

Exploring the Utilization of Counselling Services in Canadian Amateur Hockey

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Abstract

This project investigated the unique adverse stressors influenced by (predominantly male) sports culture and specifically the impact on junior, college, and university hockey players in Canada. Some of the general themes that were explored include the perception of mental toughness, attachment adversity, masculinity, mental health literacy outcome, and the potential benefit of a phenomenological approach for future research. The study's results highlighted a need for sport-specific counselling interventions as there is no evidence in the literature of a thorough conceptual framework implemented to support competitive young athletes. Potential solutions are examined, including but not limited to the utility of mindfulness, self-authoring, holotropic breathwork, and biofeedback mechanisms. Research of these techniques may instill optimism, however, clinical trials are necessary to determine which modalities are most effective for young players in their hockey journey or in transitioning to a new vocation.

Key words: Mental toughness, hockey, masculinity, attachment, hierarchies, sport-specific intervention, mental health literacy

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Entering the competitive world of junior, university, and semi-professional hockey can be an extremely exciting time of anticipation for youth and young adults. There is the hope of sharpening skills, taking part in the camaraderie of a team, and even the possibility of a career in hockey. However, there are numerous stressors and challenges that have often been overlooked and minimized. This may include stress from being away from home for the first time, living with a strange family in a strange town, fitting in with a competitive team, and expectations of coaches and teammates. Even the physical consequences of possible injuries and concussions have not been addressed thoroughly until the past decade. These youth are at a critical time in their life, which involves significant stress generally, not to mention the added pressure of a new and intense environment. It would benefit many players to have access and be encouraged to use psychological counselling services to help them navigate some of the inevitably stressful events. However, the current culture and perceived stigma have prevented this from happening.

There is limited research on the utilization and accessibility of counselling services for players competing in the Canadian junior, college, and university hockey leagues. As participants move through these stages of opportunity, common pressures and difficulties that arise may not have been expected. The motivation of players to openly seek additional help is often outweighed by the undesirable consequences of losing playing time or the notion of appearing “mentally weak” (Bauman, 2016). Mental toughness among athletes is positively correlated with goal progress, objective performance, and indications of optimal mental health (e.g., thriving) (Gucciardi et al., 2017). Players who are underperforming or struggling to progress towards their goals may experience more significant mental health challenges. Effective counselling interventions unique to clients in hockey may serve the development of realistic and

attainable aims within the context of their current situation. Further research is needed to compile evidence of complex intervention outcomes applied within sports and, more specifically, competitive amateur hockey (Breslin et al., 2017; Gerlach, 2018; Hebard & Lamberson, 2017; Purcell et al., 2019).

A logical advancement for sports organizations is to engage in the development of interventions specific to athletes' specialized needs, which may include professionals familiar with the unique culture (Gavrilova & Donohue, 2018; Gerlach, 2018; Purcell et al., 2019). The primary focus of a Head Coach is to generate more wins than losses, which do not necessarily correlate with attention to the mental health of their players. A functional relationship between a player and coach can lay the groundwork for substantial growth in the development of character within the context of sport and other areas of life (Jackson & Delehanty, 2013; Rodahl et al., 2015). Some players may not develop skills to efficiently deal with difficulties on their own and could benefit from support from mental health professionals regarding both hockey related and personal issues. Ineffective coping mechanisms may result in relationship concerns, misuse or abuse of drugs and alcohol, and a lack of optimism concerning vocational projections (McCoy, 2015; Purcell et al., 2019; Raemaker & Petrie, 2019).

Similarities in masculine ideologies exist within other hypermasculine sports such as American or Canadian football. Socialization of men's mental health is a common theoretical approach used by psychologists in masculinity research (Addis & Cohane, 2005). The socialization of masculinity can exist in many forms seen as a dynamic and everchanging course of action dependent on context, which may contribute to the underuse of counselling and an unhealthy self-perception of the individual athlete (Steinfeldt, Gilchrist, et al., 2011). Benevolent character traits for all men and women within sport and other facets of life might include

accountability, responsibility, discipline, and resiliency (Steinfeldt, Foltz, et al., 2011; Weinberg et al., 2011). Information to educate and help oneself without the utilization of a professional seems to be more accessible than in recent decades due to online resources (Ebert et al., 2018; Peterson, 2019). However, speaking with a trained clinician with experience on a similar path might benefit a player's trust in the process, providing a space to be vulnerable and freely express his or her perspectives (Gavrilova & Donohue, 2018; Purcell et al., 2019). That said, a former athlete turned clinician or researcher will need to be mindful in maintaining a current interpretation while avoiding presuppositions from their own experience in sports.

An unfortunate side effect of competitive hockey is the occurrence of concussions and their contribution to mental health difficulties. Despite genuine efforts to decrease head hits, the impact of concussions will remain an area requiring attention (Todd et al., 2018). Emotional regulation difficulties may arise stemming from a head injury, which can worsen without adequate support and supervision (Valovich McLeod et al., 2017). Major mental health difficulties have been shown in several retired professional players with cognitive difficulties and progression of earlier onset of dementia (Esopenko et al., 2017). To its detriment, the sport has traditionally conformed to norms of toughness, resiliency, and suffering in silence, contributing to underutilization of mental health services (Bauman, 2016; Gavrilova & Donohue, 2018).

While research is limited regarding the support of former players, there is some evidence that the hockey culture is aiming to increase understanding of ongoing issues. I Got Mind is an organization established by Calgary and former National Hockey League (NHL) player, Bob Wilkie, to promote awareness and reduce stigma in the remedy of social and emotional learning among amateur and professional sports (Wilkie, 2019).

This paper will aim to explore the possible benefits of specifically tailored interventions for amateur competitive hockey players within Canada. An examination of the literature will encompass influential factors pertaining to mental health outcomes impacting players' athletic performance, vocational opportunities, and the quality of their relationships. Following the review, there will be a discussion of the implications for counselling practice and limitations in the research requiring further attention.

Self-Positioning Statement

Self-reflection and awareness of the reciprocal nature of mind, body, and emotions impacting school and hockey performance did not begin with any depth until I was 17 years of age. Early in the fall of 2000, I suffered a severe concussion during a game resulting in sustained disorientation and confusion. I returned to play about 10 days later but struggled to regain anywhere near the level of confidence and ability that I had prior to the incident. I had been an honors student from grade 6 to 11, but my grades dropped substantially during that final year of high school. Adding to the escalation of troubling emotion was that, prior to the incident, I had been named captain of the team and perceived that I was failing my peers through my struggles upon return to play. I also felt that I was disappointing my coach, whom I had the utmost respect for as we had won a league championship together a few years earlier. It seems there was a correlation with this incident and my ensuing performance in academics and hockey, which unfolded as a watershed moment at a crucial time in my development.

Fortunately, I was recruited to compete in the Alberta Junior Hockey League (AJHL) with the Fort McMurray Oil Barons the following year in pursuit of a college or university scholarship. After a positive first season, I had difficulty with heightened expectations from coaches and peers at the beginning of my second year. During this time, further awareness

regarding the power of mindset became evident after my parents gifted me a book written by sports psychologist Miller in 2001 called *The Complete Player: The Psychology of Winning Hockey*. Through childhood and adolescence, I do not recall much discussion of mental health or strategies for healthy emotional processing. Following intensive curiosity of this book, I was surprised by my level of confidence and energy for a few games, which seemed to be a result of the new pragmatic knowledge I had acquired. However, I did not review the book past the first month that I first received it. In hindsight, I believe repetitive consumption of the material may have contributed to a stronger forthright mindset within the game. At that time, I did not demonstrate enough consistency aimed at healthy habits to optimize athletic performance and interpersonal relationships.

Aside from on-ice performance, numerous ecological factors will influence an amateur hockey player's mental health. The relationships with stakeholders such as teammates, coaches, billets, immediate families, and other members of the community all contribute to a player's experience (McFadden et al., 2016; Pescosolido & Saavedra, 2012; Rodahl et al., 2015; Shaw, 2018). Contradicting pressures to behave in certain ways can create difficulties in the execution of setting healthy boundaries. While the primary focus of players will typically be the on-ice performance, the psychosocial factors outside the playing surface may be given less attention, resulting in a disparity of overall health (Bean et al., 2014; Lundqvist & Raglin, 2014). Most of these players will not reach the professional level and will look to discover a new pursuit after their competitive hockey careers. Recent research has highlighted a deficit in support among Canadian Hockey League (CHL) and AJHL players transitioning to other vocational opportunities outside of hockey (McCoy, 2015; Shaw, 2018).

Following a trade to a new team during my final season in the AJHL, I visited a psychologist with my parents as they had become concerned with what seemed to be a consistent anxiety-ridden narrative that they perceived during our telephone conversations. In retrospect, I believe I suffered multiple unreported concussions through these competitive playing years. I have no doubt that I am not alone in dealing with undiagnosed complicated concussions, and many of my peers have similar stories. During those years, I recollect that there may have been a deficit in public discussion and openness to mental health support in Alberta and especially in the hockey context in which I was involved.

I did not experience impactful therapy until the age of 31 following a brief but stirring intimate relationship. The last contact with my ex-partner was through a text message interaction. The words exchanged debatably may have been open to interpretation, yet nonetheless were not well received by her. I attempted to connect over a voice call to no avail, which signified the end of our bond. It may seem trivial, but this experience of perceived loss triggered a cathartic period significantly influencing my life's direction. I believe that night could be referred to as a "dark night of the soul," as the grief did not sit well with me including guilt and regret for sending an unnecessary message. That night seemed to redirect my aim for a new purpose. It became clear how important it is to be mindful about how we utilize language especially through evolving technology in our efforts to strengthen communication.

During the sessions of therapy, I was able to reflect on difficulties and peak experiences of past emotional periods and my contribution to what transpired. This resulted in cathartic emotional processing, which occurred through the revelation of my interconnectedness. Specifically, the connectedness of my actions with the events that occurred around me. Balanced emotional regulation will continue to be an ongoing process requiring consistent attention. I

believe strongly that an alliance with a trusted counsellor or therapist during my playing days may have contributed to stronger resiliency and acceptance for embracing the challenges I faced in junior and university hockey.

As a counsellor or therapist, I will aim to support those who may be seeking clarity of their own unique experience. I would like to help guide and motivate others in seeing their value and capacity for positively contributing to their community. This paper could serve as an initial step to contribute to the ongoing development of optimal solutions, increasing the support to Canadian amateur hockey players.

