AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF COACH AND PLAYERS' EMOTION REGULATION IN A FEMALE VOLLEYBALL TEAM

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ABSTRACT

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During the past few decades, the strategies followed by athletes in order to initiate, maintain, modify or display emotions before and during competition have received extensive attention in sport settings (Gross and Thompson, 2007). The coach's determinant role in the athlete's pursuit of optimal performance is yet another topic of scientific interest (Chelladurai, 2007). The aim of the present study was to explore the emotion regulation strategies that Greek female volleyball players tend to follow before and during competition as well as the coach's emotion awareness and contribution to the players' regulation of emotion. The study's sample consisted of ten Greek female volleyball players currently competing in the regional semi-professional championship of Western Greece and their coach. Data for both the players and the coach were collected using semi- structured interviews. Additional qualitative information was gathered through an observation protocol, which included the researcher's descriptive and reflective notes. The collected data were thematically analyzed (Boyatzis, 1998). Themes and codes were developed using the inductive and deductive approach and the participants' cues were compared to each other in search of similarities and differences between the players' followed emotion regulation strategies and the coach's awareness and interpersonal emotion regulation. The inductive and deductive analysis revealed eleven main themes for the players' perceptions and emotion regulation strategies and eight main themes for the coach's perceptions, emotion awareness and contribution to the players' regulation of emotion. The results revealed that the participant players perceived pleasant emotions as more functional for their performance and described under which circumstances unpleasant emotions like stress turned from functional to dysfunctional. The players' cues related to emotion regulation strategies supported the existing literature and disclosed self-talk, positive reappraisal, listening to music, putting into perspective, seeking others' help and emotion sharing as the most frequent followed strategies. Interestingly, the results showed a high consistency between the coach's and the players' statements when compared. The coach was presented as an emotionally intelligent person who developed stable relationships in the team, was able to adapt in challenging situations and to manage the players' emotions. The researcher's observation notes supported the interview results. The study supported the existing literature and shed more light on the ongoing scientific flow regarding the integration of the emotion regulation (ER) and emotional intelligence (EI) traditions.

Keywords: Coach-athlete relationship, emotion regulation, emotional intelligence, interpersonal emotion regulation, volleyball

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Volleyball in Greece

In 1895, a YMCA physical education director called William G. Morgan created volleyball in the state of Massachusetts (USA). Morgan tried to develop a new game that could be played indoors but it would be less rough and dangerous than basketball or handball for the athletes. He named the new game Mintonette whereas Alfred Halstead changed the game's name into volleyball after a couple of years. Quickly, the new game became popular and during World War I reached Europe. In Greece, volleyball arrived in 1922 and two years later, the first volleyball championship took place. Although being a popular sport, volleyball was not well organized until 1970 when the Hellenic Volleyball Federation was established. After that, new volleyball courts were constructed; a new volleyball coach school started operating whereas more and more young athletes chose volleyball as their main sport (http://www.volleyball.gr/news/istoria).

As in most European countries, football is the most popular sport in Greece (https://www.huffingtonpost.gr) and during the last years, volleyball has not received much of attention. Luckily, the Hellenic Ministry of Sports is currently being re- organized and under the scope of the "Sports for all" program is trying to cultivate and promote sports like volleyball in order to develop professional sports and enhance young athletes' physical and social health (http://gga.gov.gr/gga/skopos-ths-ypiresias).

According to the Hellenic Volleyball Federation's principles, Greece is in need of a modern, holistic sports model in order to improve the current situation and correct past mistakes that have been made. In order to achieve that, people who are involved in volleyball need to consider the young athletes' needs and provide volleyball clubs with coaches that have both theoretical and practical knowledge concerning practice and competition. The Greek sports society needs to promote volleyball among young athletes-especially girls who seem to give up sports in an early stage- and focus on their mental skills improvement too. Moreover, educated and skillful coaches are needed, even in the

semi- professional or amateur level in order to provide young athletes with useful knowledge and high quality training.

The present study's main ideas for exploring the coach and players' emotion regulation in female volleyball as well as examining the coach- athlete relationship in semi- professional volleyball team was based on two factors. The researcher decided to combine her personal experiences in the Greek semi-professional volleyball league, as a former player, alongside with the need of the Greek volleyball world for practical reformation based on scientific knowledge.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sports and emotion

The meaning of the term emotion has evolved through the years. The study of emotions began in ancient Greece when Aristotle stated his general theory on emotions and developed it through the years in his major works (Yazici, 2015). According to Aristotle, the human emotion- referred as "pathos" («πάθος») – has four different bases. The metaphysical aspect concerns the conceptual meaning of "pathos" which is not close to what is called emotion today, but it is more relevant with notions such as "affection", "experience" or "alteration". In a psychological base, the human emotion derives from the not- limited human soul and as stated in Aristotle's work, "the soul is the principle of animal life, whose knowledge contributes to the advance of truth in general and our understanding of nature" (Yazici, 2015, p.902). In simple words, it is implied that emotions are complex phenomena, but the theory includes several complementary parts in order to describe their nature. For the ancient Greek philosopher, emotions also involve some kind of bodily sensations such as increased heartbeats and the feeling of "boiling blood" and concerning the mental states, emotions can cause either pleasure or pain (Yazici, 2015). Finally, in a cognitive base, emotions change when beliefs change and that can also cause the change in judgment and a different final action.

The development of the term continued and during the following years, the word "passion" was broadly used, but it was back in 1579 when the term "emotion" was introduced in the academic field and adapted by theorists. Soon enough, emotions gained research attention. The real concept of the term is still vague and according to Marc V. Jones, "defining emotions is a difficult task given the range and complexity of different states it must describe" (Murphy, 2012, p.155). An accurate definition is not available among researchers but there is a general agreement in the perception that "an emotion is a cognitively appraised response to an event, either conscious or unconscious" (Murphy, 2012, p.155).

One different but also important definition belongs to Lazarus (2000) as he tries to describe emotion as phenomenon. As stated in his research, "an emotion is an organized psychophysiological reaction to ongoing relationships with the environment, most often, but not always, interpersonal or social. This reaction consists of responses from three levels of analysis- namely introspective reports of subjective experience (often referred to as affect), overt actions or impulses to act and physiological changes that make the emotions organismic" (Lazarus, 2000, p.230).

The multi- dimensional and subjective nature of emotions makes it easier to understand why it has been a favorite topic of research and why more and more studies in the field of sport sciences focus on them. Emotions influence athletes' goals and motivations (Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall, & Zhang, 2007; Gross & Feldman Barrett, 2011; Lench, Flores, & Bench, 2011). In the sports world emotions are subjective feelings experienced in response to events either in the athlete's environment, for example walking onto the field of play or in the athlete's mind such as anticipation of an upcoming event (Lazarus, 2000). In addition to this definition, Hanin attempts a classification of emotions and provides us with four categories of emotion. The categories include, a) emotions resulting from harms, losses and threats including anger, anxiety, fear, guilt, shame, sadness, envy, jealousy and disgust; b) emotions resulting from benefits including happiness, joy, pride, gratitude and love; c) borderline cases such as hope, contentment, relief, compassion and aesthetic emotions; and d) nonemotions which should not be regarded as discrete emotions such as depression, nervousness and curiosity (Hanin, 2000).

Traditionally, athletes report that they experience both pleasant and unpleasant emotions before, during and after competition such as anxiety, nervousness, anger or excitement (Hanin, 2000; Uphill, Lane, & Jones, 2012), enjoyment, sadness, guilt, and self-hostility (Cerin, 2003). Moreover, studies have shown that experienced emotions can harm, enhance or maintain the performance of the athletes (Hanin, 2010; Lane, Beedie, Devonport, & Stanley, 2011; Robazza, Pellizzari, & Hanin, 2004). The way emotions affect the performance differs from one athlete to another. Emotions whether they are classified as pleasant or unpleasant are not equally perceived as functional or dysfunctional for all people. On the one hand, experienced emotions can be functional for the athlete, for

example, the emotions of anger and fear (unpleasant emotional experiences) can motivate the athlete to stand up and deal with an intimidating opponent in order to win (the fight or flight response). On the other hand, emotions can be dysfunctional, for example, an athlete might be angry about an official's decision, and react aggressively in a way that results in a penalty.

In the past, most studies focused on stress and anxiety, which according to the researchers, have a major influence on the performance outcome (Ruiz, Raglin & Hanin, 2017). There were two separate blooming literatures, one centered in stress and coping and the other on emotion (Lazarus, 2000). Traditionally, stress and anxiety were faced as negative emotions that cause harm on the athletic performance. Not surprisingly, anxiety and performance research based on these approaches often yielded inconclusive or contradictory results or required extensive modifications of the original conceptual frameworks that underlay these theories (Ruiz et al. 2017). Even the carefully validated, existing inventories were characterized as non-sufficient from sport psychology experts, because they didn't pay enough attention to the individual differences and that led to an new era in sport sciences. It has not been a long time since field experts started to consider the importance of other emotional experiences among athletes besides stress and anxiety (Hanin, 2000; Lazarus 2000). Emotions include not only different aspects of stress but they can also indicate the psychological basis of stress. The common and most important point of these theories though, is the fact, that discrete emotions play a major role and affect the athletic performance and this is the reason why researchers started to focus more on athletes' emotions in order to predict their success in performance.

There are a lot of approaches and theories that have been proposed in the scientific field to explain how emotions arise in sport settings. These include, a) Attribution Based Approaches (Vallerand, 1987; Weiner, 1986) which describe the importance of performance evaluation as an antecedent of emotion, b) the Reversal Theory (Apter, 1989; Kerr 1997) which focuses on the meta-motivational frames of mind that a person experiences and create emotions and c) the Cognitive-Motivational Relational Theory (CMRT: Lazarus, 1991, 2000a) which states that emotions occur when the person appraises meet with the environment as having either a positive or negative significance for well-

being (relational meaning) in terms of the person's individual goals. The most specific to sports and useful approach for this present study is the Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning Model (IZOF: Hanin, 2000a). The IZOF model has been developed on the subjective emotional experiences of athletes and teams and emphasizes on the effects of both pleasant and unpleasant emotions on an individual's best and poor performance patterns (Hanin, 2000).

The athletes' subjective emotional experiences related to their successful and unsuccessful performances are one of the key area of research and application in the practice of sport psychology (Ruiz & Hanin, 2004). The IZOF model is concerned to be a useful tool for athletes in order to become aware of their emotions and to express their pleasant and unpleasant emotional experiences related to their best and worst performances (Hanin 2000). On the one hand, the IZOF model differentiates between emotional states, relatively stable emotional patterns (repeated experiences) and meta-experiences (i.e., knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about recalled, actual or anticipated experiences). On the other hand, the model supports the idea of the conceptualization of emotion as a component of performance related states (Ruiz & Hanin, 2004). Performance related states include five interrelated dimensions namely; form, content, and intensity that describe the structure of athletes' subjective experiences and time and context that indicate the dynamics of these experiences (Ruiz & Hanin, 2004).

In terms of form, the way in which emotional experiences are demonstrated, the psychobiosocial states proposed be the IZOF model include eight modalities i.e. cognitive, affective, motivational and volitional (psychological); bodily-somatic and motor-behavioral (psycho- physiological) and operational and communicative (social) states (Ekkekakis & Hanin, 2014). Regarding the "affective" modality, the model associates global affect and discrete emotion approaches and conceptualizes it within the framework of four categories from hedonic tone and functionality distinctions (Ruiz, Hanin & Robazza, 2016). These categories are pleasant and functional emotions (P+), unpleasant and functional emotions (N+), pleasant and dysfunctional emotions (P-) and unpleasant and dysfunctional emotions (N-). The cognitive modality is related to attention mechanisms whereas the motivational and volitional modalities involve purposes, goals, desires, drives, motivations and

commitments. The bodily-somatic modality encompasses the biological or psychophysiological signs of emotions while the motor-behavioral modality is related to the perception of motor coordination and movement characteristics. Lastly, the social component involves an individual's perception of the effectiveness of an action or task execution (operational modality) and the verbal or nonverbal aspects of interpersonal interactions among people involved in task execution (communicative modality) (Ruiz, Hanin & Robazza, 2016).

