

**The Influences of Social Media on Athletes' Mental Health and Performance:
A Literature Review**

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CPC 695: Counselling Psychology Research Project

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December 23, 2021

Abstract

Athletes face a variety of stressors and challenges that impact their mental health and functioning. While research has focused on a number of these factors, social media and its use is still an emerging area of interest. In this literature review, I examine the intersectionality of social media and other variables that are implicated in the mental health and performance of athletes. Strategies catering to the use and assistance of social media to practitioners and athletes are mentioned along with strengths and limitations to guide the discussion for further areas of research.

The Influences of Social Media on Athletes' Mental Health and Performance: A Literature Review

With the exponential rise in social media usage over the past two decades, there has been increased interest in examining how it impacts our mental health and overall functioning. Researchers have gathered data by looking into a number of elements and platforms encompassed by social media and its effects on youth and adults. Although there has been an explosion of research into social media and its impact on mental health, the focus on specific groups of people (i.e., athletes) is still an emerging area within this scope of investigation. My interest in writing this paper is to highlight how social media impacts the mental health of athletes.

In considering the influences of social media on athletes' mental health and performance, various intersecting components have been investigated as individual pieces. For example, when looking at athletes' mental health, one must understand how the individual factor of social media can intersect with mental health symptoms or how an injury can influence an athlete's athletic identity. My aim in writing this paper is to explore these individual pieces from a more holistic perspective. It is critical to look at how social media can impact the various aspects of athletes' mental health to better address the concerns that this group brings to counselling. By exploring the intersectionality of mental health and athletic performance, better supports and services can be offered to this unique group.

In this literature review, I aim to examine the influences of social media on athletes' mental health and performance and highlight how these elements impact the younger generation of athletes. This review will explore two subsets of athletes, professional athletes and amateur

athletes, with a particular focus on identifying the benefits and consequences of social media use on amateur athletes.

The word 'athlete' has many different definitions in the literature ranging from someone who enjoys a particular sport to someone who is able to make a career out of their participation in a sport (Ericsson & Williams, 2007). For the purpose of this review, the definition of a professional athlete that I will draw from includes any athlete who competes in the highest level of their sport while receiving financial compensation for their involvement; with a focus on the research conducted in football, basketball, golf, hockey, and soccer in both men's and women's professional leagues.

Self-Positioning Statement

As an athlete myself, I am mindful of the impact that various stressors can have on an athlete's mental health. My athletic background, including soccer and fitness competitions, has allowed me to witness the internal and external pressures of wanting to pursue a career in a targeted sport. In playing competitive soccer for many years, I know how difficult it was to see myself as anything but a soccer player.

From my year-round training, countless out-of-town soccer tournaments, and money invested into myself as an athlete, it was hard for me not to invest most of my time into the sport. The sense of awareness that I was able to gain as an athlete has guided me into my current interest in athletes, particularly the impact of social media. Being a young athlete myself, I had to balance many other areas of my life, including friends, school, and family, along with social media.

As I think back on my own experiences with social media and developing my identity as an athlete, I can see the many ways that it shaped me - both benefitting and limiting me. The

most beneficial component of social media on my development as an athlete was surprisingly the lack of accessibility to social media platforms, which allowed me to slowly become accustomed to social media and find out how it fit my life as I grew into adolescence. I can remember creating my first Facebook account in the early 2000s. I only had access to a dial-up computer that would allow for limited access to social media platforms due to the poor internet connection from being connected to the phone. As for a portable device, I only had a flip phone that carried out basic commands such as text on nine keys and the ability to make phone calls. I grew up when most households had landlines, and there was no such thing as an area code if you needed to dial local phone numbers. Now in the year 2021, I can attest to witnessing younger adolescents and children using and posting on social media with ease due to the availability of technology.