Phenomenological research could be effective in the hockey culture for the intention of researchers to bracket bias with a beginner's mind approach for minimizing projections of one's own subjective experience. An everchanging perceptive bias may exist among all of us; therefore, staying mindful and reflexive when preconceived notions arise will be important. It seems that disciplined self-care to remain strongly centered, grounded, and present is crucial for bracketing bias at all junctures of any process. Holding a space for others to give rise to their own inward freedom and meaningful interpretation of an experience seems to be a crucial part of effective therapy (Rogers, 1961). Enhancing mental health support for these players could have a widespread impact positively affecting their peers, family members, and all other relationships within their respective communities. The shortage of evidence regarding sport-specific interventions may be impeding progress to measure the most effective modalities within the hockey culture.

Remaining cognizant of potential assumptions regarding sport culture is crucial for bracketing bias throughout the entire literature review process. It is important to broaden perspective for expanding on egocentric and ethnocentric viewpoints can facilitate new

beneficial insight (Tufford & Newman, 2010). The utilization of a reflexive journal, as well as supervisor and second reader review, are all methods used in this research process to mitigate preconceptions. Tufford and Newman (2010) suggest the utility of a journal can benefit the maintenance of a reflexive standpoint, thereby enhancing self-awareness and innovation, creating space for new knowledge to emerge. The following analysis of the literature consists of a wide range of resources, all deemed applicable to enhancing mental health support for young athletes.

Literature Review of Mental Health in Sport

To conduct a comprehensive review, consolidation of academic literature regarding the mental health of primarily male athletes in various countries and differing levels of competition has been constructed. The articles are grouped into common themes and subsequently reviewed for their potential ability to help improve the health and well-being of those within the hockey culture. There are six major themes, including the perception of mental toughness, attachment adversity, masculinity, mental health outcomes, sport-specific counselling interventions, and phenomenological research.

Perception of Mental Toughness

It seems the term “mental toughness” can express both positive and negative connotations depending on how the term is construed (Gucciardi & Gordon, 2011; Gucciardi et al., 2017). Various sources contribute unique notions of the term, but the definition has lacked clarity and a common consensus (Jones, 2002). This section will review the impact of how this phrase has been understood in various sporting contexts, including an athlete’s capacity for coping through emotional intelligence and resiliency (Bauman, 2016). The motivational factors and the experience of youth in sport will also be studied for their ability to enhance services to members involved within Canadian amateur hockey. The conceptualization of the two terms mental

toughness and mental health share an overlap for positive functioning but also show slight variations in meaning within sporting culture.

An expression of mental toughness could be inferred as personal resources to promote an athlete's ability to withstand stressors, possibly enhancing the fulfillment or maximization of an individual's potential contributions to the preservation of mental health (Bauman, 2016; Gucciardi et al., 2017). The phenomenological experience of depression and anxiety among competitive athletes often goes untreated due to a culture of silence and competition begetting underutilization of services (Coles, 2009 Gucciardi & Gordon, 2011; Shaw, 2018;). Stigma is defined as a multi-layered notion that incorporates hesitancy to disclose, desire for control, need for social distancing, and the interpretation that mental illness is personal weakness (Jorm & Oh, 2009). From the research, it seems that the frame of expression and understanding of phenomenological perspectives, individually and collectively, can play a vital role to the openness and willingness of athletes in seeking mental health support (Gucciardi & Gordon, 2011; Shaw, 2018).

Crust and Clough (2005) discussed four aspects of mental toughness including control, commitment, challenge, and confidence. The mentally strong are viewed as confident, showing few signs of anxiety symptoms, competitive, and resilient to mistakes or stressors (Crust & Clough, 2005). Shaw (2018) suggested in his thesis that confidence is highly valued among hockey players in the field of sport psychology. Sociocultural factors may influence the willingness of an athlete to admit vulnerability. Seeking support from a professional with the title "sport psychologist" could be a hook for athletes to begin talking. On the surface, it may appear that services aimed to improve mental toughness with less focus on emotion or "feelings," which are typically attached to stigma, could attract more male athletes. However, effective processing

of emotion, visualization, discipline, resiliency, and persistence are all important facets of mental toughness to keep in mind when encouraging players to utilize mental health services (Bauman, 2016; Clough & Strycharczyk, 2015; Gucciardi et al., 2017; Shaw, 2018).

Periodic rest is necessary for an athlete to maintain mental well-being; however, stigma may prevent an athlete's willingness to disclose their vulnerability. Players can place an excessively high value on how they are perceived by peers and might push boundaries at the expense of their health (Bauman, 2016; Gucciardi et al., 2017; Shaw, 2018). Physical overexertion could also be a result of heightened motivational and emotional states based on the importance they attach to a certain outcome. The physical, psychological, and social consequences can contribute to negative mental health outcomes. Awareness of the ever-changing dynamics of a team could be promoted with increased accessibility to counselling. Additional support and psychoeducation could improve both coaches and players' ability to quickly identify and resolve issues prior to adverse consequences. This could include concussion management or support and guidance for a clear understanding of relational issues among all team members (Broglio et al., 2014; Rodahl et al., 2015; Shaw, 2018).

The inevitable occurrence of injuries can result in varying mental responses (i.e., inadequacy, unworthiness) creating stress, anxiety, and issues with a commitment to harm reducing interventions (Broglio et al., 2014; Clement et al., 2013). As a solution, psychosocial strategies for aiding physically injured athletes can be implemented by team trainers to keep a player engaged with the group, formulating small incremental goals, and ensuring variability in their recovery (Clement et al., 2013).

Elite young adult competitors may be more susceptible to mental health challenges influenced by heightened motivational states within an age group (16–25) at high risk for the

onset of depression or anxiety symptoms (Rice et al., 2016). The necessity is high among athletes to be connected to competent clinicians equipped in helping reduce cognitive dysfunctions (Gucciardi et al., 2017). The complex physical stressors and pressure to succeed make this demographic susceptible to a range of issues, including substance abuse or misuse. Unique mental health concerns can manifest among players at varying levels of competition including anyone approaching their retirement stage, where additional support might be needed to smoothen the transition to another vocation or purpose (Gucciardi et al., 2017; McCoy, 2015; Rice et al., 2016).

The theoretical understanding of mental toughness can be described as a strong capacity to respond effectively with goal-directed conduct when facing circumstantial demands with varying intensity (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2015; Gucciardi et al., 2017). Previous ineffective experiences and poor mental health literacy are additional barriers to the stigma that may prevent elite athletes from seeking counselling or therapy and formulating reasonable goals (Rice et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2007; Watson, 2006). Athletes and coaches may be more likely to absorb procedures that are represented as “mental toughness development” than they are for services sold as mental health interventions (Gucciardi et al., 2017; Shaw, 2018). Educating student-athletes on misconceptions of counselling and reframing the perception away from a pathology-based focus to one that concentrates on growth and development seems to increase openness to services (Watson, 2006).

Emotional Intelligence and Coping Effectiveness

Emotional intelligence relates to physiological stress responses, effective psychological or mental acuity, and level of athletic performance (Laborde et al., 2016). Athletes with superior ability in emotional intelligence and coping may have a propensity for evaluating emotional

events as challenges rather than threats and have greater command over managing stressors (Cowden, 2016). The research generally seems to illustrate that athletes who interpret events with appropriate significance (e.g., not overreacting or underreacting to varying degrees of adversity) typically experience more fulfillment, enjoyment, and success in performance.

A study sample of 150 male adolescent athletes explored the interconnectedness between mental toughness, emotional intelligence, coping efficiency, and sports performance (Cowden, 2016). Each participant completed a sports mental toughness questionnaire, entailing measures using a self-evaluated emotional intelligence scale and a coping effectiveness scale. The results of the study indicated that:

(a) emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of mental toughness and (b) mental toughness fully mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and coping effectiveness among-high performing adolescent male athletes involved in a variety of sports. (Cowden, 2016, p. 69)

Athletes with higher mental toughness may tend to cope with more ease due to a stronger optimistic nature and a perception of greater control over stressors, therefore, lessening their intensity (Crust & Azadi, 2010). Positive affirmations must be created regarding situations interpreted as threatening by understanding and reorienting emotions (Castro-Sánchez et al., 2018). For an amateur hockey player, this could include a reframing of perception of someone's role on a team, or a change in how they respond to consecutive losses. The function of the players in less prominent roles is difficult to objectively measure (Perlini & Halverson, 2006).

Building Resilience

The public may interpret resiliency as an ability to quickly recover from adversity and stay on track (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2015). Research has shown various approaches for

building resilience. This includes a general sense that influencing factors often include a challenging yet supportive atmosphere. Those factors can include social support systems and the encouragement of experiential learning through means of self-reflection and appropriate adjustment (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2015). The leadership of a team can adopt a strategic solution for developing mental toughness through seeking an optimal balance of friendly competition and structure (Connaughton et al., 2008). Coaches can aim to build resiliency for distinct personalities through various strategies due to individual temperamental differences. Recurring themes include an intense competitive practice environment, deliberate implementation of positivity, and a growth-oriented mindset encouraging positive and instructional feedback with an emphasis on acceptance of differences in ability (Martindale et al., 2005; Shaw, 2018; Weinberg et al., 2011). To be heard and understood in an environment with a growth mentality may increase an athlete's willingness and motivation to commit their focus and concentration on continual healthy pursuits.

Motivation

The competitive nature of amateur sport with pressure to continuously evolve in skill level may result in fluctuating motivational states among youth athletics. Lundqvist and Raglin (2014) explored the notions of need satisfaction, dissatisfaction, perfectionism, and motivation correlating to encapsulate an athlete's sense of wellness and ability to cope with stress. For elite athletics that incorporate intense training, participants may experience periods of depression and anxiety.

Contributing to higher rates of mental health adversity among elite athletes than the general population may include sport-related injury, concussions, performance failure, excessive travel, overtraining, and stigma towards help-seeking (Purcell et al., 2019). There can also be a

payoff and benefit from positive social and physical outcomes, which can result in increased performance and sustained motivation (Harrison & Casto, 2012). It seems that varying levels of competition will influence the degree of motivation to succeed versus attention being pulled by other motivational drives outside of the sporting context, including pleasure-seeking behaviour (Lundqvist & Raglin, 2014).

The terms hedonism and eudaimonism are contrasting philosophical views that are subjectively evaluated based on emotions focused towards a joint and valued aim (Lundqvist & Raglin, 2014). Hedonism concentrates on the emotional encounters among people with a mindset that the essential purpose of a person's life is created through attaining pleasure and enjoyment. In contrast, the eudaimonia tradition places a stronger focus on thriving in life from the challenging pursuit of maximizing one's potential through discovery and mastery of their distinctive qualities. Evaluations of hedonic and eudaimonia well-being have illustrated that stress can offset a person's interpretation of their overall health (Lundqvist & Raglin, 2014). The traditional culture of amateur and professional hockey has been influenced by both hedonistic and eudaimonia perspectives. Research may be scarce on these opposing philosophical views; however, the accounts of numerous retired player biographies suggest that the most successful teams and individuals place a high value on eudaimonia pursuits, but not without varying levels of hedonism. Coping or excessive celebration of victories has included the abuse of drugs and alcohol throughout the culture's past (Dryden, 2017; Fleury & Day, 2009; Probert & Day, 2010).