When comparing with other approaches the IZOF model conceptually excels them because its framework recognizes that emotion is a major component of the performance-related psychobiological state and conceptualizes emotion content within four global emotion categories derived from two factors: the hedonic tone and the predominant functional impact upon performance. Furthermore, the IZOF framework proposes empirically established criteria (zones) to evaluate individually optimal intensity of emotion and the in-out of the zone principle predicts either individually optimal or poor performance. What is more, the model considers the interactive effects functional and dysfunctional emotions and lastly, attempts to provide tentative functional explanations of emotion- performance relationship from the psychosocial and psychobiological perspectives (Hanin, 2000). In few words, this model covers a broad range of emotions and its basic principle is that there is an idiosyncratic relationship between emotional states and performance levels.

2.2 The regulation of emotion in sports

One other subject of great interest in the field of Sport Sciences concerns the regulation of emotion in athletes and the strategies that they use in order to achieve the best performance. Gross and Thompson (2007) define emotion regulation as the automatic or deliberate use of strategies to initiate, maintain, modify or display emotions and it is proposed to be a part of a self-regulatory process in which individuals consciously or non-consciously monitor the emotions they are experiencing, and develop strategies to maintain or change emotions to desirable levels. Athletes' goals and motivations can be influenced by emotions via three types of response: physiological, cognitive and behavioral in a positive (functional) or a

negative (dysfunctional) way. Athletes of all levels are more likely to try to experience an emotion if they believe that doing so will facilitate performance (up-regulation) (Hanin, 2003, 2010; Robazza, Pellizzari, & Hanin, 2004). On the other hand, athletes will try to hide or avoid an emotion if they believe that it can block or harm their performance (down-regulation). When sports people try to focus their attention to a task or suppress inappropriate behaviors, they use emotion regulation strategies to avoid any unwanted results and reduce the discrepancy between current and desired emotions.

The goal of emotion regulation might be hedonic, defined as seeking to increase supposedly pleasant emotions like happiness and excitement and reduce supposedly unpleasant ones like anger, anxiety and sadness (Russell, 1980). Alternatively, efforts to regulate emotion might be more instrumental in their focus, representing a process while individuals attempt to regulate their emotions to levels they believe will facilitate a successful result. Athletes try to regulate their emotions driven by the motivation to feel better or the motivation to achieve a desired goal (Lane et al, 2012). Explaining the instrumental approach to emotion regulation, Tamir (Tamir et al., 2008) states that preferences for emotions depend on the balance between their hedonic and instrumental benefits in a given context. When immediate benefits like immediate pleasure outweigh long-term benefits like delayed pleasure derived from successful goal pursuit, people should prefer pleasant emotions. When long-term benefits outweigh immediate ones, people should prefer useful emotions, and regulate their emotions accordingly. The balance between immediate and long-term benefits, in turn, depends on the goals people pursue and their beliefs on whether emotions help performance. Recent evidence indicate that individuals will tolerate, or seek to increase, unpleasant emotions in the short term if they are perceived as fulfilling the instrumental function of aiding task performance. For example, participants reported a greater preference for engaging in activities to generate anger rather than engaging in exciting or neutral tasks if they think they will subsequently be engaging in a confrontational task (Tamir et al., 2008).

Studies show that, emotions can affect and change the way people think, process information and behave. Consequently, in the sport field it is known that emotions experienced before and during sport competition influence the athlete's performance.

Therefore, emotion regulation appears to be an important psychological skill for athletes performing either individual or team sports. Studies reveal that athletes tend to use psychological skills like emotion regulation without having received any kind of formal training and most of these skills have an effect on their emotional state and performance whether they are perceived as emotion regulation or not. Sports performers develop emotion regulation strategies according to beliefs, which are associated with optimal performance. The emotion regulation strategies that are commonly used by athletes can be divided in two broad categories: the first category refers to conscious and automatic processes, which aim in the prevention of an emotional response, called antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategies. The second category includes the direct regulation of emotions, the response- focused emotion regulation strategies (Lane et al, 012).

Gross and Thompson (2007) proposed a detailed five-category model of antecedent- and response- focused emotion regulation strategies. Situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment and cognitive change belong in the antecedent-focused strategies and they mostly concern the person's appraisals that trigger emotions. Situation selection is about the process where the athlete actively chooses to place himself/herself in one situation rather than another. This can be achieved either by choosing to confront a situation in spite of the unpleasant emotions it might potentially elicit or by escaping of the situation as a whole, mostly when the situation is unlikely to bring any future benefits. Situation modification includes the athlete's attempts to modify any external aspects of the environment. This alternation of a situation's emotional impact can be achieved by taking on practical actions that directly modify the situation, by seeking others' assistance and by choosing conflict resolution and taking steps to defuse a challenging situation. Consequently, attentional deployment concerns the process whereby the athlete directs his or her attention in order to influence emotions. The athlete can change the way he or she feels in three ways: a) by using a shift in attention either from a situation or from the emotional aspects of the situation, b) by focusing on thoughts and feelings associating with unpleasant emotions, the so-called rumination and c) by paying attention to the present moment in a non-judgmental way. Cognitive change is about alternating the meaning of an event or situation. In other words, the athlete can change the way he or she thinks in order to change the way he or she feels in four ways: i) by trying to be more confident that he/she

is able to deal with the situation, ii) by weighing the gains and losses of an adverse situation, iii) by re-appraising a situation in a more positive way and iv) by accepting the situation or the incapacity to deal with it. The response-focused strategies are mostly about the direct regulation of the physiological and cognitive aspects of an emotion, commonly known as response modulation. Response modulation includes emotion sharing, verbal and/or physical aggression, substance use and expressive suppression like hiding the unwanted emotions (Peña -Sarrionandia, Mikolajczak, & Gross, 2015).

Overall, it is easy to understand that emotion regulation is a very important psychological skill for athletes and a preferred research topic. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that people who are involved in sports should use strategies that influence their appraisal of the situations to create the most appropriate emotional climate for competition. (Hanin, 2010). The regulation of emotion is more effective that the emotion suppression most of the times and according to the researchers in the sport sciences field, prevention is better than cure.

2.3 Interpersonal emotion regulation

Studies have shown that athletes and sports people in general follow over 400 different strategies in order to regulate their emotions. Emotion regulation is in fact a psychological skill of big importance and athletes tend to use it without having received a formal training. However, besides intrapersonal emotion regulation and the techniques athletes use to activate, control, alter and express their own experienced emotions, one other psychological skill that has gained scientific attention is interpersonal emotion regulation which refers to athletes' deliberate and non-deliberate verbal and nonverbal actions which influence others' emotions (Niven, Totterdell, & Holman, 2009).

Emotions have innate social roots and emotional episodes take place while people interact with each other. In accordance with Parkinson's research, the primary purpose of expressing emotion is to achieve indirect interpersonal effects and thereby mediate the social interaction between individuals. In sports context, athletes tend to share emotions in order to communicate the importance of their current situation or experience among teammates, coaches and the audience (Friesen et al, 2013). The social- functional aspect of

emotion has been studied in individual, dyadic, group and culture level by Keltner and Haidt (1999). Individuals are notified by aroused emotions about specific social events or conditions in which action is needed. In dyadic level, emotions are used in order to arrange and coordinate the social interactions between two people, as in the case of an athlete and the coach. In terms of a group, that shares common experiences like a sports team, emotions are used in order to determine the group boundaries and recognize the members within it (Friesen et al, 2013).

In more recent studies, Van Kleef's (2009, 2010) Emotions as Social Information (EASI) model, supports the social- functional approach of emotion and proposes that one person's verbal and non- verbal emotional expressions inform the observer who consequently affect some others person's behavior via two channels. The first channel of interpersonal emotion regulation is related to the observer's affective reactions, which include two types of responses: emotion contagion and interpersonal liking (Friesen et al, 2013). Emotion contagion, which has gained scientific attention in the sport psychology field, refers to situations when "a person or group influences the emotions or behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes' (Schoenewolf, 1990, p. 50). The concept of interpersonal liking revolves around the effect of pleasant emotions on boosting and the effect of unpleasant emotions on deteriorating the relationship quality (Friesen et al, 2013). The second channel, namely observer's inferences, is related to the observer's assumptions and assessments concerning one person's expressed emotions. In a sports context inferential processing has received been widely studied because as a process, it could take the form of feedback (e.g. between a coach and an athlete) and influence the other's emotions, behaviors and consequently their performance.

2.4 The coach's emotional intelligence

The coach's role in the athletic performance has become an important aspect in the research field of sports. In the case of professional sports, optimal performance and a successful athletic career do not concern only the athlete but also the whole "network" of people

around him/ her who work to achieve that. It is known from the existing literature that in most kinds of sports, both team and individual ones, the coach is the most important person in the athlete's life and the one's behavior can affect the other's performance (Kenow & Williams, 1992). In the pursuit of excellence, the coach's most intense and deepest involvement is at the practical stage, where he or she is responsible for helping the athlete focus on certain tasks and tries to teach the athlete how to control and regulate thoughts and emotions. The actual "job" of the coach is to plan and direct the practice correctly in order to lead the athlete to successful performances. By definition, the pursuit of excellence is about progressive improvements in physical, mental and emotional capabilities, which in turn lead to the desirable results. The athlete transforms from an amateur, pleasure-seeking "kid" to a dedicated professional and it is the coach who leads the focus person (the athlete) in this changing procedure by providing inspirational motivation, idealized influence and intellectual stimulation (Vallee & Bloom, 2005). Some essential coaching behaviors that facilitate the pursuit of excellence are the individualized and supportive leadership (B. Bass, 1985), the promotion of self- efficacy and self- esteem (Feltz & Lirgg, 200; B. Bass, 1985), the cultivation of self-interest (Avolio & Locke, 2002) and the emotional training.

Based on the theory of Salovey and Mayer (1990), emotion regulation is part of the emotional intelligence alongside with other two categories of adaptive abilities, the appraisal and expression of emotion and the utilization of emotions in problem solving (Schutte et al., 1998). In simple words, emotional intelligence involves one person's ability to recognize the meaning of emotions and their relationships as well as the ability to use emotions for cognitive activities. Emotional intelligence is a characteristic that includes a wide-range set of psychological skills and it is quite important for coaches since, high-performance coaching requires qualities beyond technical and tactical acumen (Chan & Mallet, 2011). As coaches lead and manage the coaching process, emotional intelligence may be useful for facilitating improved interpersonal relationships that may lead to improved interpersonal functioning and performance outcomes (Chan & Mallet, 2011). An emotionally intelligent coach is able to recognize the meaning of his or her players' emotions and their relationships and is able to use these emotions for cognitive activities such as problem solving. Apart from technical knowledge, the coach has to possess some crucial psychological skills in order to help the athletes regulate and control their emotions

so they can relax, avoid distractions and perform as well as possible (Hebert, 2014). A coach should be able to perceive the athletes' emotions and express his or her own ones, understand and use the emotions that athletes tend to experience and be able to manage the emotions in order to achieve the optimal performance. While studying the coach-athlete relationship and the coach's role in the athlete's life, one thing that needs to be considered is the interpersonal aspect of emotion regulation. However, in the existing literature, little information is given on the role of the coach in the athletes' regulation of emotion and the coach's awareness on the emotion regulation techniques that the athletes tend to use.

3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present study was to explore the coach and players' emotion regulation in female volleyball.

