaches and players communicate and coaching research cannot ignore these developing issues.

REFERENCES
Walther, J.B., & Parks, M.R. (2002) Cues filtered in approach accounts for the transfer of the authority dynamic from Face-to-Face interaction to CMC interaction, as well as the possibility that communication between two like personalities can become hyperpersonal – which means that thoughts or feelings not normally expressed in person would be more readily expressed via CMC.