Well-being motivated by the achievement of goals and a mastery-oriented environment can enhance personal development and cohesion among teammates. An amalgam of need satisfaction, self-esteem, perceived competence, and perfectionism have proven to significantly impact a competitive athlete's overall health (Lundqvist & Raglin, 2014). Strategic marketing of

a trained clinician with knowledge of sports culture may serve to reduce stigma and enhance the utilization of services (Hebard & Lamberson, 2017; McCoy, 2015; Purcell et al., 2019; Shaw, 2018).

Relationship Between Player and Coach

Research has shown the existence of significant positive correlations between contentment with a coach and mental toughness (Rodahl et al., 2015). A total of 154 males (aged 17 to 33) from 10 teams in Norway's professional hockey league participated in a study involving physical testing and a self-reported Sport Mental Toughness Questionnaire (SMTQ) used to assess mental toughness. Participants responded to items using a scale that ranged from 1 (*not true*) to 4 (*very true*) (Rodahl et al., 2015). Following this, the players undertook the Athletic Satisfaction Questionnaire utilized for evaluation of the varying degrees of satisfaction with their coach.

The study had a dual aim in measuring the levels of mental toughness and its correlation with the quality of relationship between a player and their coach (Rodahl et al., 2015). Intercorrelations suggest that there is a link between how players perceive their coaches' conduct with the interpretation of their own mental toughness. This statement supports the notion that mental toughness is not an inborn trait but can also evolve through adequate rapport building between coaches and players for the facilitation of optimal mental health (Rodahl et al., 2015). The player's self-evaluations were relatively high on the mental toughness scales, which may not come as a shock as they are all professionals being compensated for their craft. Research has suggested that elite competitor's attributes, such as mental toughness, are vital for successful performance (Gucciardi & Gordon, 2011). Athletes will encounter oscillation between failure and success, so it is understood that acceptance of disappointments and conflict may enable the

development of mental toughness (Rodahl et al., 2015). It seems that the efficacy of a supportive and encouraging dynamic between coaches and players is a key component for creating resiliency (Connaughton et al., 2008; Gucciardi et al., 2017).

Founded on this outcome, coaches might recognize the need for mental or emotional support outside the scope of their relationship with a player. The provision of a counsellor external to an organization could be the best method for protecting a player's confidentiality and ensuring maximum benefit to the individual and the team. Providing the player ownership through effective communication and long-term goal setting may create the necessary motivation to achieve specific aims (Connaughton et al., 2008; Purcell et al., 2019).

Outside the academic literature, the book *Eleven Rings: The Soul of Success* (2013), written by former National Basketball Association (NBA) coach Phil Jackson, provides excellent insight on the dynamic relationships between player and coach. Much of his success was due to his compassion and ability to generate player connectedness, spontaneity, and creativity combined with a healthy dose of structure. He encouraged players to think for themselves and to find joy in some of the seemingly mundane tasks through the process of a long season. He led his teams to 11 NBA championships between 1991 and 2010 (Jackson & Delehanty, 2013). Unfortunately, it seems enjoyment of sports can be lost when the process becomes restrictive due to injuries, stigma to help-seeking, and lack of counselling advocacy, implementation, and support (Purcell et al., 2019).

Youth Participation

An increase in the early specialization of "one-sport athletes" has created added pressure on young people to enhance mental toughness and strengthen resiliency (Purcell et al., 2019). Youth sport developmental models have recently been following three pathways, including

recreational participation, early specialization, and late entrance for participation (McFadden et al., 2016). The notion that premature single sports concentration will help young athletes gain an advantage over others has been challenged. Research indicates that youth who do not specialize in one sport until adolescence may see psychological and physical benefits (McFadden et al., 2016). McFadden et al. (2016) explored the correlations among “youth hockey players level of specialization, psychological needs satisfaction (PNS), psychological needs dissatisfaction (PND), mental health and mental illness” (p. 1). A sample of 61 male youth hockey players was surveyed online, with findings showing that PND was significantly higher in early specializers compared to recreational athletes (McFadden et al., 2016). Outcomes also indicated that “both PNS and PND predicted mental health and mental illness; however, specialization did not significantly contribute to these predictions” (McFadden et al., 2016, p. 9). Narrowing focus and energy to one sport in adolescent years may create a benefit without hindering performance (Epstein, 2013; Jayanthi et al., 2012). It will be crucial for stakeholders to endorse PNS and lessen PND by avoiding specialization too early and fostering a motivational climate of positivity, support, and empowerment (McFadden et al., 2016). If an adolescent’s narrow sporting focus is not enforced by their parents but rather an autonomous individual choice, which may not always be simple to decipher, it would be reasonable to suggest the likelihood of high PNS and low PND (McFadden et al., 2016).

Another study aimed to compare the psychological effects of early specialization in one sport versus the early diversification of numerous sports on youth athletes. The authors concluded that “specialization-diversification should not be viewed as a dichotomy but rather a continuum” (Baker et al., 2009, p. 86). Homeostatic imbalances could also occur in a family unit from the psychosocial effects of siblings harbouring resentment or jealousy if one or more do not

engage in organized sport (Bean et al., 2014). The psychological effects on adolescent students specializing in one or multiple sports is a subject that may require research to promote optimal athletic development that does not come at the expense of physical and psychological health within a family.

Attachment Adversity and Chronic Stress

Attachment disruption causing psychosocial problems are possible in hockey due to young players leaving their family at a young age and player transactions to different teams. Relationship dynamics are, of course, liable to continuous change creating the potential for attachment adversity issues requiring attention (Spinazzola et al., 2018).

van der Kolk (2005) is an important figure in trauma research. His public offering, through the book *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2015), touches on the science of emotional trauma. Trauma can occur within anyone regardless of the subjective degree of tragedy and possibilities for healing. Multiple variations of trauma and cumulative stressors can occur in childhood, which may result in self-regulation disturbances continuing into adulthood (Cloitre et al., 2009; van der Kolk, 2005, 2015). Fluctuations in teammates and coaches' relationship satisfaction or distress occur through the ebbs and flows of a season; therefore, awareness of self-regulation skills is vital for building resilience and stress recovery (Girme et al., 2018; Loizzo, 2018; Tatnell et al., 2017).

Manifestations of Masculinity

The social context of competitive sports has shown to produce hypermasculine ideologies that may have a detrimental physical and psychological impact on male athletes. Gender socialization can be a hindrance to well-being as a way of regulating conduct within rigid gender role expectations (Ramaeker & Petrie, 2019). Gender role conflict signifies possible negative

consequences, including a restriction in emotionality and affectionate behaviour among men, over-emphasis on competition or success, and difficulties in balancing priorities and relationships. Attention to masculine ideology in sport seems to be gaining momentum but not without deficits. The research illustrates that men who are more likely to conform to typical North American masculine norms have shown less willingness toward help-seeking (Ramaeker & Petrie, 2019). Endorsing adaptability of masculinity norms at post-secondary institutions may foster the progressive movement towards higher numbers of athletes accessing mental health services (Ramaeker & Petrie, 2019).

Contributing to the masculinity norms of amateur Canadian hockey players has been the traditionally aggressive nature of the game and culture (Cusimano et al., 2016; Dryden, 2017; Probert & Day, 2010). The social context has certainly evolved with a gradual shift towards the encouragement of speed and skill throughout the 15 years; however, remnants of unnecessary violence that was once accepted and endorsed will still manifest occasionally. Alcohol use has been associated with masculinity as a symbolic representation of being a “man.” Previous research has shown connections between binge drinking and violence (Ramaeker & Petrie, 2019).

From the research, it seems that hypermasculine sports such as football and hockey have accepted and even promoted risky behaviours (i.e., playing through painful injuries) and violence. Players often need to decipher the potential risks of competing despite the potential for further harm by remaining in competition with an injury. The idealization of a player who pushes through the pain and sacrifices his physical well-being for the betterment of his team can hit a threshold prompting mental and emotional health issues (Bauman, 2016). Despite the many

benefits of hockey participation, legal body-checking and aggressive play is correlated with multiple concussions and other injuries (Cusimano et al., 2016; DeMatteo et al., 2010).

Aggressive play and revenge-seeking conduct was investigated among 61 minor hockey participants from Ontario, including parents, coaches, trainers, managers, and one referee (Cusimano et al., 2016). The predominant theme was the notion that “hostile aggression” can inflict harm. In contrast, “instrumental aggression” is a necessary action for advancing successfully within the rules (Cusimano et al., 2016, p. 5). This attitudinal approach is tolerated by most and further perpetuated by peers, coaches, sports broadcasters, and the professionals that many young players idolize. The discovery of methods to amend this recurrent theme is necessary to achieve real change (Cusimano et al., 2016). The results could be used to aid the development of interventions for lessening aggression and subsequent injuries.

Multiple brands of developing masculine identity lie on a continuum across a variety of contexts (Cusimano et al., 2016). Toxic masculinity is a notion discussed in the literature and sometimes in mainstream culture, referring to traits reduced to a singular construct that can be detrimental to the individual and collective welfare (Lomas et al., 2015). This might include a “win at all costs” attitude leading to anger or violence. Outside the academic literature, psychotherapist Kingma (1993) wrote a book titled, *The Men We Never Knew: Women’s Role in the Evolution of a Gender*. She discusses how cultural influences have oppressed sensitivity in males emotionally, sexually, spiritually, and creatively and how women can help men be more expressive (Kingma, 1993). One article in current literature aligns with Kingma’s message demonstrating the notion of a causal link between empathy and support impacting the health of spousal relationships (Verhofstadt et al., 2016).

Another perspective on masculine norms involves the desire of football players to be muscular, not only for optimal performance but for peer approval in terms of “physical appearance, conformity and sex appeal” (Steinfeldt & Gilchrist, et al., 2011, p. 324). The model of muscularity or optimal fitness could generate positive self-image but also the potential for unreasonable expectations. If managed mindfully with small incremental steps towards enhancing body image, depression or anxiety symptoms may be less likely to show. Exemplary intangible masculine traits such as accountability and responsibility can be channelled effectively by placing emphasis on skill, creativity, and team success rather than unnecessary violence (Steinfeldt & Foltz et al., 2011).