- Aim 1: to explore the emotion regulation strategies that Greek female volleyball players tend to use before and during their performances. Specifically, the study aimed to
    - o investigate a) the players' awareness concerning experienced pleasant and unpleasant emotions as well as b) the players' emotion perception concerning the functionality of their experienced emotions before and during performance
    - o study the type of relationship among the team players and between the players and the coach
- Aim 2: to examine a) the coach's awareness concerning his/ her players' emotion regulation used techniques before and during performance by comparing specific cues stated by the study's participants and b) the coach's contribution to the players' regulation of emotions.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Participants

The criteria for the inclusion in the study were a) that the team roster did not change a lot from the last season (three new players maximum), b) that the team coach did not change from the last season c) that the players had at least one year of experience in the semi-professional championship.

Ten Greek female volleyball players, members of a team competing in the regional semi-professional championship of Western Greece and their coach agreed to participate in the study. The club did not have a female team in the past. The participant players were between 15 and 20 years old (M =17.7) and they had a playing experience of 5 to 10 years (M = 6.6). Most of the players (except for one girl) have been members of the team for the last two years. All of them had more than one year of experience in the semi-professional championship. The coach has been a volleyball player himself for the last 20 years and has a coaching experience of 3 years (2 years in the studied team).

4.2 Instruments

For the completion of the study's main body a qualitative research method approach was used. Two semi-structured interview guides (one for the volleyball players and one for the coach) and an observation protocol were developed. All of the participants were native Greek and study was conducted in Greek and then translated in English by the researcher.

An interview guide was developed in order to explore the players' emotion awareness as well as the emotion regulation strategies that the volleyball players of the studied team tend to use before and during their performances (*see Appendix A*). The interview guide included ten basic questions and its semi-structure helped with the adjustment of the questions in each participant's responses and reactions. The players' interview guide consisted of three parts and it was based on the Five Category Model of antecedent-and-response- focused emotion regulation strategies by Gross and Thompson (2007) and the Cognitive Emotion

Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ-Short) by Garnefski and Kraaj (2006). The first part of the interview included questions related to demographics such as age, playing experience and position. The aim was to ease the start of the interview process by making the participants feeling more comfortable and collect some basic personal information. The second part contained general questions and explored the players' experienced pleasant and unpleasant emotions before and during their performances. Moreover, the researcher asked questions to get a better understanding regarding the players' perceptions about themselves, teammates and coach, how comfortable they are with expressing emotions to others and the relationships they have developed among the other members of the team. An example of a question was, "How would you describe your performance so far in the team compared to your teammates?" The third part of the interview included two sub- parts and explored the players' used emotion regulation strategies before and during performance as well as the coach's role in the players' regulation of emotion. The questions followed the conceptualization of Gross and Thompson's model (2007) and specifically examined the ways players react in certain situations, like difficult upcoming games and conflicts that might take place in the team or after making crucial mistakes during competitions. An example of a question was, "When facing a problematic situation, for example a conflict with your teammates or your coach, how do you react? Do you try to find practical and direct solutions on your own or seek for others' assistance?" In the second sub- part, the players were also requested to describe how the coach usually regulates their emotions before and during performance and how they perceive their relationship with the coach in general. For example, the participant players answered to the question, "How does your coach tries to regulate your emotions before a competition?"

The second interview guide was developed for the coach of the studied team and again consisted of three parts that included ten basic questions (*see Appendix B*). The interview questions were based on the Emotional Intelligence Theory (Chan & Mallet, 2011) and the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire- Short Form (TEIQue–SF; Petrides, 2009). During the first part of the interview, the coach had to answer demographic questions about his age, years of playing experience and years of coaching experience in order to get familiar with the interview process and provide some useful information about his experiences and coaching philosophy to the researcher. The second part of the interview

examined the coach's emotion awareness regarding the players' experienced emotions before and during performance. The questions assessed the coach's assertiveness, emotion perception and social awareness based on the conceptualization of TEIQue- SF (Petrides, 2009). For instance, the coach answered the question, "Before and during competition, how do you perceive your players' emotions? What kind of strategies do you follow?" The third part of the interview included questions about strategies that the coach uses to regulate the players' emotions and the way he handles certain situations like conflicts or crises. The seven basic questions assessed the coach's emotion expression, emotion management, stress management, adaptability and impulsiveness (TEIQue-SF; Petrides, 2009). An example of a question was, "How would you handle a player who experiences a mental breakdown during game?"

At the beginning of the procedure, the questions for both interviews were designed in English according to the theories and questionnaires mentioned above. A pilot interview was conducted with two Sport and Exercise Psychology students (one native English speaker and one Greek speaker-highly competent in English) in order to test the question flow and whole meaning of the interview. The students' feedback and suggestions were taken under consideration and minor changes were made. After that, the Thesis supervisor, who kept up with the procedure checked and corrected the interview guides and the final questions were selected. The interview guides were then translated to Greek and one more pilot interview with the Greek Sport and Exercise Psychology student was done in order to check the translation validity. The collected data from the interviews were analyzed in Greek and the results were again translated in English by the researcher and checked for language and meaning mistakes by the same students as in the beginning.

The observation protocol was developed based on Creswell's theory (Creswell, 2007) during the researcher's scheduled visit to the team in January 2018. The researcher decided to observe the team as whole and each person individually (including the coach) before and during a friendly game. Before the game started, the researcher was present in the locker room observing and taking notes of the players' behaviors and reactions especially when the coach came in to have the pre-game talk with the team. During the game, the researcher sat on the bench next to the coach and observed the players' and coach's

performance behaviors. The researcher paid explicit attention to the players' and coach's reactions every time a mistake was made and took notes of them during the time-out periods. The observation protocol was completed after the game and it included the researcher's descriptive and reflective notes, opinions as well as some feedback that the team gave to the researcher.

4.3 Procedures

During the first stage of the study development, the researcher came in touch with three different semi-professional volleyball teams from two different parts of Greece. For the main study, the researcher and the coach exchanged a lot of emails and phone calls in order to decide jointly the way that the study would be conducted. After reaching an agreement, the researcher sent the information sheet and the consent forms to the players. The consent forms were signed by ten of the twelve players of the team and sent back to the researcher by the coach. Two of players of the team did not show interest about the study and decided not to participate in it. The first phase of the data collection took place in November 2017. At first, the players were interviewed individually through Skype in order to ease the interaction between the participants and the researcher (the participants felt more relaxed when they were able to see the researcher while talking about personal issues). Every interview lasted approximately 25-30 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the players. The coach's interview was the last one. It took around 40 minutes and it was also audio-recorded in order to provide the researcher with a complete set of data. The second phase of the data collection took part in January 2018 and included the observation part of the study. The researcher visited the city where the volleyball club was located and met the team in the volleyball court. The players were happy to give feedback to the researcher about the experience of participating in a study. Furthermore, the team coach organized a friendly game and the researcher had the chance to observe both the players and the coach performing during a volleyball match.

4.4 Data analysis

All eleven interviews (10 players+1 coach) were transcribed verbatim in Greek as Word documents and stored as electronic forms of data. The researcher followed the thematic analysis strategies in order to develop data driven themes and codes using the inductive approach as well as theory driven themes and codes using the deductive approach (Boyatzis, 1998). For the data analysis, the researcher used the Atlas.ti software for the development of the thematic codes. After the analysis was completed, themes, codes and quotes were translated back in English by the researcher and two other Sport and Exercise Psychology students confirmed the translation validity.

During the analysis, each of the players' interviews were analyzed separately. Firstly, the raw data of each script was read through and relevant text was marked throughout the script. The researcher developed a descriptive summary for each interview. Secondly, each interview was analyzed using Atlas.ti separately. On the one hand, the inductively developed themes were created based on the players' answers in more general questions that were included in the interview guide, such as questions about the players' perceptions regarding their relationships with their teammates and their coach. On the other hand, the deductively developed themes were created based on the players' answers that included context linked to theories and models of the existing literature. For example, one of the main themes that came up from the deductive analysis regarding the players' emotion regulation strategies before and during competition followed the Five Category Model pattern (Gross and Thompson 2007), and corroborated with the existing theory's main points. All ten players' interviews were compared to each other in the search of common themes. The third step of the procedure included the generation of the thematic code. Each theme was labeled and given a descriptive definition. Clear-cut indicators were used to reveal how the themes were coded alongside with notes describing the qualifications of exclusion from the code (differentiation) for each theme.

The coach's interview was thematically analyzed (Boyatzis, 1998) using the same software and the thematic code was developed based on the same procedure with the players' data. The coach's thematic code was compared to the one resulted from the players' interviews analysis so any similarities and differences would be found. The thematic analysis results

were also supported by the researcher's observation and they are thoroughly presented in the results section.

4.5 The role of the researcher

For the completion of the data collection, the researcher conducted a structured, non-participant observation. Following the non- participant observation guidelines, the researcher attended a friendly game, observed the studied team and took notes while keeping the appropriate distance between herself and the study's participants (Gray, 2014). The researcher observed the team as an outsider during the coach's pre-game talk in the locker room and throughout the game procedure (from warm-up to the coach's after-game talk). While being in the field the researcher kept descriptive notes regarding the coach and player's behaviors and actions according to the observation protocol, which was completed after the end of the game with the addition of the researchers' reflective notes.

Some ethical challenges related to the researcher's role in the observation procedure derived from the fact that the researcher had a common sport background with the participants as a volleyball player herself and shared the same language with players and coach of the studied team. As in any kind of sport, team or individual, volleyball has its own code language and "unwritten rules" during all phases of a game whether it is an official competition or a friendly game. Incidents that may occur in the court could be intriguing for someone who is not familiar with volleyball. In the present study, the researcher was already familiar with the game procedure and knew what the next step would be in each phase. Furthermore, the researcher was familiar with the terminology used in volleyball and had no difficulties in following the coach's instructions or the player's in game verbal and non- verbal (hand signals) conversations. Lastly, the researcher could be preoccupied of expecting some reactions in specific incidents because she was familiar with the "unwritten rules" of a volleyball game. For example, challenging the opponent (verbally or non- verbally) is not accepted in volleyball and if an incident like that takes place, the players are scolded by the referee. This is not something widely known, so another researcher would pay attention to an incident like a conflict between opponents

whereas the researcher already knew that the referee is the one who takes care of a possible conflict resolution.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Players' interviews and coding

The thematic analysis for the players' perceptions and emotion regulation strategies revealed eleven main themes namely: *players' experienced emotions, bodily reactions connected to unpleasant emotions, description of a social experience, players' emotion expression, players' emotion regulation, players' emotion regulation strategies, players' general perceptions, players' relationship with the coach, coach's emotion regulation strategies as perceived by the players, players' relationship with teammates and players' interpersonal emotion regulation (see Table 1).* Some themes resulted from the inductive analysis of the raw data and some other themes were deductively developed by using the theory-driven method.