Although I felt the pressure of performing and advancing my skillset within my sport, I did not have the added influence of social media or the accessibility to use these websites. If I had access to social media while engaging in negative self-talk about my skillset, comparing myself to other soccer players would only aid in the spiral of self-limiting beliefs. I was fortunate enough to engage on social media platforms when I was “older” than the younger generation that I see utilizing the apps today. Younger individuals have access to social media platforms through their phones, tablets, iPads, and laptops. Technology has allowed the younger generation to remain connected, which has been instrumental during the COVID-19 pandemic. As both a social media user and an athlete, I have unfortunately seen the challenges that the younger generation of athletes have to navigate amidst the already complex nature of other stressors. I have witnessed virtual bullying on these platforms; one specific incident had sparked an interest in how to support the younger generation of athletes.

There was a video of a younger boy shooting a basketball into a hoop. The boy appeared to be between the ages of 10-12 and seemed to be having fun. The comments from other users of all ages were criticizing his skillset with one comment stating, “You will not make it into professional basketball if you keep missing the hoop.” Amateur athletes who use social media have the opportunity to connect with fellow teammates and peers online, seek out supports, and watch videos to improve their skills and post highlights from their games. Controversially, social media has been associated with harmful experiences, such as bullying, checking out opponents that can lead to a negative comparison of skills, or pressuring athletes to showcase only their best and conceal what’s going on ‘behind the scenes’. In advocating for amateur athletes and helping them create their identity outside of the sport, it is essential to look at athlete stressors and barriers to seeking supports such as counselling.

In being an active member of the social media community, I can see first-hand the adverse effects on athletes’ mental health and performance in the sports community. I currently follow some professional athletes on social media and when I read the comments under a photo or video they post, some of the comments are distasteful. There was one video of a female athlete who was in a soccer uniform showcasing her footwork with the ball. Some of the comments made were “your skills are not video worthy” or “maybe choose a real career instead of one that you aren’t good at.” Reading those comments, I became upset and confused as I felt empathy towards the athlete, as she appeared proud of her skills of only to be torn down by the hurtful comments.

I have also spoken with athletes who have used social media as a tool to check out other opponents in the game or competition they have entered. Some athletes would view another competitor’s social media, comparing their physique, stage walk, and workouts to the content

posted by the other competitor. It is not necessarily a bad thing to ‘scope out’ your competition. It becomes harmful when the lens from which you view the competitors stems from jealousy and discouragement. Again, speaking with athletes of the sports community along with my self-reflection, looking at other athletes from a place of jealousy can leave you with feelings of resentment and inadequacy. Throughout my interactions with athletes and self-reflection, I have noticed how watching other athletes in the same competition highlights insecurities within oneself.

Before competing in my fitness competitions, I sought out other women competing in the same event through social media. I began to notice that all my insecurities were brought to my awareness as I searched my competition on social media. The fitness competitions had various categories, such as body building and women’s bikini, to name a few. All classes had specific outfits to wear to judge their physiques. As a competitor in the bikini category, I had to wear a rhinestone suit and heels. I was insecure about how I could not walk in heels, yet I was nervous because I saw these other women exude such grace and ease while walking in heels.

What I had perceived as imperfections within myself were only exacerbated through exploring social media and the other competitors. I didn’t recognize at the time that these social media platforms could have aided in social supports or guidance from other competitors. I could have used social media to reach out to previous competitors to gain constructive feedback about my walk instead of convincing myself I had to mimic another individual’s presentation. By sharing my personal experience, I hope to expand beyond the horizons of my journey and gain more insight into how social media influences other athletes’ mental health. As I engulfed myself in reviewing the current literature and creating this project, I hoped to broaden the perspectives through which I view the research. I want to provide a unique experience to readers through my

perspective and showcase the duality of what it means to be an athlete in a time of evolving technology. Although I bring a unique lens through which the studies are interpreted, I have tried to be aware of how this incorporation may emerge as bias.

The purpose of my research is not to find an answer; my research question clearly states “the influences” of social media on an athlete’s mental health and performance. The term “influence” can encompass both negative and positive benefits. My research aims to educate myself and readers on both sides of the spectrum to take a more informed and holistic approach concerning athlete involvement on social media.