Psychosocial Factors of Masculine Norms

Cultural norms can indirectly affect an increased possibility of harmful incidents (Johnson & Ivarsson, 2017). Psychosocial factors may enhance the probability of becoming injured during action within contact sport (Bauman, 2016; Ivarsson et al., 2016). Exposure to prolonged periods of stress can lead to a decrease in brain functioning between the right and left cerebral hemispheres, which can negatively impact decision-making (Ivarsson et al., 2016). Three psychosocial factors that may influence an athlete’s stress response and situational awareness can be separated broadly as personality variables, a history of stressors, and the individual’s capacity for coping (Ivarsson et al., 2016, p. 354).

Ivarsson et al. (2016) explored the effect of team social dynamics on injury occurrences and the impact of therapeutic interventions created to lessen harmful incidents. A higher number of injuries correlate with poor team objective performance All variations of intervention programs, including psychological skills training, cognitive-behavioural therapy, and mindfulness, showed similar results (Edvardsson et al., 2012; Ivarsson et al., 2015). The purpose

of a sport-specific intervention will aim to lessen stress-related brain activity contributing to cognitive impairments such as attention and neurocognitive response time (Ivarsson et al., 2016). Because stress seems to be the “biopsychosocial construct that has the strongest relationship with injury occurrence, psychosocial-based interventions should include programs targeting stress management skills” (Ivarsson et al., 2016, p. 363). The implementation of a strength training program modified for both midseason and offseason involving a biomechanical injury prevention program could be tracked with the guidance of a competent counsellor to maximize benefit (Ivarsson et al., 2016).

Awareness regarding the impact of adverse psychosocial influences within hockey is improving with more focus on player safety in recent years (Cusimano et al., 2016; McCoy, 2015). Social constructionist scholars suggest that masculinity research should include a contextual investigation of the varying forms of masculine identity manifesting within different subcultures (Coles, 2009). An interview sample of 10 National Collegiate Athletic Association football coaches illustrates six dominant themes including:

- i) being a man means being accountable and responsible, ii) coaches teach players what it means to be a man, iii) the sport of football teaches players what it means to be a man, iv) coaches reframe emotion, v) coaches minimize the role of race, and vi) psychologists have an important role. (Steinfeldt & Foltz, et al., 2011, p. 247)

Numerous investigations portray the contextual origin of masculine subcultural norms and their effect on gender role expectations. The notion of “habitus” touches on a subconscious process based on experience and present expectations (Coles, 2009). A synchronization occurs within the environment that serves to create a team driven by a common objective and intention rather than a governed set of rules (Coles, 2009). The unique environment of team sports could provide the

opportunity to teach youth honourable ways to act like an adult male resulting in patterns of serviceable and appropriate conduct (Martin & Harris, 2006). Examination of male authorities who are a primary source of masculinity models will provide more clarity on how sports influence masculinity socialization (Steinfeldt & Foltz, et al., 2011). Future research might also need to examine the support available for coaches and not just the players.

Steinfeldt and Foltz, et al. (2011) did not fully support the assumption that coaches endorse hypermasculine behaviours such as being “tough” or “stoic with emotions.” Instead, they demonstrate the various coaches interviewed as a diverse group defining their masculinity in different ways (Steinfeldt et al., 2009). The most noticeable finding in the study is that National Collegiate Athletic Association coaches promoted accountability and responsibility as vital traits for beneficial masculine behaviour (Steinfeldt & Foltz et al., 2011). Coaches place a high value on psychosocial development from experiential learning, which can lead to more successful, responsible, and accountable men within all aspects of life (Steinfeldt & Foltz, et al., 2011).

The characteristics of what is called “hegemonic masculinity” evident in sport can include strength, speed, acceptance of potential harm, and lack of empathy for competitors (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). Elite sport settings that privilege specific forms of hegemonic masculinity have, at times, shown to accept subcultures that exclude and abuse males who embody alternate forms of masculinity. This could include males outside of sport who embody traits of small, effeminate, and weaker bodies (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). A closer examination of masculine and feminine qualities suggests that “the traits of masculinity and femininity occur in both men and women, sometimes with equal magnitude, and such qualities are not mutually exclusive” (Donnelly & Twenge, 2016, p. 557). Ramaeker and Petrie (2019)

discuss the hesitancy of emotional expression and affection among men influenced by masculine gender roles and their contribution to psychological distress or problematic behaviour. Donnelly and Twenge (2016) suggest that future research is needed to reveal more current conceptualizations of gender. In a review of the literature, it seems that further discussion on the continuum of masculine and feminine traits might be helpful. This could eventually lead to the conversation regarding the construction of interventions aimed to elicit cathartic emotional processing for the benefit of men's mental health and flexibility in gender roles.

Mental Health Outcomes

Team Cohesion

Current team success or lack thereof will certainly affect an athlete's degree of wellness. A seemingly sensible notion that strong group cohesion will heighten performance is not always beneficial to team success (Carbonell & Rodríguez Escudero, 2018; Rovio et al., 2009). Influential pressures encouraging norm conformity can eventually lead a team to hit a tipping point contributing to a decline in the team's performance (Rovio et al., 2009). For teams that lack a strong value towards success and productivity, a high level of cohesion can become counterproductive. Conversely, external activities and groups might also interfere with team events which can threaten a collective identity and influence team dynamics (Carbonell & Rodríguez Escudero, 2018; Pescosolido & Saavedra, 2012; Purcell et al., 2019; Rovio et al., 2009).

The intention to preserve harmony may not be a beneficial course of action if the group dynamics are collectively moving towards less productive behaviours. When cohesion is high, athletes with a tendency of occasional limiting behaviour may justify showing less effort. Rovio et al. (2009) noted that conversely, when cohesion is low, players tend to make fewer excuses for

their actions and might conduct themselves with increased fortitude and enthusiasm to make a positive difference. Strong cohesion can be inversely impactful when maintaining group homeostasis, and this factor can become a more important focus than the task of winning games. Situational demands may require a degree of conflict resolution to redirect the group's aim (Rovio et al., 2009). The previously discussed study of hedonic and eudaimonia drives has a similar observation in that maintaining peace or pursuit of pleasure may come at the expense of goal-driven habits (Lundqvist & Raglin, 2014).

This research may provide some explanation of how a team can obtain a respectably high number of consecutive victories followed by a streak of losses as ever-changing dynamics might gravitate towards complacency when positive expectations are incongruent with consistently appropriate effort (Rovio et al., 2009). A by-product of each player striving for optimal health in setting boundaries outside of hockey could result in improved team resiliency for cocreating effective, shared strategies to aid in group success (Carbonell & Rodríguez Escudero, 2018; Girme et al., 2018; Pescosolido & Saavedra, 2012).

Sport-Specific Interventions

This section will expand on the unique variances in cultural norms across multiple sports by investigating the possible benefit of sport-specific interventions. Research has explored and clarified some of the reasons or barriers impeding athlete's utilization of mental health services (Gavrilova & Donohue, 2018; Robinson et al., 2007; Shaw, 2018). The development of optimization-focused mental health and sport performance interventions specific to different sports is an ongoing process (Gavrilova & Donohue, 2018; Purcell et al., 2019). The comprehensive and adaptive framework proposed by Purcell et al. (2019) identifies athlete-specific risk factors responsive to varying levels of skill and mental health (Purcell et al., 2019).

Research suggests that the best approach for facilitating more engagement among athletes is to provide strategies that will concurrently improve athletic performance with enhanced mental health and wellness (Gavrilova & Donohue, 2018; Purcell et al., 2019).

The theoretical perspective on the ecology of human development was first discussed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), which conceptualizes the dynamic interaction between a developing person and their ecological environment. An ecological systems model modified for elite athletes will ensure that factors from a broad perspective are taken into consideration to avoid pathologizing an individual athlete. This model illustrated three spheres of influence outside of the individual athlete, including a microsystem (e.g., coaches, families, friends, and staff), an exosystem (e.g., the unique sport), and a macrosystem (e.g., broad sporting environment, social or mainstream media) (Purcell et al., 2019). In addition to the above factors, the model also incorporated a prevention and early intervention spectrum. The model encompasses individually focused development for influencing a non-athletic identity and skills for maintaining sport-life equilibrium necessary for the inevitable adjustment from competitive athletics to other priorities or vocations (McCoy, 2015; Purcell et al., 2019).

Individual counselling or psychotherapy can focus on role transitions utilized to facilitate a change in an athlete's life trajectory (McCoy, 2015; Purcell et al., 2019; Todd et al., 2018). McCoy (2015) examined the effects of various changes on players and their level of support, which indicated that further investigation is needed for the utility of providing transitional interventions specific to unique sport environments. The tragic outcome of career transitions has resulted in numerous suicides among amateur and professional players. The abrupt nature of some of these transitions has put these athletes at risk. McCoy suggests there is a need for

increased resources and support by implementing transitional interventions to lessen the stress of a player nearing the end of their time in the CHL.

Thirteen years ago, Robinson et al. (2007) investigated the AJHL by assessing coaches' perceptions of referral and collaboration with counsellors for the precise needs of their players. With the need for increased support, offering psychological services is necessary as many coaches prefer to resolve player concerns themselves (Robinson et al., 2007). This could potentially create a conflict of interest and lessen a player's willingness to be open and vulnerable for fear of stigma or reduction in playing time. There is evidence that awareness and advocacy have improved in junior hockey, with teams holding special mental health advocacy events before games (King, 2017).

However, the provision of support external to the coaching staff is necessary. The framework proposed by Purcell et al. (2019) could be modified to the benefit of hockey organizations by tailoring interventions applicable to ongoing team dynamics and for help with career transitions (McCoy, 2015). A possible contributor to hockey-specific counselling for an off-season could be a self-authoring narrative, including goal-setting interventions that have shown to have substantial benefit with academic performance (Morisano et al., 2010). During the season, mindfulness may be an appropriate modality as training has been shown to benefit mental health and enhance flow state among athletes (Chen et al., 2018; Jackson & Delehanty, 2013; Miller, 2001).

Effects of Concussions

A significant risk factor and ongoing concern within hockey is the impact of head trauma and its contribution to psychiatric illnesses (Dryden, 2017; Todd et al., 2018; Valovich McLeod et al., 2017). An analysis of 20 interviews from participants, which included coaches, parents,

professional players, and physicians, showed results of a common biographical theme where a player's identity as a hockey player was disturbed from concussion injury. Many players will experience dizziness followed by periods of reclusion, stigma, and the absence of a clear direction for their life (Todd et al., 2018). The process of biographical disruption can be referred to as a progression through chronic illness in which a former way of living is no longer feasible (Todd et al., 2018, p. 11).