Table 1: Players' Main and Sub themes

Main themes	Sub themes
Players' experienced emotions	-Pleasant functional emotions
	-Pleasant dysfunctional emotions
	-Unpleasant functional emotions
	-Unpleasant dysfunctional emotions
Bodily reactions connected to unpleasant emotions	
Description of a social experience	
Player's emotion expression	

Player's emotion regulation	-Up- regulation -Down- regulation
Players' emotion regulation strategies	-Situation selection -Situation modification -Attentional deployment -Cognitive change -Response modulation
Players' general perceptions	-Perceptions about self -Perceptions about teammates -Perceptions about self in relation to teammates -Perceptions about the coach
Players' relationship with the coach	
Coach's emotion regulation strategies as perceived by the players	
Players' relationship with teammates	
Player's interpersonal emotion regulation	

5.2 Players' theme description and cues

Players' experienced emotions

After answering to questions related to demographic information the players' were asked to talk about their experienced emotions before and during competition and how they perceive them. The first theme generated, "players' experienced emotions" was correlated to players' descriptions of the emotions they tend to experience before and during games and

it included four sub-themes. Based on the IZOF model's affective modality, "players' experienced emotions" categorized as pleasant functional emotions, pleasant dysfunctional emotions, unpleasant functional emotions and unpleasant dysfunctional emotions (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1: Players' experienced emotions- Frequency of sub themes

Percentage %

Category	Percentage
Pleasant Functional (P+)	46%
Pleasant Dysfunctional (P-)	4.30%
Unpleasant Functional (N+)	20%
Unpleasant Dysfunctional (N-)	30.40%
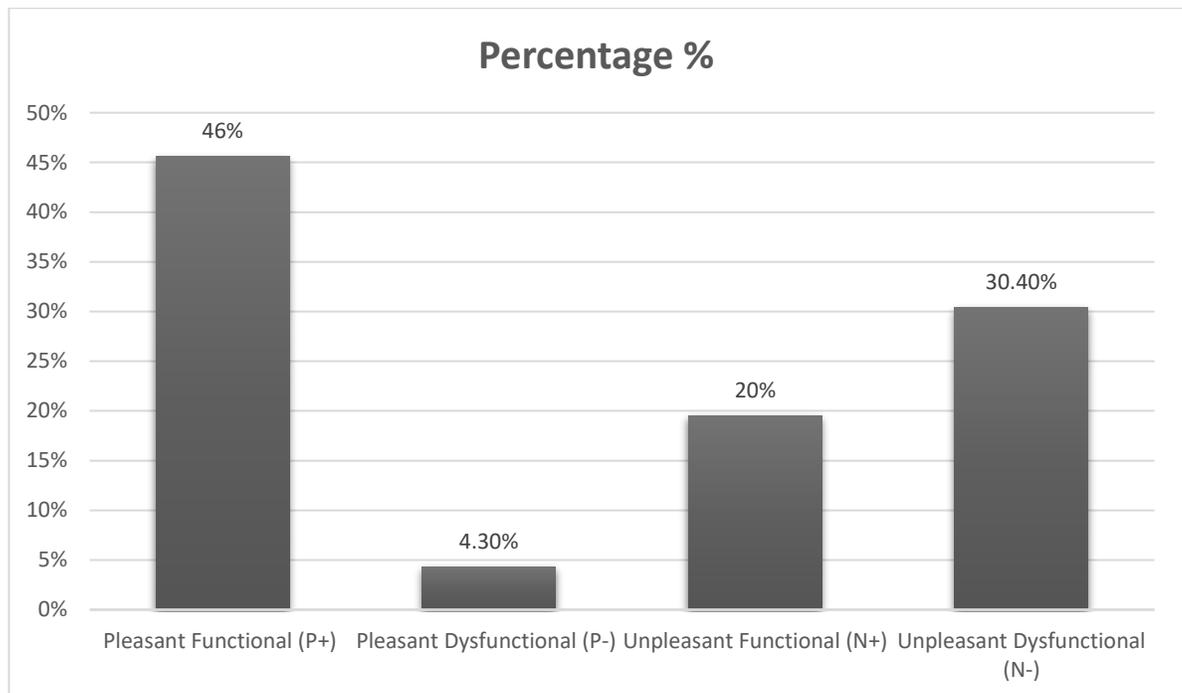
a) Players' experienced pleasant functional emotions

During the interview, all players were able to recall emotional experiences connected to their best performances so far in the championship and to describe at least one pleasant and functional emotion (P+). The most common pleasant functional emotions among the participants were "happiness", "calmness" or as some players described it "absence of stress" and satisfaction. For example, when Player 2 asked to recall her best performance, she stated, "*I was happy that day…*" Player 3 described her experience as followed: "*I played with no stress and no pressure and everything worked*" and Player 7 reported, "*I felt so satisfied… and it was this joy because I helped my team and we won.*" Some players had

difficulties with using specific words for emotions and tried to give a detailed account of the general essence of the experienced emotion like one player who stated, *"I felt that my efforts, the practice-all those times that I was tired but went to practice-actually paid off"* (Player 9).

b) Players' experienced pleasant dysfunctional emotions

In the case of pleasant and dysfunctional emotions (P-), the players faced some troubles with describing their recalled emotional experiences. However, two players discussed the fact that overexcitement and the feeling of overconfidence before and during a competition never worked for them. According to the players, underestimating the opponent is not good and as Player 9 pointed out, *"...neither being too excited helped me because I couldn't stay focused and the others took advantage of it."*

c) Players' experienced unpleasant functional emotions

The analysis of this theme generated some intriguing results concerning unpleasant emotions that enhance the players' performance (N+). The majority of the players communicated that they perceive unpleasant emotions such as pressure, stress and anger as more functional. Player 7 stated, *"Functional? Hmm…Stress! All players, professionals and amateurs, even coaches are stressed and I believe that stress can be functional in most cases and help us play well."* Player 5 described how pressure boosts her performance as, *"It helps me to feel a little pressure"* whereas Player 2 described one of her performances and noted, *"Then I got angrier and during the next set I played better."* The most interesting fact was that although the players claimed that they want to feel a little stressed or experience the so-called "bench-pressure" before and during games, stress is perceived as a functional emotion up to some point, like Player 10 who mentioned, *"Up to some point stress makes me perform better."*

d) Players' experienced unpleasant dysfunctional emotions

The last sub theme that was developed involved the players' descriptions regarding unpleasant emotion experiences that blocked their performance (N-). The majority of the players had some difficulties in expressing themselves but most of them described the point where stress turned from a functional to a dysfunctional emotion. For example, Player 4 stated that, "*I couldn't concentrate, I made a lot of mistakes and I was anxious for no reason.*" Players 9 and 10 were more specific about stress turning into a dysfunctional emotion by stating, *"Being too stressed didn't help me perform well"* (Player 9) "…*at that point I got more stressed and felt a lot of pressure, so I froze.*" (Player 10). Additionally, four out of ten players described the experienced disappointment before a game as a dysfunctional emotion, like Player 5 who described her worst performance so far like, *"I was so disappointed, that I couldn't be myself and give my 100% as usual."*

Bodily reactions connected to unpleasant emotions

The second theme was deductively generated since two of the players were not able to use specific words related to their unpleasant emotions, so when asked, they started describing their psycho-physiological state (bodily- somatic modality) and what happens to their body when experiencing stress or a lot of pressure before and during competition. For example, Player 1 and Player 10 expressed their emotions as followed, *"My whole body gets numb to the point I can't even run. I feel like I have no flexibility. I bite my nails. I need to go to the bathroom all the time."* (Player 1) *"My arms and legs are shaking and I can't move towards the ball."* (Player 10)

Description of a social experience

Another theme that emerged from deductive analysis was "description of a social experience". Four out of ten players preferred to use a situational example and describe their social state (communicative modality) when they were asked to describe their

experienced emotions before and during competition. For instance, Player 3 depicted two of her past social experiences as followed, "*I liked it because we worked well with the other girls, we made mistakes but we fixed them and it wasn't an easy game after all.*" She also used the coming quote for a different experience: *"It was a game that we didn't play well at all and I didn't perform well either. We couldn't work to get over mistakes. It was a game where I didn't show what I am capable of"*.

Emotion expression

The fourth theme came along after inductive analysis and revealed that before and after competition, most of the players have the ability to openly share their emotions with their teammates because they are all women, around the same age and with many common experiences. The players reported being comfortable with expressing their emotions as Player 4 and Player 7 characteristically noted, *"I am very comfortable with my teammates because we are all around the same age, so if I have a problem I share it with them."* (Player 4) *"If I am having a bad day during a game or a practice, I will express myself."* (Player 7)

Players' emotion regulation

During the third part of the interview, the players had to answer various questions related to the emotion regulation strategies that they and their coach tend to use before and during performance. In the beginning, the researcher informed the players regarding the concept of emotion regulation. Following this, the researcher asked a question about the players' "emotion regulation" in general and the fifth theme, including two sub-themes (up-regulation & down- regulation), was generated *(see Figure 2).*

Up- regulation

The researcher provided the players with some information regarding the concept of emotion regulation. When asked, almost all of the players reported at least one strategy they use in order to up-regulate themselves emotionally and experience an emotion that they think would facilitate their performance (34.6 % of coded quotes). Especially when it comes to pleasant emotions, they players stated that they try to show more enthusiastic or joyful because it helps them perform better and it intimidates their opponent too. For instance, Player 2 stated, *"If it's excitement, thrill and stuff like that, I express myself in general. Every time we win a point, I express myself with more passion."* (Player 2)

The researcher's observation notes and reflections in this case supported the thematic analysis results. During the friendly game that the researcher attended, the players of the team seemed more expressive every time they won a point and it seemed that they were trying to show their excitement not only to their teammates and coach but also mostly to the opponent team.

Down- regulation

On the contrary, players reported more strategies that they tend to use in order to hide or avoid experiencing an emotion that they believe it would block their performance (65.4 % of coded quotes). The majority of the players described unpleasant emotions. For example, Player 1 mentioned, *"Usually for my anxiety, I try to hi…well not hide it, because when I do it, it gets more intense, but I try to reduce it."* Following the same pattern, Player 4 stated, *"Some emotions, such as stress and fear, well I try not to show them because I think that they will affect my performance, so whenever I feel like that I try not to show it and get over it."* In addition, some players claimed avoiding feeling overexcited and preferred to cover those emotions in order to "keep their feet on the ground", like Player 3 who reported, *"I try not to get too excited. When you feel excited you cannot show it vividly because things change easily and you can crush in just one moment."*

Consequently, during the observation, the researcher noted that it was not easy to distinct which players were trying to hide or avoid experiencing dysfunctional emotions during the observed game. The players were calm, enthusiastic and showed support to each other. However, the researcher stated in the reflective notes section that a friendly game is always confronted differently than an official competition by a team.

Players' emotion regulation strategies

The next theme was developed deductively based on the five-category model of antecedent- and response- focused emotion regulation strategies by Gross and Thompson (2007). The "players' emotion regulation strategies" theme includes five sub themes namely, *situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change* and *response modulation* (*see figure 3*), which were formed, based on the players' answers and reactions to hypothetical scenarios.

Figure 3: Players' emotion regulation strategies- Frequency of sub themes
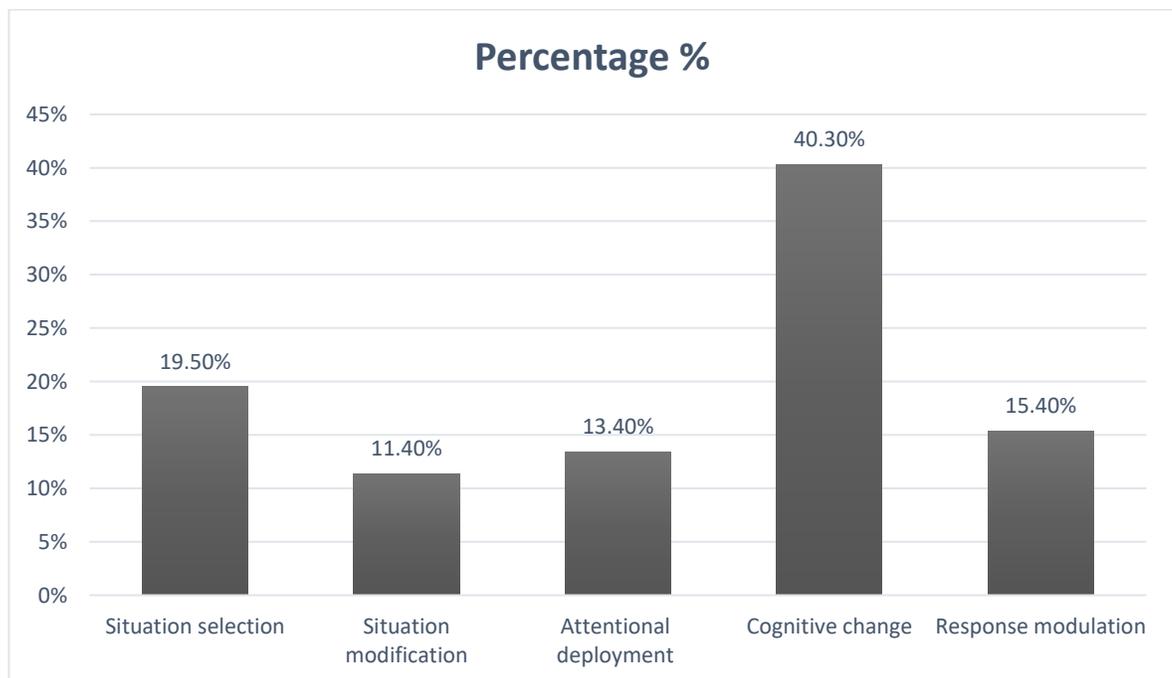
Situation selection

As it is shown on Figure 3, the "situation selection" strategy appeared in the players' answers quite frequently. Six out of ten players mentioned that they would actively choose to put themselves in a situation (a fight or challenge) rather avoiding it even if it would cause them unpleasant emotions. Specifically, Player 3 stated, *"If there is a fight during practice, I'll try to find a solution because leaving things unsolved can affect your performance."* Moreover, one other participant player noted,

> *"If something like that happens, at first, I try to understand what went wrong. If I am wrong, I will apologize and in general, I will try to have a talk and don't let things go on without solving any issues because I don't like fighting, I feel really bad."* (Player 4)

Furthermore, some of the players reported that they would try to avoid a stressful situation like Player 8 who answered the following: *"They can do whatever they want. I won't interfere."* when the researcher asked whether she would take part in an imaginary fight between two of her teammates. Likewise, four out of ten players explained that they would regulate their emotions in a different way depending on how serious they perceive the challenge. Player 2 pointed out, *"If it's something stupid I won't care that much."* In an imaginary serious conflict between her and the coach, Player 10 stated, "*If the situation was serious enough I would talk to him because I think that he would like to talk about it too. We are players and he is our coach, there is no point in having fights."* (Player 10)

Situation modification

The data analysis showed the "situation modification" was the least frequent used strategy among the players. However, almost all of the players (nine out of ten) stated that, in case of a misunderstanding or a fight they would attempt to seek help from others than facing the challenge on their own. On the one hand, if the challenging situation concerned the coach, the players would ask help from their teammates. On the other hand, most players claimed that they would ask the coach's help if they could not resolve any issues with their

teammates. Concerning a situation involving the coach, Player 8 and Player 9 pointedly stated, *"Maybe, if I have a problem with the coach, I might talk about it with the girls in order to hear their opinion because they know him for a longer time than I do."* (Player 8) *"If there was a problem with the coach, I think I would talk about it with my teammates."* (Player 9) whereas in a situation with the teammates, Player 5 and Player 9 noted, *"If I had a fight with a teammate of mine I would ask help from the coach."* (Player 5) and *"If it was about my teammates I would talk about it with my coach."* (Player 9)

Attentional deployment

The players were generally willing to share the emotion regulation strategies they follow before and during competition. The majority of the players were able to remember techniques they use to direct their attention in order to influence their emotions only before games. None of the players could recall a strategy followed during games and that was because all of the girls claimed being 100% focused on the "ball" while being in the court. Six players reported listening to music before performing and they mostly talked about choosing fast, rhythmic songs. Player 10 stated, *"I listen to music loudly so I can be more confident and forget how stressed I am. Yeah, before games I listen to music, something with a hard beat".* Other players described using imagery and trying to talk about irrelevant and funny things with their teammates in order to defuse tension. However, some players reported having difficulties to refocus and re- direct their attention, especially during games and after a lost point, like Player 2 who stated, *"Sometimes I focus on my emotions and it is like giving up."*

The researcher's descriptive observation notes supported the use of the attentional deployment strategy during the friendly game of January 2018. Most of the players who reported listening to music had their headphones on while being in the dressing room the whole time before the coach arrived. In addition, two of them were responsible for the music played in the court during the warm-up before the game started.

Cognitive change

The "cognitive change" emotion regulation strategy was the most frequently coded sub theme for the participant players. Each player described at least one strategy that she usually follows to change her mind in order to change the way she feels. Apart from one girl, the players reported using self-talk before and during games in order to change the way they think and the emotions they experience. The following quote is one of the most characteristic ones:

> *"That moment I try to get more resilient. I try not to think about it and tell myself: "if I let my stress to affect me, my teammates will be affected too and the game will not go on the way we want to".*" (Player 4)

Players 6 and 9 described usi of self- talk every time they make mistakes and need to "get back in the game" as, *"I think about it. I am in another world. But then I will say, "Now this is it, you have to focus"."* (Player 6) and *"I think that mistakes will be made, it's normal, so whenever I make a mistake I try to focus and tell myself "ok, move on, at least don't let the same mistake happen again".*" (Player 9)

The researcher managed to detect a three of the players, who stated using the self-talk technique, talking to themselves during the friendly game. The most characteristic example was one player who seemed to repeat a pre-performance routine cue ("corner") every time she served the ball.

One other common strategy declared among the players was the positive thinking especially when it was about crucial mistakes during competition. What was more interesting though was that players reported that they had started getting over mistakes and facing challenges in a more positive away during the past two seasons and after the new coach joined the team. Player 5 mentioned in her interview, *"Some time ago, it bothered me. It blocked me. During the last couple of years, I have solved this issue and I forget easily. Ok, everyone makes mistakes, let's move on."* The coming quotes exemplify the analysis findings more:

> *"In the past, I used to experience this defeatism. I used to get into the court and tell myself "it's ok, we will lose". Instead of forgetting the previous game phase and move on, I kept thinking my previous mistakes."* (Player 1)

> *"I was used to think about my mistakes during next phases in the game and then make more mistakes. Now, I do not think about it. I've started getting over my stress and I've started getting over my mistakes too".* (Player 10)

During the friendly game, positive thinking was indicated in verbal form. Between game phases and during time-outs the team members were trying to express verbally their positive reappraisals by claiming that the game is in their "hands" and they can win it.

Oppositely, there were some cases where players were not able to follow a certain strategy to affect their cognitive part of emotion and reported ruminating past mistakes. Some girls described situations where they were stuck in a moment, thought about it during their performance and accepted their incapacity to deal with it. Player 2 disclosed being sensitive to the her mistakes, *"Every time I don't do something right or in the way I want, I think that I might not be good for this kind of sport."* Player 9 reported the use of negative self- talk, *"Some other times I might be super negative and tell myself "it's not happening now, I cannot do it"."*

Response modulation

Following the semi-structure of the interview questions, the players had the opportunity to share their direct responses to experienced emotions before and during games. Most of the girls described past incidents when they felt emotionally charged and reported that those moments they were unable to suppress unpleasant emotions, like sadness, stress and anger, and expressed them in an intense way. Player 9 stated, *"I couldn't deal with it and I was jumping up and down, and shouted "sorry coach", I got really stressed"* whereas Player 10 described using her body to express herself, *"I hit my hands on the floor, or my feet or hit my hips with my hands. I do that when I am angry to something or stressed…"*

On the contrary, two players reported emotion suppression like Player 5, *"I think it is not visible. I don't react, I don't express"* and Player 6, *"I don't express myself in a certain way. I don't realize it. I don't show it."* who claimed that they prefer not to express their emotions because they do not want to affect the rest of the team.

During the observation and while the two opponents were warming up, the researcher noticed an incident of verbal aggression. One player from the opponent team spiked a ball and hit one of the observed team's player. Minor accidents like that are often in volleyball but traditionally the player who hits the ball apologizes to the other. In this case, the opponent did not apologize and one other player from the studied team started shouting to the opponent player that this was not right and asked for an apology.

Players' general perceptions

The players who participated in the study were also asked to express their perceptions and beliefs regarding their role in the team as long as their teammates' and coach's role. The seventh theme that was inductively generated after the analysis and coding procedure concerned the "players' general perceptions" and included four sub-themes namely, *perceptions about self, perceptions about teammates, perceptions about self in relation to teammates* and *perceptions about the coach.*

Perceptions about self

Throughout the interview, the players were encouraged to express their perceptions, opinions and beliefs about their behavior, performance and personal progress (13 coded themes). Most of the players reported a progress in their performances comparing to past game seasons. Regarding this season's progress Player 4 stated, *"I have made a progress comparing to past seasons."* One interesting pattern that aroused from the data was related to the perceptions of some players concerning what a "good" defender should do. Player 2 spoke her mind in the most characteristic way, *"If I do my "job" right, then the setter will be able to do it too. And the wing spiker and the opposite hitter and the middle blocker and the game will go on".*

Perceptions about teammates

The players were less comfortable with sharing their perceptions, opinions and beliefs about their teammates (11 coded themes). Overall, the players preferred to make general comments on their teammates' progress and some of them emphasized on what makes their teammates stand out from other players or not. Player 3 talked about her teammates in the following way, *"In general, all girls in the team are good, but there are some who are…not bad, it is just that some girls have certain talents, a different body type, they are taller*." In addition, Player 8 stated, *"There are also substitute players because we don't all have the same body type, some girls are different, maybe they don't have the right attitude or something."*

Perceptions about self in relation to teammates

The researcher asked from the players to describe what they believe or think about themselves while comparing to their teammates (16 coded themes). The emerged sub theme revealed that the majority of the players believe that everyone in the team is on the same level and that there is generally a common progress as the time goes by. For instance, Player 1 compared herself to her teammates and noted, *"So far we are doing well with the team and I see a common level, I believe we are all in the same level. A good level."* Following the same pattern Players 5 and 6 pointed out, *"I believe we are all getting better equally."* (Player 5) and *"I believe we are all in the same level."* (Player 6)

Perceptions about the coach

While trying to express their personal beliefs and opinions the players conveyed their perceptions about the coach's behavior, his role in the team and sometimes they made comments related to how the coach should behave under specific circumstances (18 coded themes). In general, the players were positive towards the coach's attitude like Player 2 typically stated, *"He doesn't care just to get done with practice and leave but he stays*

longer and cares about us". Actually, some of the players supported the coach's style and behavior in a very intense way and pointed out that when their coach is around his opinion is the only one that counts. For example, Player 8 stated, *"I believe that this man knows something more than me in order to do something like that. Who am I to judge?"*

Players' relationship with the coach

The eighth theme that was developed after analyzing the players' interviews consisted of general comments the girls of the team made regarding their relationships and everyday interactions with the team coach. The whole group of players described a good quality and close relationship with the coach. The girls disclosed being comfortable around the coach and that they appreciate his sense of humor although the younger ones revealed being a little intimidated by him, especially when he gets strict. Some characteristic examples belong to Player 1 who mentioned, *"We have a very good relationship with the coach. There is a lot of humor too. His jokes from time to time…"* Player 3, *"I am comfortable with the coach but I am more pulled back."* Player 4 who revealed a close relationship with the coach, *"It's the same with my coach, I am ok with telling him if something bothers me or if I do something wrong he will share it with me."*

Coach's emotion regulation strategies as perceived by the players

The coach's contribution to players' emotion regulation was examined both from the players' and the coach's perspective. During the third part of the interview, the players were asked to describe the strategies that the coach follows in order to regulate their emotions before and during performance. The girls had a lot to talk about and the consensus among their perceptions was intriguing. Based on the players' perceptions, the coach seemed to follow a common pattern before every game. In the beginning, he gathers all the players in the dressing room and gives general instructions. Depending on the opponent and each players' abilities, he tries to give instructions that are more specific. All players reported the coach's efforts to boost their confidence before performance and to make them

get over their mistakes faster during the games. According to the players' comments, the coach pays more attention to the procedure and the players' optimal performance and not care exclusively about a positive result. For instance, Player 4 described the coach's pre-game talk like, *"He reminds us of our abilities, he knows what we do wrong and he just helps us not to be stressed before a game and enter the competition by being sure and confident."* Player 7 pointedly stated, *"Before every game he tells us not to "turn of the lights" and that we our performance should not be blocked after a mistake is made."* Furthermore, Player 9 talked about the coach's sense of humor, *"Sometimes, I think he tries to make us laugh and sometimes it works."* Some more quotes that serve as examples are the following:

> *"He talks to us about every team we are facing and how each one of us should perform. Of course he makes general comments like "you have abilities and if you couldn't make it I wouldn't insist", "you have nothing less than your opponents"."* (Player 2)

> *"Before a game, he talks to us while being in the dressing room. He tells us what we should do, and tells us to be confident. Most girls in the team are experiencing this defeatism because of our old coach but he is different, he tries to boost our confidence."* (Player 3)

In the friendly game, by the time the coach entered the dressing room, the girls' attitude changed and they appeared being careful to what the coach wanted to share with them. The coach gave his pre-game speech and tried to psych-up the girls. He confronted the upcoming friendly match as an official competition and pointed out how important was for the players to try their best even if the team's rating would not be affected.