Recent decades have seen an increase in focus on overall health care towards examining players showing concussion symptoms (Kelly & Erdahl, 2016; Valovich McLeod et al., 2017). Enhanced awareness on the relationship between concussions and mental health can offer health care professionals recommendations for clinical practice. One approach includes age-appropriate screening tools and multimodal assessments of symptoms, cognition, balance, and oculomotor function for overall health (Valovich McLeod et al., 2017). A collaborative group of healthcare providers could cooperate in assessing and treating the physical, psychological, and emotional symptoms of brain trauma to develop a concussion management plan or other unique interventions (Valovich McLeod et al., 2017). A best-practice guideline for treating possible brain trauma should involve a multi-factorial evaluation of the player, including a neurological history of symptoms and neurocognitive performance and motor control (Broglia et al., 2014). A 'return-to-play' decision will come when the player no longer reports or displays concussion-related symptoms through objective assessments by professionals (Broglia et al., 2014).

Unfortunately, not every player recovers from brain trauma in a desired efficient period. Esopenko et al.'s (2017) experiment entailed a comparison of hockey player participants ranging from ages 34–71 to a sample of non-hockey player participants. The questionnaires measured cognitive ability in terms of psychosocial and psychiatric functioning. Common themes in group

differences regarding cognitive performance and intellectual functioning correlated with the experience of concussion impact (Esopenko et al., 2017). Hockey players will own unique neurocognitive and neuromuscular capacities from exposure to stressors and attributes. These presentations are not typical in the general population, thus creating unique health concerns (Esopenko et al., 2017; Valovich McLeod et al., 2017). These stressors can lead to a high degree of alcohol and substance abuse, which have been evident in athlete populations, further contributing to impairments (Martens et al., 2006; Raemaker & Petrie, 2019).

Furthermore, specific sites in the brain of previously concussed junior hockey players and their varying degrees of injury severity illustrate the function of various locations. The most commonly injured sites noted as T6 (affiliated with the integration of social, behavioural, and verbal cues) and F8 (suspected to be a source of rumination and anxiety) are near the right ear likely from side impacts with opponents and the glass surrounding the ice surface (Donaldson et al., 2018). Mindfulness exercises are a possible antidote as they have been shown to have some positive effects on the brain's recovery process (Bay & Chan, 2018; Jackson & Delehanty, 2013).

Concussion management and counselling interventions will also necessitate adaptation to the needs of female players undergoing different biological and social pressures. Specifically, this could include biomechanical variances. These could include, but are not limited to, neck strength, hormonal variability affecting the amount of blood flow to the brain, and cultural influences. The cultural influences suggest that female players may be more likely to report concussion symptoms (McGuckin et al., 2016, p. 429). The unique experience of hockey players will need further investigation to manage varying degrees of attachment adversity and recovery from chronic stressors (Bay & Chan, 2018; Loizzo, 2018; Spinazzola et al., 2018).

Phenomenological Research

The concept of transcendental phenomenology utilized by Moustakas (1994) based on principles recognized by philosopher Edmund Husserl could be a qualitative method for researchers to use in their investigation of hockey culture. The philosophical approach is grounded in the notion that all perspectives cannot be seen at once, so setting aside preconceived ideas for a more comprehensive understanding is abstract in the experiential or transcendental paradigm. The aim is to neutralize subjectivity and prevent bias. The researcher will assume a “not-knowing” stance to bracket bias and limit presuppositions from their own experience and aim to perceive an experience as if for the first time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach could be appropriate for exploring the common “what” (textural description) and “how” (structural description) shared experience in the junior and university leagues through a sample of current and former players.

Summary of the Literature

With the complexity of challenges players face when engaged in the competitive hockey world, it seems that accessible counselling during this epoch will be helpful. However, the dominant culture has traditionally adopted a focus on hypermasculinity that can stigmatize showing any need for help or weakness. The pressures of performance provide reasons for youth to continue pushing forward and not seek help. Players may not want to be perceived as unfit and may believe that maintaining the appearance of strength and confidence is important to cement their position on a team. Injuries and concussions are often thought of as inevitable aspects of the game meant to be powered through, and fans and media have glorified players who make sacrifices for the betterment of team goals. Lack of support and counselling around the challenges these youth face often lead them to seek out unhealthy ways of coping with stress.

An integrated counselling approach to this experience would benefit young adults to find healthy strategies and increase resiliency while pursuing their dream. Evidence of efficacy and outcome measures on sport-specific interventions is currently lacking and requires further investigation (Gavrilova & Donohue, 2018; Gerlach, 2018; Hebard & Lamberson, 2017; Purcell et al., 2019). The culture (at various levels) will need to be strategically challenged for sustainable change. This could include the encouragement of coaches and management to treat their players as complex and unique individuals within a dynamic group environment rather than another team member to jostle with.

Implications for Counselling Psychology

The preceding literature review demonstrates clear implications for counselling psychology, including the need to implement sport-specific mental health programs and to then assess the efficacy of the uniquely tailored interventions. A public portrayal of aggression, the glorification of continuing play through injury, and mental illness stigma continues to impact the multi-dimensional layers of health in hockey. There is evidence that sports psychiatrists working within an organization can benefit the building of trust with consistent presence around a team (Morse, 2013). The employment of an in-house psychologist may not be feasible or the most ethical and efficient approach due to budget considerations within junior, college, and university organizations. Psychologists should advocate for the improvement of mental health literacy among parents. This will benefit their youth as early prevention through community sports clubs prior to junior and post-secondary league competition (Hurley et al., 2018). This should contribute to an increased level of skill in coping mechanisms prior to the launching of adolescent athletes moving away from home. The inclusion of a collaborative and integrative

effort among various health care providers will certainly benefit the individual and collective holistic health surrounding the hockey environment.

The ecological systems model for athletes proposed by Purcell et al. (2019) focuses on three key points. These include (a) the need to improve individual self-management skills, (b) key stakeholder's response to mental health concerns, and (c) the need for multi-disciplinary teams to provide appropriate interventions and support. Furthermore, advocacy for improving mental health literacy, athletic and personal development, and mental health screening at all phases with an organization should be considered (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Morisano et al., 2010; Purcell et al., 2019, p. 3). Workshops within community sports clubs may be an effective early intervention to equip parents with increased knowledge and competence for sustaining their child's mental health. Athletes and their parents exposed to relevant psychoeducation may be more prepared with coping skills to face unexpected challenges throughout their child's athletic journey. There is evidence that parents who participate in brief intervention seminars support adolescent mental health outcomes (Hurley et al., 2018). The following sections will include further implications for the context of therapy or counselling in the hockey culture. This includes psychoeducation, mental health literacy, current notions of trauma, social hierarchies, masculine ideology, and concussions. Following these implications, suggestions for the next steps in research are unpacked, leading to proposed recommendations for practice.

Psychoeducation

Counselling psychologists intending to work with young male athletes should have a strong awareness of masculine norms prevalent in the sporting context, concussion prevention, and various evidence-based techniques for social and emotional processing. Providing psychoeducation on the culture of hockey, including its history, evolution, and potential future

will benefit minor hockey parents, organizations, and the junior, college, and university leagues (Dryden, 2017). The following are potential topics for discussion within psychoeducation modalities and interventions for amateur Canadian hockey organizations.

Mental Health Literacy

Psychologists directing attention to the powerful effect of language and speech regarding mental health may benefit minor hockey stakeholders. It is debatable that a threshold exists when excessive focus on issues like depression and anxiety can begin to do more harm than good with prolonged attention on the problem rather than the solution. It seems that if mental ill-health terminology is continually and repetitively discussed among laypersons, the source of fear-based emotions generated from parents can have subsequent negative consequences on their children. Precision of speech and language is immensely powerful and beneficial for affecting positive change; however, words can also act as a virus if opinions and perspectives are not delivered and received mindfully. This includes the need to raise awareness regarding the reduced effectiveness in communication through modern technology and social media. Albert Einstein allegedly stated, “I fear the day when the technology overlaps with our humanity. The world will only have a generation of idiots” (as cited in Holdeman, 2013, p.1). Whether he truly made this statement is irrelevant in terms of the intent and meaning of the message, which is that face to face interaction is likely more effective to potentially resolve differences or misconstructions.

When taken out of context, any conversation about others who are not directly present may restrict our depth and breadth of interpersonal and intrapersonal connection possibly creating misunderstandings. Any discussion of disorders or diagnostics that pathologize and isolate an individual must consider the broad ecological system of a team, family, and community, including the impact of technology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Some individuals learn

to cope with stress more efficiently than some of their peers, but the effect of parents and coaches must not be ignored. The individual response of someone diagnosed will vary on a case by case basis in any environment. Some may interpret a diagnosis as helpful and reassuring due to a better understanding, containment of the issue, and realization that they are not alone. At the same time, another person may perceive it as a fault and experience shame or guilt from the label. Emotional co-regulation of people within an environment must be accounted for when discussing mental health issues (Soma et al., 2019). Co-creating a culture of seamless collaboration should be the aim which could have widespread implications for improving the collective health of any community. That said, self-regulation skills for building resilience might be best to focus on for improving a person's adaptive competence and to avoid high levels of codependency.

Early prevention and intervention should include not only a focus on the child athlete's mental health but also that of their parents and their chosen language for its impact. Young players may be encouraged to engage in sport psychology books specifically written for hockey players to help connect literacy with labelling emotion (Hamptonstone, 2016; Miller, 2001). Repetitive consumption of this literature might benefit them on the ice as well as improving effectiveness in relationships outside the arena.

Trauma Responses and Attachment Adversity

Players can experience varying degrees of trauma affecting the regulation of their emotion during a season, which can be especially difficult for a young athlete who has moved many miles away from their familiar support system. An expansive re-conceptualization of trauma within the hockey context could include the impact of concussions causing emotional dysregulation or potential attachment injury due to player trades and leaving the family at a

young age. Psychoeducation on attachment adversity and resilience could benefit a player. Awareness of attachment styles and repetitive relationship dynamics with parents might generate insight to past behaviour (e.g., triangles, circular feedback loops, pathologizing). However, within hockey it might be best to build self-regulation techniques for reducing codependency and resolving perpetual unhealthy patterns (Cloitre et al., 2009; Girme et al., 2018; Tatnell et al., 2017). Awareness and resolution of unhealthy attachment or relational patterns will hopefully lead to greater autonomy and agency of an individual to self-regulate and look inward for entering a vocation that will positively serve their community (van der Kolk, 2015).

Multiple sources express an expansive concept of trauma, including less obvious cumulative day to day stressors and microtraumas originating in childhood (Loizzo, 2018; Matei, 2019; van der Kolk, 2015). Further awareness of this literacy could increase acceptance towards healing within individuals feeling guilt or rationalizing their experience in comparison to more obvious horrific tragedies but still operating at low levels of despair.