Based on the players' comments, the coach is able to recognize the differences and unique characteristics of each player and chooses to spend time with every player individually in order to regulate their emotions. As demonstrated in one player's quotes:

> *"Yeah, that happens a lot! It's not only the conversation he has with all of us. He thinks it is right-and I respect that- to have private conversations with us*

> *because maybe someone is not comfortable with sharing personal stuff."*
> (Player 1)

Lastly, some of the players claimed that the coach can be very strict sometimes and yell at them, but they recognized that he does it only to help them not to be blocked by dysfunctional emotions. For example, Player 9 noted, *"If he realizes that during the game we're not confident enough or that something goes wrong he will ask for a time-out and he might yell at us."*

In accordance with the players' comments, the coach appeared strict during the observed friendly game.

Players' relationship with teammates

The "relationship with teammates" main theme was directly derived from the data and what players had to tell about the kind of relationship they had developed with their teammates. Most of the players described a special bonding among the team players, mutual understanding and the feeling of acceptance. Player 1 pointedly stated, *"They accepted me. They opened their hearts, so I- I am a positive person in general- showed my true self at once."*

Players' interpersonal emotion regulation

Throughout the whole interview, it was obvious that the players wanted to share not only personal emotional experiences but also the way they communicate with the other members of the team, especially during competition. The last main theme was generated inductively from the information that players provided to the researcher concerning the followed strategies in order to regulate their teammates' emotions or in which ways the others regulate their emotions. The players reported that it was important for them to see their teammates being confident and sure about themselves because in that way their confidence increased too. For instance, Player 7 stated, *"I will try convincing my teammates so we will all feel more confident and get ready to face the upcoming challenge"*. Moreover, the

players described incidents of "emotion contagion" and that they were able to directly affect others' emotions or get affected themselves in a positive or negative way. Player 9 described how her experienced joy could benefit the whole team: *"When I express my joy and my teammate expresses her joy we all feel better and our confidence is boosted"*.

5.3 Coach's interview and themes

The thematic analysis for the coach's perceptions, emotion awareness and his contribution to the players' emotion regulation revealed eight main themes namely: *coach's general perceptions, coach's interpersonal emotion awareness, coach's interpersonal emotion awareness strategies, coach's use of interpersonal emotion regulation strategies, coach's interpersonal emotion management-crisis, coach's experienced emotions, coach's intrapersonal emotion regulation strategies,* and *coach's relationship with the players.* (*see Table 2*)

Table 2: Main and Sub Themes originated from the Coach's interview

Main themes	Sub themes
Coach's general perceptions	-Perception about players -Perceptions about himself
Coach's interpersonal emotion awareness	
Coach's interpersonal emotion awareness strategies	

Coach's use of interpersonal emotion regulation strategies	-General interpersonal ER strategies
	-Up- regulating interpersonal ER strategies
	-Down- regulating interpersonal ER strategies
Coach's interpersonal emotion management-crisis	
Coach's experienced emotions	
Coach's intrapersonal emotion regulation strategies	
Coach's relationship with the players	

5.4 Coach's theme description and cues

As explained before, in the beginning of the interview, the coach had to answer to a couple questions concerning demographic information. Afterwards, the coach was encouraged to talk about how he perceives the team players emotional experiences before and during performance. The first theme generated "coach's general perceptions" was quite broad and included two sub-themes related to the coach's "perceptions about players" and the coach's "perceptions about self"

Coach's perceptions about players

The coach made an effort to present an overall view of the team's climate to the researcher. He described the situation of the team during past seasons before engaging in the club's vision and that he took the responsibility of changing the way players behave and perform. He mentioned that he introduced a new coaching style and to the team claimed that the

most challenging duty he had was to understand and regulate the players' emotions. Two quotes that illustrate the coach's perception are:

> *"These are girls with no big experience in competition. They could have more experience during the past years but they don't. So, they had to start developing some skills and that was hard for them in the beginning… The girls had to get involved in a procedure that they were not familiar with, they had to learn how to work as a team and not individually…But they cared and they reached a point where they are closer to each other."*

> *"On the one hand, there are 5-6 girls who care and want to develop because they understand how much we (the club) try and they like it- the way we treat them, the way we organize everything. Well, I don't know if they appreciate it…But there also some girls who have not realized that we need to work."*

Coach's perceptions about self

While sharing his perceptions about the team players, the coach presented various beliefs and opinions concerning his own behavior and performance. The coach's comments were again related to his different coaching style and the way he looks upon to his players. As he pointedly mentioned, *"My coaching style and the way I make them practice is totally different"*.

Coach's interpersonal emotion awareness

Following the initial general comments, the coach answered specific questions about his beliefs or thoughts concerning the players' experienced emotions before and during competition. The coach advocated that he is able to understand what kind of emotions the players experience in general and he has developed a clear view of each player's psychological limits. A quote that exemplifies the coach's ability is:

"I can understand, generally but also more specifically in some cases, what emotions my players experience during practice and during competition. There are some girls in the

team that I know I can push harder and ask more from them. Even if they experience a mental breakdown, they are able to get over it and move on. On the other hand, there are some girls that, according to what they have showed me, are not able to deal with it ... I think that they are still a little afraid of me."

Coach's interpersonal emotion awareness strategies

Apart from his capability of understanding the players' emotions, the coach reported some strategies he follows in order to achieve that. The coach stated that he prefers observing the players' reactions and behaviors, especially during challenging situations like "difficult" games. He usually takes time to have face-to-face conversations with each one of them and sometimes he tries to psychologically push players harder in order to test their endurance. Concerning the observation technique the coach stated:

> *"I understand that, I get it that when a mistake is made -either during practice or during a game- mostly during a game, they don't handle it themselves but I see six people turning to the bench and looking at me."*

During the friendly game that the researcher attended, there was an incident of a face-to-face conversation where the coach tried to make the players feel more confident and try harder. One of the team's setters and one middle hitter were trying to perform a trick-hit ("transition footwork") that is not common in semi-professional volleyball. During the first game set, the girls tried to achieve the hit but failed three times and stopped trying. When the set was over the coach asked from the two players to talk in private and tried to convince them that a friendly game is an opportunity for every volleyball player to try new things and fail until he or she achieves them.

Coach's use of interpersonal emotion regulation strategies

During the last part of the interview, the coach talked about his contribution to the players' emotion regulation and the use of emotion regulation strategies in order to up- regulate or down- regulate the players experienced emotions. The fifth developed theme consisted of

three sub-themes namely; *general interpersonal emotion regulation strategies, up-regulation interpersonal emotion regulation strategies* and *down- regulation interpersonal emotion regulation strategies* (*see Figure 4*)

General interpersonal emotion regulation strategies

This sub- theme was one of the most frequently coded (59.1% of the coded quotes). It included the coach's quotes that were related to the strategies he follows in order to regulate the players' emotions before and during competition, yet without being aware or not stating if the strategies were used to upregulate or downregulate the players' emotions. The coach stated that, from the first moment that he took over the new team, he had to be stricter and use different techniques in order to make the players understand his vision and coaching philosophy. One quote that exemplifies the coach's statements is:

> *"I would rather make more comments, insist and be stricter during practice in order to provide them with the information I want them to get as a coach. During the week they have to work as a team, as a whole because in the end during the game, in the court the one will be supporting the other."*

The coach's main goal is to make the players' more resilient mentally and psychologically so they can handle the competition pressure. Moreover the coach tries to spend time having conversations with the players in order to help them focus more on their game performance and not the result per se. For example the coach pointed out:

> *"This is the reason why I try, during a game, to make them understand that, ok it's just a game that we are able to control if we do the things that we have worked on. When the girls enter the court, they have to be happy about it no matter the result. This makes them think in a different way than before, that they have to deal with things in a critical way. I achieve that with the help of some certain exercises, with having conversations before practice about what we are doing and why."*

Furthermore, the coach reported that the players' most crucial weakness is that they are not able yet to face demanding challenges in a critical way, so he shared a certain strategy he follows in order to change the players' behavior during games in the following way:

> *"During "easy" games I try to be more strict with them because I know what they are showing to me is not what they are capable of. During a "difficult" game, I would rather not overload them with pressure, especially when I understand that they don't listen to me."*

Coach's up-regulating interpersonal emotion regulation strategies

Generally, the coach seemed to acknowledge which experienced emotion helps each player to perform better (27.3% of the coded quotes). He, also, seemed to be aware of what emotion regulation strategy he has to follow in order to help the players experience those functional emotions. The coach stated that he prefers having some private moments with each player so he has the time to boost the player's confidence and alter her mood. The coach's use of strategies is embodied in the following quote:

> *"During time outs or during the warm up or any kind of stop, I try to talk to each one individually and ask different things. I ask from each one what I know she can do best. In that way I see that her mood changes, she feels that I count on her, I don't treat her differently because I do this with all of them and I ask different things form each one. For example, when I know that one of my players has the skills for a specific task I try to make her understand that she won't have a problem because she is better than the opponent. Another player that I know she is generally calm, I try to make her keep things low and help her teammates some time during the game when something goes wrong or they get stuck."*

Coach's down-regulating interpersonal emotion regulation strategies

The data analysis on the coach's interview revealed that in some cases the coach is not fully aware of which emotions are perceived as functional or dysfunctional by the players. However, he reported that before and during competition, he avoids making the players more nervous and anxious because based on his point of view, experienced stress harms the players' performance (13.6% of the coded quotes). His point of view is demonstrated in the following quote:

> *"I remind them that any mistake they make and might block them it is not so serious anyway, this is something that happens during games, it's logical and they have to move on because this is the only way to "fix" their mistake. Yeah, I do that before, during and even after the game so I can avoid making them feel more anxious."*

Coach's interpersonal emotion management-crisis

The coach had to answer questions about his reactions to some hypothetical challenges. The researcher asked the coach, how he would manage a player's emotional breakdown during a game. His answers generated the fifth main theme. The coach appeared calm and ready to face any challenge. He stated, *"It depends on the player"* and pointed out that every player is different so his reaction would be different too. In case that the player's breakdown was due to a crucial mistake, he stated that:

"I would try not to pay so much attention; I would let it go without pointing out the mistake so the player can move on… Maybe just a quick boost like "it's ok, go on!" "it's just a mistake, we all make mistakes"."

Coach's experienced emotions

Throughout the whole interview, the coach was not very expressive about the emotions he experiences before and during the team's performances. Nevertheless, he mentioned that emotions play an important role in the team's and his personal performance as a coach,

"the psychological part plays an important role in every game", and he admitted going through a lot of pressure before and during games as he pointedly claimed, *"During a game I get a lot of information and I experience great pressure"*.