An example of potential abrupt emotional events is player transactions that occur within the junior leagues altering the world of the young athlete, which can be a challenge to process (especially if unexpected). The players are required to leave their peers and billet family with one team and move to a different town without any control once a decision is made by team management. This can result in attachment injury or adversity depending on the individual somatic response (Girme et al., 2018; Loizzo, 2018; Spinazzola et al., 2018). Events that quickly alter the player's expectations will need to be treated with appropriate situational awareness. Most coaches and management are not adequately trained with an understanding of the impact varying forms of sudden life-altering events can have on the autonomic nervous system affecting an individual's ability to self-regulate (Cloitre et al., 2009; van der Kolk, 2005, 2015). There are

signs of promise suggesting the antidote to ease trauma or stress reactivity and build resilience could be attained through narrative reframing (self-authoring), intensive breathwork, mindfulness and yoga (Bay & Chan, 2018; Loizzo, 2018; Spinazzola et al., 2018).

Social Hierarchies

Underlying contributions to mental health challenges in youth hockey, masculine ideology, and concussions are influenced by varying presentations of hierarchies across hockey landscapes. Most parents obviously desire to see their child perform well; however, some will cross boundaries from benevolence to malevolence in pursuit of their child's athletic success. Some parents can demonstrate inappropriate behaviour in the ecological context of youth hockey, providing a poor model for children. This can include verbal abuse or coercive measures involving coaches, referees, and other parents. The routes to attaining prominence and influence within a social hierarchy as a coach or a player may need to be discussed within hockey interventions to encourage and regulate acceptable behaviour. The quality of relationships between coaches and players not only influences team performance but also mental health outcome beyond the hockey arena (Connaughton et al., 2008; Rodahl et al., 2015). The fact that coaching staff will have more years of hockey experience does not necessarily equate to strong and healthy coping mechanisms. A well-educated and self-aware coach is better entailed to optimally balance the pressure to win without applying unnecessary force on players, therefore being a contributor to holistic health challenges.

The focus of clinicians working in hockey will be to guide clients in further understanding themselves within their environment and to formulate goals that emphasize growth in skills and interpersonal effectiveness. This will include eliciting awareness that strong team cohesion does not always equate to success. Strong cohesion can hit a tipping point when

proper aim and focus towards eudaimonia pursuits are not sustained due to excessive pull towards hedonistic distractions (Lundqvist & Raglin, 2014; Pescosolido & Saavedra, 2012). The individual who aims for continuous humble self-improvement with interpersonal and intrapersonal competence could experience less conflict with teammates and coaches. The antidote to personal and team struggles in therapy may be to encourage client responsibility and congruence, eliminating discrepancies in their words and actions (Erford, 2015). Coaches are more effective by encouraging player unity, connectedness, and an appropriate degree of autonomy without surrendering final authority (Jackson & Delehanty, 2013).

Research in social psychology suggests that the three distinct yet not mutually exclusive avenues for attaining status include virtue, competence, and dominance (Bai, 2016). When a player has a highly impactful game, the performance is often described as “dominant” in the context of hockey culture even when the player demonstrated pure skill, speed, and talent more-so than brute force or intimidation tactics. In many cases, the word competence is a more precise and appropriate verbal expression. Describing a performance as highly competent does not have the same “ring” among laypersons as expressions of aggression such as “he’s killing it” or “he hammered him” to describe someone playing well or a body check, respectively. Conversations about the distinction between colloquialism in the hockey culture versus what is appropriate in other settings may elicit awareness among players to invest more in taking responsibility for the precision of speech, language, and nonverbal expression. Physicality is part of the fabric of hockey, and a certain degree of aggression is legal including body contact in areas above the waist and below the head to minimize injury. Controlled aggression within the rules of the game is a beneficial emotional release for males in hockey and an aspect that stakeholders appreciate.

Challenging common phrases heard in the hockey culture may benefit therapy or counselling sessions. *Competence* can be defined as the embodiment of skill utilizing precise information for achieving concisely concrete goals (Bai, 2016). From an ecological systems perspective, the current spectrum of avenues to a higher status in the “exosystem” of hockey seems to have swung toward a greater emphasis on competence and virtue and less on dominance (Purcell et al., 2019, p. 3).

A therapist with experience in sports may want to first empathize and aim to understand but also to subtly challenge narratives if there are signs of incongruence between words and action to benefit their team and personal relationships (Erford, 2015). The concept of minimum necessary force might be applied by the therapist, which can be defined as the smallest possible intervention, which will vary contingent on situational demands (Peterson, 2018, p. 349). Dosing and spacing of subtle verbal and nonverbal interventions between empathic confrontation and acceptance, allowing a client space for autonomous insight will differ among players and context (Erford, 2015). At times, a player might need a space to be vulnerable and to speak openly about their challenges. An empathic and healthy counsellor with finely tuned sensory acuity might tune in to the degree a client is currently sensitive and vulnerable and at such moments an empathic confrontation may be inappropriate with the potential to do more harm than good. Encouragement of the player to trust their own direct experience and benevolence for the greater good is necessary for emotional support.

The application of the smallest possible intervention could result in a quick connection and might lead to client insight regarding the necessity of a certain degree of stress in the aim for peak performance. Consistent and gradual effort towards concrete goals can create enjoyment, enthusiasm, and the possibility of entering a flow state in relationship to the environment on and

off the ice (Chen et al., 2018). However, it seems a tipping point exists on a curve of emotional arousal. Thought and actions that are overly excited and focused on the outcome rather than the minute incremental steps in a process have the potential to hinder on-ice performance (Miller, 2001).

Implementation of professionals that encourage situational appropriate verbal and nonverbal economy of expression could lead to strengthening a client's adaptive competence and insight. Eudaimonia aim such as the development of interpersonal relationship skills could have a widespread positive impact on peers, family, and the broader community. Self-care, including nutrition and sleep, is vitally important, and the ecological systems model could be shown to the player for emphasis and graphic evidence (Lundqvist & Raglin, 2014; Purcell et al., 2019).

Dosing and spacing of the smallest possible interventions in conversation regarding nutrition and sleep hygiene might lead players to stronger mental health.

Much like the discussion on the continuum of masculine and feminine traits by Donnelly and Twenge (2016), the three routes of status attainment in social hierarchies could be discerned as an amalgam of behaviours rather than rigid and separate actions. Acting with varying degrees of magnitude between virtue and competence seems to be what NHL leaders demonstrate, both past and present. Raising awareness of the moral actions of current successful players may benefit youth hockey players through moments of psychoeducation. Research in masculine ideology could benefit clinicians for better understanding hockey clients; however, it might already be a topic to discuss in therapy, process groups, or open forums for amateur hockey stakeholders.

Masculine Ideology

As discussed in the literature review, numerous abstractions of masculinity will manifest in sport, and different teams will demonstrate their unique variations. A notion for psychologists to discuss in practice is the antidote to detrimental masculine norms and the traits that are most beneficial to the broad environment of Western culture (Lomas et al., 2015). The American Psychological Association's (2018) *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men* suggests that psychologists encourage boys and men to promote healthy behaviours despite various social pressures. It is important to educate clients on the restrictive nature of masculine norms and their relationship to health risk behaviours (American Psychological Association, 2018). It seems that gender-appropriate behaviour is difficult to define.

Toxic masculinity as mentioned by Lomas et al. (2015), seems to express a tone that could potentially denigrate males and create unnecessary conflict between the sexes. A lack of effective coping techniques for emotion regulation leading to aggression and potential violence may be a more precise description of the issue that can be harmful to well-being. With that said, it might not be helpful to refer to any emotion as toxic. In my opinion, anger, shame, guilt, and a myriad of other finely tuned emotional responses are part of the human condition with origins beyond our control. Like Frankl stated (1946/2006), the space between a stimulus that might elicit anger or guilt and our response to that impetus lies our opportunity for growth and freedom. There are socially acceptable places and moments to feel these emotions, and clinicians should help clients be cognizant of potential dilemmas associated with the location of their expression. I think there is nothing toxic about the masculine or the feminine and would prefer to ignore ideology that reduces masculinity to various abstract denigrations.

It is debatable that humanity, in its entirety, has been in a predominantly masculine energy field for thousands of years involving destructive violence and war. From a wide

spectrum of analysis, the term “wounded masculine and feminine,” which is not found in the academic literature but in some circles online, is a more compassionate phrase for illustrating common male challenges of the past and present (Lara, 2019; Lockard, 2019). The antidote to support a wounded male might be an empathic ear and encouragement towards grounded responsibility and purpose for collective well-being. However, catharsis might be necessary to move forward with more emotional depth for interpersonal and intrapersonal connectedness (Lara, 2019; Lockard, 2019). Pathologizing normal human behaviour that does not fit a civilized structure for what is a long-term ecological systemic condition seems to demonstrate short-sightedness and inadequate understanding.

The meaning of the term wounded masculine is aligned with the adverse consequences of gender role conflict discussed by Ramaeker and Petrie (2019). Perhaps the interpretation of abstract notions of masculinity (e.g., hegemonic or toxic), including wounded masculine, could be discussed further in academic research to gain a more conscientious understanding of the current struggles affecting males. Educating amateur hockey members about an ever-changing continuum of masculine and feminine traits could be a precarious and seemingly irrelevant task, especially with consideration of stigma and the typical mindset athletes express towards mental health services (Donnelly & Twenge, 2016; Shaw, 2018; Wasylkiw & Clairo, 2018). However, within the therapy room, empathically probing players to question certain masculine norms or narratives could be a place to start. The intent of a therapist might be to accept the client fully while also heightening their awareness of chosen words, thoughts, and actions for their effect on others both within and outside of the hockey arena (Rogers, 1961).

Concussion Prevention and Management

Conceptualizations of trauma discussed earlier should include the management of brain injury for returning to play, which may include group mindfulness exercises (Bay & Chan, 2018). Sidney Crosby and Eric Lindros are arguably two of professional hockey's most valuable players in the past three decades whose careers have been seriously impacted by concussions. Due to the financial implications of popular NHL players obtaining significant injuries, steps to improve the odds of prevention have been evident in the form of rule changes and stricter penalties for hits to the head. From a layperson's perspective, there has been a cultural shift among leagues at various levels by implementing stricter penalties for body checks to the head. Widespread recognition of the long-term detrimental effects among retired players (including depression, anxiety, and post-concussion syndrome) has increased the respect players have for each other on the ice (Dryden, 2017; Esopenko et al., 2017).

In 2018, the NHL settled a lawsuit for nearly \$19 million which equated to \$22,000 being dispersed to 300 retired players impacted by concussions. Some of these players may have experienced chronic traumatic encephalopathy; however, confusion and controversy remain as NHL commissioner Gary Bettman has consistently denied a definite association between blows to the head and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (Smith et al., 2019; Whyno, 2019).

Beyond legalities and posturing, there is no doubt that repeated contact to the head has seriously impacted players during their careers and in retirement (Esopenko et al., 2017; Todd et al., 2018). Implementation of mindfulness when executed effectively has proven to benefit individuals reducing stress associated with traumatic brain injury. There is evidence that it can improve attention, executive functioning, and self-efficacy (Bay & Chan, 2018). Strategic maneuvering by team trainers could help keep a player engaged with the group with small incremental exercises while monitoring for post-concussion symptoms (Clement et al., 2013). It

is possible that using mindfulness as part of an intervention in practice could speed the recovery for return to play (and healing in retirement) as it might tap into the brain's capacity to change and heal itself (Doidge, 2007). The NHL has a procedure referred to as "the quiet room" where the team's physician will conduct tests on a player following significant head contact during a game or practice. A decision will then be made collaboratively regarding a safe timeline for the player to return to play.

Further research on return to play programs and advancements in brain science may reduce persistent cognitive impairments (Bruce et al., 2016; Donaldson et al., 2018; McGowan et al., 2018). Computerized neuropsychological tests are utilized yearly among NHL players to examine the difference between the most recent baseline test and post-concussion performance for predicting cognitive change (Bruce et al., 2016). Perceptual-based switch tasks that shift visuospatial attention can measure a player's cognitive flexibility and may help to determine when a player is fit to return (McGowan et al., 2018). Combining these tests with mindfulness techniques may help track a player's progress throughout the recovery process (Bay & Chan, 2018). The decision on when it is safe to return to play, however, is best to proceed with a collaborative approach, including pediatricians and experts in brain science taking consideration of the athlete's previous baseline testing scores (Bruce et al., 2016). The need to adapt to the needs of female players in college or university undergoing different social influences must also be considered (McGuckin et al., 2016).

Fundamental Next Steps for Research

Research on the effectiveness of sport-specific mental health interventions could eventually lead to progress in generating hierarchies and masculine norms, entailing stronger morality and flexibility. At this juncture, proposed frameworks for sport counselling

interventions have been created, but there has yet to be studies on their efficacy (Purcell et al., 2019). Increasing the scientific knowledge and awareness of the challenges these athletes face could have a widespread positive impact on the quality of relationships during and following their playing careers. Purcell et al. (2019) propose that the efficacy of sport counselling interventions should include an ecological systems approach to avoid pathologizing individual players experiencing difficulties (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Best practice should not only see interventions for the players but also coaches and management developing a thorough understanding of the ongoing systemic dynamics of a team. University, college, and junior organizations should be involved in consultation with athlete mental health initiatives and adaptations, which could include mental health literacy or psychoeducation programs. These should also involve minor hockey stakeholders to increase the odds of alignment and unison with the language that is being delivered at a grassroots level (Wilkie, 2019).

Qualitative Research

Directing focus away from ideology towards a more comprehensive understanding of junior, university, and college hockey players could be discovered through qualitative research. A transcendental phenomenological study could include participants of current and former players to gain a long-term experiential perspective of the changes in culture (Dryden, 2017). Moustakas (1994) touches on the need for investigators to reduce bias by bracketing out their views before advancing towards making meaning of the participant's unique experience. A researcher could immerse him or herself into a team's environment regularly to identify the common and shared subjective experience of junior, college, and university players. This includes, but is not limited to, psychosocial factors, injuries, player transactions (trades with another team or being cut/released), boarding with a billet family, and abuse or misuse of drugs

and alcohol (McCoy, 2015; Shaw, 2018). Multiple in-depth interviews on the relationship of players with their coaches, billet families, and management could illustrate the manifestation of current common structural hierarchies and masculine norms in the hockey culture. Open questioning on the phenomenology and the contexts that have influenced many players could result in structured narrative accounts of past and present common junior, college, and university experiences. This could then lead to a comprehensive understanding of detrimental interpersonal patterns that need to be brought to awareness for lasting change (Moustakas, 1994). This might include the recognition of optimal coping mechanisms (e.g., mindfulness, breathwork, etc.) and ways for reducing less healthy strategies such as the abuse or misuse of drugs and alcohol.

Previous research of a similar theme conducted by McCoy (2015) used an interpretive phenomenological analysis method of qualitative interviews with six retired CHL players (McCoy, 2015). Her study was mainly focused on the need for career transition programming for CHL players but also recognizes that there had been no study conducted on specific interventions for improving an athlete's coping ability. Furthermore, the focus of the thesis conducted by Shaw (2018), a University of Lethbridge graduate student, was to obtain a sense of the mindset and openness of players seeking help. He suggested a qualitative investigation is needed to improve understanding of the player's attitudes and experience. Openness to sharing personal information was found to be a barrier to help-seeking. The provision and efficacy of external mental health support ensuring player confidentiality should be examined in future qualitative research.

A researcher with experience in sports may be helpful due to common forthright endeavours. To eliminate presupposition, the professional must aim to interpret the current meaning of his or her encounters, while simultaneously giving participants the freedom to establish their meaningful interpretation of their unique hockey culture experience. A precise set

of questions to guide an interview process could be developed for organizing and analyzing data. Only the perception of the individual participant being interviewed can point to their truth, leading to a synthesis of meaning and essence from various participants (Moustakas, 1994). Ultimately, the intent for this type of study is to generate pragmatic improvement in concussion management, vocation transition, and general counselling support for stakeholders within amateur hockey.

Necessity to Implement and Evaluate Sports Counselling Interventions

The implementation of a flexible framework based on the concepts provided by Purcell et al. (2019) could be the next step for generating research on the efficacy of sport-specific interventions for improving athletes' mental health. Sport mental health programs should include variations depending on the juncture of the individual athlete in their athletic journey, including mid-season and off-season considerations. This could be implemented with a collaborative approach between clinicians and coaches. Players may be reluctant to share personal information with a clinician if they are aware of a joint effort between counsellor and coach for the possibility of transference. Respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the player is paramount to increase the utilization of services. The best practice might be to involve an external mental health professional with less connection to the team to avoid delineating the limits of confidentiality.

The ecological systems model considers the multi-layered influences on the individual athlete that could generate a finely tuned approach to appropriately respond to risk indicators through the integration of both prevention and early intervention models (Purcell et al., 2019). Following the implementation of a framework based on said proposal, a phenomenological method of research could be conducted to compile qualitative data on the direct experience of

hockey players accessing the sport-specific intervention. No research currently exists on the results of customized services.

An experiential phenomenological study could elicit a synthesis of a common subjective experience leading to specific frameworks used in the junior and university leagues. An investigation on the utility of such frameworks should be followed by appropriate adjustments made to refine aspects of the intervention that were beneficial and to eliminate those that were not. Of course, differences for each intervention will occur on a case by case basis. Aside from interventions, some moments may require a person-centred approach of acceptance to create a space for vulnerability, compassion, and understanding. The provision of an empathic counsellor who has travelled a similar path will be the best practice for increasing the accessibility and utilization of the sport-specific services among hockey players (Shaw, 2018). As mentioned by Purcell et al. (2019), their framework could be costly; however, they believe that adaptations to the foundational and at-risk components can be made for low resource settings. Before any research can be conducted on the efficacy of a sport-specific framework, interested mental health professionals might want to initiate the process for a pilot project to this effect.

Recommendations for Practice

Early intervention within youth and minor hockey should be an effective preventive measure for the preparation of young players before entering a heightened competition where situational pressures might outweigh the capacity to cope. The recognition of the onset of mental health issues may not always be apparent; however, coaches and management will need to increase their awareness of signs. There is some evidence that using “in-house” professionals may be more effective due to the low utilization and possible stigma of athletes seeking extra help for mental health (Purcell et al., 2019). Athletes within the university league will

presumably have access to counselling centers available to students. However, many organizations in the junior leagues will not have the financial capacity for a mental health professional on the payroll; therefore, encouragement of external service providers is warranted. Psychology training clinics for grad students is an option as some offer sliding scale or reduced fee structures within an affordable range (Thompson et al., 2017). The other argument is that these professionals may not be embedded in the sporting environment, so players may be reluctant to use the service (Shaw, 2018).

The notion of a holistic approach with consideration of ecological systems might be the best practice for any hockey-specific intervention. Beyond psychotherapeutic modalities, other holistic health intervention plans could be constructed in coordination with a client's autonomy and case complexity. Some suggestions are conjecture; however, players might benefit from learning more about holotropic breathwork, and other methods for optimizing their overall health (Valverde, 2015). Evidence-based modalities could involve journaling or self-authoring (Morisano, 2010); mindfulness, visualization, cognitive behavioural techniques (Bay & Chan, 2018); HeartMath (McCraty & Deyhle, 2015); and various autonomously chosen mechanisms by an individual player (Erford, 2015). The effectiveness of these modalities specifically for hockey players has yet to be proven (except mindfulness); therefore, clinical trials in hockey-specific interventions are necessary to determine what approaches have the most beneficial outcomes.

Personal Development and Vocation

Most players will not graduate from Canadian junior or post-secondary leagues and move on to play professionally. Therefore, it is necessary to initiate a discussion regarding humble self-improvement and support for career transitions appropriate to unique individual capacities outside of the hockey context (Breslin et al., 2017; McCoy, 2015; Purcell et al., 2019). Attention

towards vocational opportunities among players, parents, and organizational leadership beginning prior or during time in junior hockey should benefit cultural well-being. Cultivating self-awareness at this stage in the development of an increasing number of young adult males could generate optimism and improve their agency. This could be especially true among players who are uncertain of future aspirations or whose intentions do not include playing hockey at a professional level. Meaningful and transformative conversations during an individual's junior hockey experience could rectify the precision of aim in a player's decision-making process regarding what potential post-secondary education may align with their possible ambitions. These aspirations should include both projections within and outside the realm of hockey. The inclusion of a personal development component to a hockey intervention program could refine self-awareness to benefit present and future endeavours of an entire organization (McCoy, 2015; Purcell et al., 2019; Shaw, 2018).

Unique interventions made to fit the individual player will be more effective when accurately contextualized with a team's "habitus" to affect change in group dynamics during the season (Coles, 2009). Off-season therapeutic modalities may differ from counselling interventions that occur during the season. During the off-season or summer months, an open and willing player could undergo a more extensive investigation into their past that could elicit cathartic emotional processing. However, this may be less appropriate during the season when best practice for team success is to remain objective, centred and grounded with a focus on the task of winning hockey games. A skilled counsellor may want to tread lightly and meet players at their humanity with acceptance mid-season. Encouragement of techniques aimed at deeper understandings and insights might be more appropriately implemented between seasons.