Coach's intrapersonal emotion regulation strategies

The seventh main theme was developed based on the coach's descriptions about the strategies he follows in order to regulate his own experienced emotions before and during competition. Although the coach's statements were not clear enough, he mentioned that before games he tries to stay calm and reduce stress by using a kind of self-talk. He also claimed that as a person and as a coach he is not exclusively interested in victory but he cares mostly about a good team performance and based on this belief he tries to regulate the whole team's emotions. As demonstrated in his quote:

> *"Well, while preparing for an upcoming game I mostly insist on the practical part. Something I have learned as a volleyball player is to remain calm. What I always say to myself and I also try to pass it to my players is that I don't care about the result. I care about what we have "learned" after every game. We have to play well, enjoy the game. What I keep at the end of the day is that after all, it's just a game."*

Coach's relationship with the players

In the end of the interview, the researcher asked the coach to provide with some information on the kind of relationship he has developed with the players of the team and the kind of feedback he usually receives from the girls. On the one hand, the coach described a good quality relationship in general and he mentioned getting a positive feedback from the players, *"from our conversations before practice or after the games I can understand that they are pleased"*. On the other hand, he mentioned some general communication problems but he did not make any specific comments on that. The coach described the whole situation like, *"Well, in general, the effort that the girls put is high but*

there is no homogeneity in the team, not from a practical point of view… I mean mentally.
That is a problem, which is indeed present."

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Players' experienced emotions

In the present study, the players' emotional experiences were explored following the IZOF's Model classification of emotions in four global categories pleasant functional, pleasant dysfunctional, unpleasant functional and unpleasant dysfunctional. (IZOF: Hanin, 2000a).

The majority of the participant players related their past good performances with the experience of pleasant functional emotions and their past bad performances with the experience of unpleasant dysfunctional emotions. As predicted by the researcher, the players reported the experience of pleasant emotions such as happiness and calmness and that general feeling of satisfaction that a competition provides the athlete as facilitating for their performance. In the case of pleasant emotions that might harm their performance, the participant players were not that expressive. However, some of them talked about overexcitement and the feeling of being overconfident. The girls described situations where they were overwhelmed with those emotions, which made them behave arrogantly, and led to unwanted results. The participants explained that although they knew that underestimating is not an acceptable behavior and never works, they had those emotional experiences they are now avoiding while trying to "keep their feet on the ground".

Even though being a little uncomfortable with sharing unpleasant emotions the participants revealed their personal stories concerning their past performances. By describing social experiences or by connecting experienced emotions to bodily reactions, the team players reported high levels of stress especially before "difficult" upcoming games and pointed that sometimes their stress is augmented by the coach's reactions, the "bench-pressure" and the audience's negative comments. In the case of unpleasant emotions that the players perceive as functional the most dominant ones were stress, anger and pressure. Some of the participant players described stress as "creative" and the pressure they experience that is generated by the coach's expectations as helpful for them. In the present study participants seemed to perceive unpleasant emotions as more functional that the pleasant ones but there

was an interesting finding that came along during the data analysis. The team players stated that stress could be perceived both as a functional and as a dysfunctional emotion even during the same performance. The intensity of the emotion as well as various external factors could alternate the way stress is generally perceived. This finding could be used as a challenge for coaches. Every player acquires a different set of techniques in order to manage stress and a coach should be able to identify those differences and treat each player in "special" way (Hebert, 2014).

6.2 Players' relationships

Trust is the cornerstone of volleyball and it is something that teams need in order to be successful. Driven by the "working together" concept the players' relationships among each other and between them and the coach were analyzed in this present study too. Being comfortable with expressing emotions openly is essential for volleyball players in order to cultivate trust in the team. The study's participants reported no hesitation in expressing emotions among their teammates since they feel comfortable being around women of the same age who share common social experiences and mutual goals. Generally, the studied team revealed the presence of a special bond among the players and the participants described the team as their safety zone. As Mike Hebert states in his book, "Volleyball depends on individual execution of skills in a team setting. Players must work together and trust each other to be successful" (Hebert, 2014, p. 184).

Furthermore, the players described having a good quality relationship with the coach. The studied team is one of the newest teams that entered the regional championship. Before the arrival of the current coach, the team was considered "amateur" and the team coach was actually the man who took over the project of creating a semi- professional women's team for the club in order to compete in the regional championship. In accordance with Jowett's theory (2007), the relationship between the participant players and their coach includes all four (3+1) interrelated components. According to the model, the affective quality component called "closeness" is related to the social bond that it is developed between an athlete and a coach in terms of feelings such as trust, respect and liking for each other. The players of the studied team reported being close to their coach and described the presence

of feelings of respect and mutual appreciation even though being intimidated by him from times to times, especially when he gets rigorous. The cognitive component of the relationship concerns "commitment" or in other words, the motivation and intention of both parties to sustain the developed interpersonal relationship over time. According to the information shared by both parties, the coach tries to establish a new coaching style in the team and set new goals related to the team's progress. Both players and the coach seemed committed to the new plan and actually, players stated that they appreciate the fact that the coach focuses mostly on the team performance than the competition result. The third quality component is called "complementary" and it is about the behavioral aspect of the relationship in terms of the co-operative and aligned interaction between both parties, which is reflected in actions of readiness or easiness. The "complementary" aspect of the coach- athlete relationship showed quite developed. Except for a few cases, both players' and the coach's cues revealed the presence of co-operation towards a mutual goal, which according to the coach revolves around good performances and not the result per se. Lastly, the "co-orientation" component, which consists of parts of the other three components, reports the degree to which coaches and athletes actually match in perceiving the other's feelings, thoughts and behaviors. This component showed quite high in the studied team too. The perceptions of both players and the coach related to the opposite party's feelings, thoughts and behaviors revealed a significant degree of match and especially the coach appeared to understand which players are capable of handling pressure (Jowett, 2007).

6.3 Players' emotion regulation strategies

The study's main goal was to explore the emotion regulation strategies in Greek female volleyball players. The researcher chose a qualitative approach to follow and collected data based on interviews and observation (Creswell, 2007). The deductive thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998)) of the participants' interviews revealed consonance between the players' followed emotion regulation strategies and the ones suggested in theory.

As assumed from the beginning, the players of the studied team tend to follow emotion regulation strategies in order to experience an emotion that they believe will help them

improve their performance (up-regulation) and tend to avoid experiencing emotions that they perceive as harmful for their performance, the so called down-regulation (Hanin, 2003; Hanin, 2010; Robazza, et al, 2004). The participant players' cues revealed that emotion up-regulation strategies were connected mostly with pleasant emotions. The most thought-provoking clue in this case was the fact that players usually try to look more enthusiastic and cheer vividly for every won point for two reasons. The players' first goal concerned the sustenance of functional emotions throughout the competition but the second goal was related to behaviors that the players communicate in order to intimidate their opponents and "reduce their strength" (Lane, et al, 2012). The players' emotion down-regulation followed strategies were mostly connected with the avoidance of unpleasant emotions like stress but there were also some girls who reported staying away from feelings of overexcitement or overconfidence. According to the players' and the coach's cues, successful volleyball players need to remain humble during competition and never underestimate the opponent. Volleyball is a game where the score can overturn easily so, players should hide or at least try to moderate their excitement and keep their feet on the ground.

The more specific emotion regulation strategies shared by the participants confirmed the five-category model of antecedent- and response- focused emotion regulation strategies by Gross and Thompson (2007). The antecedent- focused strategies are related to conscious and automatic processes, which aim in the prevention of an emotional response and the response- focused ones are related to the direct regulation of emotions (Lane, et al 2012). Situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment and cognitive change belong in the antecedent-focused strategies and response-focused strategies are mostly about the direct regulation of the physiological and cognitive aspects of an emotion (response modulation). The players' interviews were analyzed for all of them.

In the "situation selection" case, the players reported incidents where they would choose to confront an unpleasant situation actively and other incidents where they would choose to bypass the challenging situation as a whole. What was intriguing was the players' perspective on how serious the imaginary situation was. Some of the participants stated that before proceeding in any action they would first "weigh" the importance of the situation for themselves. Those statements confirmed Gross and Thompson's (2007) model as well as

CERQ- Short's theoretical framework (Garnefsi and Kraaj, 2006), which was used for the development of the players' interview guide. Regarding the "situation modification" strategy, the players were more skeptical but the majority of the participants reported choosing to seek others' help in order to defuse a problematic situation, such as a fight in the team, especially when the coach was involved. In the case of "attentional deployment", the athletes who participated in the study reported a few techniques they use in order to direct their attention and change the way they feel. On the one hand, listening to music, using humor and thinking about past pleasant moments, such as summer vacations, were the most popular techniques among players. On the other hand, there were players who seemed to focus their attention on unpleasant emotions created by mistakes they made (disappointment and frustration) and reported incapable of getting over them. Confirming the theoretical framework of CERQ-Short (Garnefsi and Kraaj, 2006), the players described ruminating past mistakes and not being able to refocus their attention to their performance and the next game phase. The most frequent used emotion regulation strategies that the participants of the study described were related to the "cognitive change" category of the model. Most of the players reported the use of self-talk cues before and during competition in order to motivate themselves, boost their confidence and sometimes in order to convince themselves that there is no reason to stress about mistakes they make. Furthermore, some of the participants stated that usually they try to re-appraise a situation or an event in positive way so they could alternate the meaning of the situation or event. In the case of "cognitive change", some of the players' statements related to the time they adopted this positive point of view captivated the researcher's attention. According to players' comments (the coach confirmed these statements later), the last two years that the team's coach changed, the girls were introduced to a new coaching style and philosophy, so they started facing competition in a different way, focusing mostly on their performance than the result and being more positive in general. On the other side of the strategy's continuum, there were also players who reported accepting the negative situation or the incapacity to deal with it, especially during games. Lastly, the "response modulation" case was also analyzed (Peña-Sarrionandia, Mikolajczak, & Gross, 2015). Emotion sharing and expressive suppression were the most common techniques that the players described during their interviews

whereas the researcher recorded verbal aggression too while observing the team during a friendly game.

The interview's semi- structure gave the opportunity to the researcher to adjust the questions in each participant's responses and reactions. The players' interpersonal emotion regulation was also explored and the results derived from the analysis of raw data. Emotion contagion was the most frequent reported phenomenon (Friesen et al, 2013). The players described incidents of them trying to influence the emotions or behavior of their teammates through the conscious or unconscious initiation of emotion states and behavioral attitudes. Generally, the participants reported being easily affected by their teammates' emotions and in order to be psyched-up during competition they need to feel that the people in the court and on the bench are self- confident and mentally prepared for the game.

One of the present study's initial goals was to compare the players' cues regarding the emotion regulation strategies that the coach usually follows with the coach's cues in order to get a deeper understanding on the coach's contribution to the players' regulation of emotions. From the players' perspective, the coach appeared to be a person who pays a lot of attention on the psychological training of the team and someone who is able to recognize each player's strengths and weaknesses. According to the players' descriptions, the coach follows a routine before the team enters the volleyball court. Every time he gathers the team and gives a speech that includes general comments and more specific, personal instructions for each player. The coach was depicted as a person who supports the positive re-appraisal strategy and someone who tries to change the way the players think in order to help them regulate their emotions in a functional way and get over their mistakes faster and more efficiently. His coaching style revolves around the increase of autonomy among the team players and his efforts to develop the players' critical way of thinking. The girls stated that the coach achieves that by having frequent group and face-to face conversations and by supporting the players to express themselves during practice and during competition. Lastly, the participants described the coach as a strict person who often uses verbal aggression and the researcher supposed that this would affect the players in a negative way. However, the athletes justified the coach and took over the responsibility for his actions by stating that sometimes they tend not to follow his instructions.

6.4 Coach's emotion awareness

The coach's awareness regarding the players' regulation of emotions was also examined in the present study. Emotion awareness is part of the emotional intelligence tradition that has flourished during the last years and involves an individual's capacity to recognize and utilize emotional states to change intentions and behavior (Zizzi et al., 2003). A coach that can identify an emotion at an early stage is able to provide an early intervention before the emotion becomes dysfunctional for the individual and the team (Chan & Mallett, 2011). The Emotional Intelligence Theory and the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire- Short Form (Petrides, 2009) were used as a base for the questions that were included in the coach's interview.

The compared results were exciting since the researcher did not expect a high consistency between the coach's and the players' statements. The coach reported the demand he had to face when he decided to take over the studied team because he had a short experience in working with female players. However, he managed to approach the girls, develop a good quality relationship with them and understand their experienced emotions up to some point. According to his statements, he used specific strategies to achieve that. The coach started observing the players carefully and taking notes of their reactions while being challenged (e.g. during "difficult" games). By the time he developed an overall view of the team players, he started communicating new practical and mental skills to the players in order to help them improve their performance and strengthen the team bonding. He also started spending more time on face-to-face conversations with the players, because he realized that in this way, the players were able to express themselves freely and it was something that made them feel unique. As he stated, now he is able to recognize the players' emotions before and during competition, he knows which players are mentally tougher than others are and he has reached a level where he can identify the unique differences of each player. Generally, the coach's statements came in accordance with the most of the TEIQue-SF's trait emotional intelligence facets that were used for the development of the coach's interview guide such as, adaptability, assertiveness, emotion perception, relationships, trait empathy and social awareness.

6.5 Coach's interpersonal emotion regulation

The last aim of this present study was to examine the coach's contribution to the players' regulation of emotions. Besides the fact that the coach was not deeply aware of the emotion regulation concept he revealed some interesting facts on how he supports the team players' emotion management and regulation. The coach had to introduce the girls in a new way of coaching and practicing volleyball since his philosophy was different from the previous coach's one.

Although the coach did not have a clear view on which emotions the players perceive as functional or dysfunctional, his main goal was to assist the players reduce their experienced stress levels before and during competition. The coach reported his efforts on trying to transform his players from amateurs with no experience in the semi- professional volleyball level to dedicated players who enjoy competing and are capable of thinking critically and independently (Vallee & Bloom, 2005). For the coach of the studied team, the emotional part plays a big role in the team's performance. During the data collection phase the coach reported his efforts to boost the players' confidence and increase the players' mental toughness before and during competition. The players' comments affirmed those made by the coach and it seemed that the coach uses many ways to be close to their players. On the one hand, he uses humor to defuse challenging situations and communicate a more positive way of thinking to his players. On the other hand, the coach tries to maintain a strict persona, especially during "easy" games, in order to help the players become more autonomous and resilient. The coach presented the current situation in the team and noted that he understands that he intimidates the players- some girls stated being afraid of the coach every time he yells at them from the bench- but according to his thoughts, beliefs and personal experience, this is a good opportunity for the real champions to stand out.

6.6 Players' meta-experiences

As stated in the literature review section, the athletes' personal and subjective emotional experiences are a concept of great importance in the field of sport sciences. The present study was based on the conceptualization of the IZOF model (Ruiz & Hanin, 2004). As a useful tool for athletes in order to become aware of their emotions, the IZOF model involves the athletes' meta-experiences (knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about recalled, actual or anticipated experiences). Despite the fact that the researcher did not explore the participant players' meta-experiences, some of them described the way they feel in the present when they bring memories from past performances in their minds.

While trying to describe their past emotional experiences, some of the players were carried away by their thoughts and talked about how their memories still affect them in the present. On the one hand, most of the players reported being upset, especially when their meta-experiences were connected to bad performances and personal crucial mistakes during competitions that led to a team loss whereas others just mentioned the situation and then noted their desire not to talk about those specific incidents. On the other hand, there were players who focused on pleasant meta-experiences and pictured how happy or satisfied they feel every time they remember that *one* performance.

6.7 Strengths and limitations

The most notable strength of the present conducted study was the fact that the concept of emotion regulation was explored from both the players' and the coach's perspective. The participant players had the opportunity to share their emotional experiences in detail and express their point of view on the coach's contribution in the regulation of their emotions before and during competition. Alternatively, the coach was able to disclose specific aspects concerning his philosophy and the strategies he follows to help the team players manage their emotions in order to facilitate their performance during competition. The comparison between each party's thoughts, opinion and beliefs created a more complete image of the emotion regulation in female volleyball. Moreover, the study included some of the strong assets of the qualitative approach in general. Qualitative research is used in cases

when researchers need to explore a phenomenon or concept and need to gain a deeper, detailed understanding of the issue of interest (Creswell, 2007). Although emotion regulation and emotional intelligence have been concepts of great scientific interest, there is always room for more qualitative data that can shed more light on the existing quantitative findings.

The last strength of the study involves the use of a female group as a sample. Female athletes were chosen for participating in this study for two main reasons. First, the role of women in the sport field has changed drastically through the years. Although, women face many barriers to their participation in competitive sport, such as lack of psychological and social support, they are being more and more active and they tend to participate in sports more often than they used to. In that way it is proved that the fears regarding the woman's serious commitment to sport- the fears of being masculinized in appearance and body- are slowly being eliminated in today's society (May & Asken, 1987). Moreover, female athletes have different physical features from men and this is sometimes challenging for coaches or sport psychology practitioners who need to adjust their knowledge and experience to the female athlete patterns.

Apart from the strengths, the present study included some limitations. One of these restraints included the language facet. Some of the theories, ideas and concepts that were used for the development of the interview guides were not available in Greek from the beginning and the researcher had to translate them from English. What is more, some words and concepts had to be explained in detail to the participants in order to avoid misunderstandings. For example, the concept of "emotion" in Greek can be confused sometimes with the concept of "affection", which can change the whole meaning of a question or answer in each case. In order to secure a word-to-word transcription the researcher recorded the participants' interviews and second coders were used to increase the study's trustworthiness and validity.

Furthermore, the study design included a small sample and a specific target group. Certainly, the main aim of the study was a detail description of the emotion regulation strategies used by female volleyball players and the coach's role but for the increase of the study's credibility, more social groups and different kinds of sport should be further

studied. Lastly, qualitative studies are not easily generalizable and there is no way to establish the probability that the present study's collected data can be representative of some larger population (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001).

6.8 Future research

In the present study the coach and players' emotion regulation in female volleyball was explored in detail following the qualitative approach. The study's findings were promising and can be used as guide for further research in the sports science field. Firstly, many aspects of the emotion regulation theory can be further investigated and supported by quantitative data. Moreover, the research project can be transferred and used in different contexts, such as other kinds of sports or in different competitive levels, and more variables, such as gender and culture can be examined from another point of view, in the future.

Furthermore, the present study's researcher attempted to merge the emotion regulation theory with the emotional intelligence theory by comparing the coach and player's thoughts, beliefs and opinions. Future researchers can shed more light on the integration of these two concepts and come up with interesting findings.

Additionally, the studied team that participated in the present project is currently competing in the semi-professional volleyball league. The team management is exclusively under the coach's authority. Usually, in the Greek professional volleyball more people are involved in the team organization (head coach, first assistant coach etc.) and more complicated relationships are developed. The examination of the coach- athlete relationship when more people are involved would be an interesting topic for future research.

Lastly, this research can be proven very helpful in a practical level too. The results of the study can be used as a basis for developing volleyball coaching seminars in which future volleyball coaches will be taught how to shape and control their athletes' psychological skills like emotion regulation. Overall, a study like this can be proven as helpful in a country like Greece that lacks such expertise in the field of Sport Psychology.

6.9 Conclusion

The findings of the present study highlighted the connection among three theoretical frameworks of great interest in the field of sport sciences, emotion regulation, emotion intelligence and the coach-athlete relationship theories. These findings supported the study's main goal regarding the exploration of the emotion regulation strategies that Greek female volleyball players use before and during competition along with the coach's emotion awareness and his contribution to the players' regulation of emotion.

The study's results supported the existing literature concerning the fact that pleasant or unpleasant emotions are not equally perceived as functional or dysfunctional for all athletes even if they are members of the same team (Hanin, 2000). Furthermore, the study delved into the participants' versatile repertoire of used emotion regulation strategies before and during performance and supported Gross and Thompson's (2007) five-category model of antecedent- and response- focused emotion regulation strategies. Concerning the coach's emotional intelligence, the study's findings advocated the importance of the coach's ability to recognize the meaning of the players' emotions as well as the ability to use those emotions for cognitive activities (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) in the pursuit of optimal performance. The studied team's coach showed as an emotionally intelligent person who is aware of the players' experienced emotions. Additionally, the coach was described as someone who has the ability to manage and regulate the players' emotions effectively and has developed a high quality relationship (Jowett, 2007) with his players.

This study, which followed the qualitative approach and focused on the athletes' subjective emotional experiences in order to achieve its main goals, could be used for further research on the ongoing scientific flow regarding the integration of the emotion regulation (ER) and emotional intelligence (EI) traditions. Lastly, even though the study's results may not be conclusive concerning the coach- athlete relationship, they should inspire more research in the field to include valuable practical information in the process of developing volleyball-coaching programs and promoting volleyball as a sport in general, especially in Greece.

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APPENDIX A

Interview guide for players based on the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ- short) by Garnefski and Kraaj (2006 and the Five Category Model of antecedent- and response- focused emotion regulation strategies by Gross and Thompson (2007)

1. Demographics
 	
   • Name
 	
   • Age
 	
   • Position
 	
   • Years of playing experience

2. Players' experienced emotions and perceptions
 	
   • I would like you to think of your best performance so far and describe me your emotions.
 	
   • I would like you to think of your worst performance so far and describe me your emotions.
 	
   • How would you describe your performances so far comparing to your teammates?
 	
   • How do you usually feel about the mistakes you have made during a performance? Do you try to learn from them?
 	
   • How do you express your feelings to your teammates and your coach? How comfortable you feel about sharing your emotions with the members of the team?

3. Players' emotion regulation strategies and the coach's role

- What strategies do you use to regulate your emotions generally?

- When experiencing pleasant emotions before and during your performances, how do you usually react?

- When you experience unpleasant emotions what do you do?

- Can you tell what kind of emotions you perceive as functional? What kind of emotions help you perform better?

- Before an upcoming performance, do you use any strategies in order to achieve these functional emotions?

- When you experience dysfunctional emotions, what kind of strategies do you use?

- When you face a challenging situation, for example a difficult upcoming game that you do not believe you can win, what do you do to change the way you feel

- When facing a problematic situation, for example a conflict with your teammates or your coach, how do you react? Do you try to find practical and direct solutions on your own or seek for others' assistance?

- How does your coach tries to regulate your emotions before a competition?

APPENDIX B

Interview guide for the coach based on the Emotional Intelligence Theory (Chan & Mallet, 2011) and the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue-SF; Petrides, 2009)

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1. Demographics

- Name

- Age

- Years of playing experience

- Years of coaching experience

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2. Coach's emotion awareness

- Considering the fact that every player experiences different emotions before and during a game, do you believe that you are able of understanding what your players feel?

- Before and during competition, how do you perceive your players' emotions? What kind of strategies do you follow?

- What are the techniques that your players use to regulate their emotions? Have you noticed any specific patterns?

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3. Coach's interpersonal emotion regulation strategies

- What strategies do you use to help your players increase the functional emotions they experience before or during a performance?

- What strategies do you use to help your players decrease the dysfunctional emotions they experience before or during a performance?

- When facing a challenging situation such as a difficult upcoming game, how do you utilize your emotions in order to solve the problem?

- How would you handle a player experiencing a mental break down during a

game?

- After a loss or a bad performance, what kind of emotions do you usually experience?

- How do you usually react when you feel that the players are not listening to you and do not follow your instructions?

- What kind of feedback do you get from your players? Do you think they are pleased with your work?