Off-Season Therapy

In-depth therapy during the off-season could help resolve and heal wounds from past prolonged or acute emotional experiences. Catharsis is defined as relief from strong or repressed emotion, which may benefit players for deepening interpersonal and intrapersonal emotional connections and agility (Erford, 2015). A counsellor with familiarity with the hockey culture may have strong acuity for an appropriate moment by moment intervention necessary unique to the individual. Emotional flooding is less socially acceptable in a hockey environment, but in a controlled therapeutic setting it could be a beneficial release. Instilling the importance of remaining centred and grounded in the aftermath of catharsis should be an aspect of any intervention, whether it is during the season or off-season. In-depth investigation of perpetual patterns within a player's family of origin or from experience in a wider spectrum of ecological systems within the hockey culture might be more appropriate during the off-season unless circumstances require urgent attention.

Due to the lack of evidence on the efficacy of sport-specific therapeutic modalities, experimentation by clinicians may need to occur during the summer months. For a player to be successful in today's hockey climate, it is almost a given they will be working hard on physical conditioning with a specialized trainer. However, the percentage of those working with psychologists is less obvious.

The off-season may be an appropriate time for coaches or team management to encourage the use of a self-authoring modality recommended or developed collaboratively with a clinician. This is loosely defined as an online goal-setting initiative for generating meaningful objectives to organize perception, emotion, thought, and action (Morisano et al., 2010). A uniquely modified self-authoring template with guiding questions specifically constructed for amateur hockey players could also include an investigation of past significant emotional events

or periods. This written narrative could create insight into how the players actions have impacted their surroundings throughout their life. This might involve sitting with painful emotion; however, it may also help an individual reframe the story of their past to a growth mindset, setting the stage for a compelling narrative towards a preferred benevolent future (Loizzo, 2018).

The written exercise regarding past lessons, present virtues, and future goals may lead to increased motivation and a deepening of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships (Erford, 2015; Morisano et al., 2010; Peterson, 2019). Suggesting this sort of intervention is conjecture, for it has not yet been proven to be effective with athletes. However, it is relevant, for there is evidence that the exercise has benefited undergraduate students in reducing drop out numbers and increasing grades (Erford, 2015; Morisano et al., 2010; Peterson, 2019). Therefore, university and college hockey players who are enrolled in classes will qualify as will many new soon to be undergraduates within the junior leagues. A player could be given the option to complete the written exercise on their own or they might choose to work in conjunction with a clinician to help with further depth and breadth in reflection.

One modality that has already shown effectiveness in sport interventions is the utility of mindfulness for concussion recovery and group flow state. This is a technique that Phil Jackson used throughout his eleven NBA championships (Bay & Chan, 2018; Chen et al., 2018; Jackson & Delehanty, 2013). Further speculation of techniques that might help a holistic approach to counselling hockey players could be to observe the utility of holotropic breathwork and shadow work. Both these techniques have potential to help manage troubling emotion such as anger, shame, or guilt, which seem to be prevalent in some players (Lalande et al., 2015; Schori-Eyal et al., 2017).

In-Season Counselling Support

The occurrence of ongoing interventions during a season from beginning to end will differ from those undergone during the off-season. Coaches will continue to put pressure on players as they should to create necessary structural tension for improving team performance. The concern is the degree to which players are supported and guided for learning to process emotion and self-regulate while remaining mentally strong and engaged. Little is known what percentage of players use mental health services during a season. Research in Sweden presented an instrument that measures values, acceptance, and mindfulness among hockey players (Lundgren et al., 2018). This tool could be useful within an individual development program proposed by Purcell et al. (2019), for increasing the individual's capacity for coping with various stressors. Repetitive review and updates of the previously mentioned self-authoring exercise may benefit players in sustaining motivation, optimism, and positive emotion.

To supplement the self-authoring exercise, a tool that could be useful for improving a player's self-awareness could be a biofeedback mechanism like HeartMath. This technology tracks and records heart rate variability and heart-brain coherence across micro and macro time intervals to promote positive emotional self-regulation (McCraty & Deyhle, 2015). This could benefit players and teams due to a sensor that creates a visual display of ongoing minute changes demonstrating the reciprocal nature of their thoughts and emotions while focusing on the breath. With repetition, the user will see measurable progress from empirical evidence on the subtle impact of positive emotion and mindset. As a player begins to see more tangible positive results with some consistency, it is possible a greater emphasis on eudaimonia pursuits could be sustained (Lundqvist & Raglin, 2014).

Psychoeducation and Process Groups

Team cohesion, emotional synchrony, and contagion are topics worthy of discussion among clinicians and team management. Predictor variables for collective efficacy within sports teams proposed that flow experiences directly impact team performance (Coles, 2009; Zumeta et al., 2016). Raising awareness on the effect player's words and emotions have on one another will certainly benefit the culture. A process group led by a clinician with sports experience in collaboration with team staff will benefit the team's on-ice performance as well as relationships outside the arena. Choosing language that matches the target demographic and hockey culture might be necessary to encourage and elicit more openness among players (Shaw, 2018).

Attachment injury and trauma-informed psychoeducation may be useful to team staff and players at various junctures and especially upon physical injury or the possible occurrence of grief or loss in their personal lives (Cloitre et al., 2009; Tatnell et al., 2017; van der Kolk, 2005, 2015). Coaches, management, and clinicians should aim to work in collaboration to determine the optimal course of action for players facing common challenges.

Reflexive Self-Statement

My involvement as a regional scout for a junior hockey team could provide a closer examination of the current culture, which has surely evolved since I was a player. My position with the team has not yet entailed a presence around the locker room interacting with players and coaches, but the General Manager has inquired that I could join them to observe at some point in the future. I look forward to opportunities for acquiring a sense of the current cultural climate that has assuredly changed since my involvement as a player, as this may be useful for future research and within my counselling practice.

In hindsight, I believe I experienced a degree of "culture shock" when I moved from a quiet, isolated acreage at 17 to the intense junior hockey environment in Fort McMurray, Alberta

located about 720 kilometres away from my family. Although my first season away from home was generally successful on the ice, some of the cultural influences were not ideal for long-term mental health, and the following years were more challenging for me and my parents. I believe strongly that I would have benefited from mental health support in junior hockey prior to commencing post-secondary studies as a member of the University of Lethbridge Pronghorns. Adequate mental health services may have eased my transition back to a combined focus on both athletics and academics.

From the amalgam of information that I have encountered both within and outside the academic literature, my perception is that any discussion of ideology could be perceived as tribalism or collective ego possibly serving to create unnecessary conflict. I aim to avoid rigid attachments to any belief system but prefer to direct my focus towards common structures in stories across varying time periods and cultures (Campbell, 2018; Dyer, 1998; Peterson, 2018; Rogers, 1961). Some degree of tension might be necessary for interacting parties to aim at the greater good. Yet, it seems a focus on ideology can be limiting and lead people astray, for it lacks the depth and breadth required to maximize an individual's capacity to serve a purpose that does not denigrate one population over another.

I think the transcendental phenomenology method of research could benefit the hockey culture. Like Donnelly and Twenge (2016) suggest, masculinity and femininity are never separate and an awareness of the everchanging degrees in structural tension between the two forces can help all men and women maximize their potential. I do not perceive masculine and feminine to be akin to males and females. My observation is that some masculine traits such as purpose, drive, accountability, and responsibility coexist with some feminine traits such as bonding, connecting, and providing emotional support. A close look of these actions can be seen

in the context of the hockey arena when a team achieves their purpose of connecting to score a goal resulting in five players bonding together in a celebratory group before resuming their responsibilities in competition. If or when a player sustains an injury delaying his or her participation, teammates often provide emotional support; however, due to some degree of internal opposition among teammates, external services are required.

I believe all types of relationship are meant to help us become more conscious. Authority figures could certainly benefit society by seeking to understand the idiosyncratic needs of their children, students, players, and subordinates to co-create effective solutions. The hockey culture must facilitate a safe space for youth and young adults to be vulnerable for freely expressing their unique psychological and emotional experience. The primary purpose of junior, college, and university hockey leagues are not to groom professional athletes but rather to prepare and create stronger men and women for their chosen vocation. This could lead to a society of more adults living peaceful and purposeful lives aligned with their unique and natural competencies. The perspective that hierarchies are evolving beyond dominance, power, and control over others towards a greater emphasis on competence, moral virtue, and facilitation of autonomy and agency is a phenomenon that could benefit all Western culture.

With that said, I think the hockey culture, like human history, has a dark side in which possible shame of past behaviour must be recognized, accepted, and integrated into personalities and the collective identity. We must become aware of the human patterns that contributed to past atrocities; by doing so, we have a better chance at revivifying actions of moral virtue and benevolence. I believe strongly in the spirit of the masculine and feminine and for the need of our culture to restore a conscious relationship with the archetypes, perhaps most notably the hero, to benefit the cooperative enterprise of all men and women (Campbell, 2018; Jung, 1959;

True speech, forgiveness, and acceptance of what is will be vitally important for remaining centred, grounded, and hopefully objective going forward in this profession (Dyer, 1998; Tolle, 1999).

The therapy I encountered in 2015-16 was the beginning of a redemptive process largely associated from my experience in hockey. I aim to find meaning and enjoyment in repetitive consumption of pragmatic information to benefit my competence in practice. My hope is for this to continue for the remainder of my vocational life and for me to embody the type of support that I needed during my time in competitive hockey but was unable to receive.

Conclusion

Various forms of abuse have occurred in hockey's past, leading to events and periods of what could be thought of as harmful emotional contagion since the game's inception (Dryden, 2017; Fleury & Day, 2009). The culture must continue to look inward collectively and individually to facilitate a process of hindering detrimental hierarchies and ideologies for the evolution of healthier modifications. Fortunately, signs of a stronger functioning culture have been ongoing. Advancements in brain trauma science continue to influence positive change in hockey for its effect on efficient recovery from concussions (Bay & Chan, 2018; Doidge, 2007). The cultural changes of stricter penalties towards contact to the head have already influenced a positive change to on-ice style of play resulting in less "blindside" hits. Emanations will not only be seen on the ice but also within locker rooms, with parents, fans, and media. Of course, continuous improvement will always be the aim, and a focus on mental health literacy will be a key point within hockey-specific interventions. It will certainly help to educate parents to notice signs of depression, anxiety, and concussions. Although perhaps encouragement of a stronger focus towards enjoyment, enthusiasm, and acceptance of moment by moment failure as an

important part of a person's development will initiate more positive holistic health outcomes (Chen et al., 2018). Unique stressors and challenges will continue to arise and resolve as we move forward, aiming to optimize the experience of Canada's popular pastime.

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