While gathering data from other research articles, I have used a self-reflective stance while reading and collecting data. In taking a critical position while gathering information, I have reflected on how the researcher(s) wrote and shared the research conducted. Reflecting on the data provided in research studies, one must not overgeneralize specific findings to a general population. As I continued to look at various social media influences on athletes’ mental health and performance, I ensured that my due diligence was being met in reading the literature correctly. I have confirmed that all articles cited have been examined to provide an informed literature review during the writing process. When gathering information from various sources, I have tried to keep an open mind that this is a learning process, and I have allowed the themes highlighted to evolve. In gathering new information, I have also been diligent in keeping a field note journal to track my biases and preconceptions.

Rationale

To understand the impact of social media on athletes and their mental health, it is important to first understand the many stressors they face when engaging in competitive sports. Stressors include an intense training regime, performance expectations, organizational

commitments such as travelling, and personal stressors (Kuettel & Larsen, 2020). The unique range of stressors that athletes face, such as burnout, overtraining, and intense media scrutiny, may increase their vulnerability to mental illness (Rice et al., 2016).

The pressure of various stressors on an athlete only heightens when there is an injury involved. Although common in athletes, injuries can lead to mental health conditions or increased self-consciousness about their performance after the injury has healed (Putukian, 2016). The demand placed internally by athletes, mainly professional athletes, can be triggered if faced with an injury. Previous research has noted that depending on the severity of the injury, many athletes will continue to play or practice despite pain and possible functional impairment (Lemoyne et al., 2017). Many athletes operate under the mentality of “no pain, no gain,” which results in fighting through the pain of an injury rather than taking time off and seeking rehabilitation (López & Levy, 2013).

Along with the numerous stressors that athletes face, research has shown that many athletes may be wary of seeking support for their mental health because of the stigma associated with mental health challenges (Rice et al., 2016). Unfortunately, the stigma associated with mental health is not solely rooted in one specific factor but rather systemically entrenched within the sport culture. This stigma can reside within the individual athlete as they may be afraid to speak out for fear of being judged by fellow teammates, be perceived as emotionally weak, lose playing time, or even lose their contract to compete (Bauman, 2016). Stigma is still driven within sports organizations through a lack of mental health literacy, resources, and response to athlete injury (Liddle et al., 2017).

In addition to these stressors, ‘branding’ or promoting oneself on social media as a commercial brand is another element that can add to the complexity that an athlete must

navigate. Many athletes use social media as a brand tool to draw in fans, endorse products, or showcase their lives outside of sports (Na et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2018). Trying to excel in one's sport while attempting to find stability in personal life, mental health, and expanding one's brand can become challenging when social media adds an element to be monitored. We as spectators may gravitate to the notion that athletes should "know better" than to engage in scandals and not partake in unethical or illegal events because they are in the public eye. Individuals who want to excel in an athletic career have been training for their whole lives while balancing other life priorities. This literature review aims to bring about a more humanistic lens through which the audience can reflect and see athletes as individuals and not just their portrayal on social media.

Literature Review

Social Media and COVID-19

Social media has created a powerful and universal platform online where billions of users can access discussion forums, social networks, and media sharing (Ahern, 2017). Users of social media can find solace in these systems because they can utilize their freedom of expression while maintaining a high level of privacy and anonymity (Ahern, 2017). Social media has been increasingly popular amongst consumers as the internet is accessible through portable devices, phones, and computers. Over 94% of Canadians have access to home internet, while 46% of Canadians use the internet for more than 10 hours a week online (Statistics Canada, 2019).

Facebook's introduction in 2004 paved the way for how people connect online (Helmond et al., 2019). With the internet becoming increasingly accessible, consumer social media usage with platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have nearly doubled from 970 million global users in 2010 to surpassing 3.81 billion in 2020 (Dean, 2021). The most popular way

consumers have enjoyed social media access is through apps downloaded onto their mobile devices with 99% of the 3.96 billion users accessing social media on websites or apps through a mobile device (Dean, 2021). Social media has also been instrumental in how individuals have remained connected during COVID-19 (Maheux et al., 2021; Saud et al., 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges and changes globally with numerous measures being implemented, including ‘social distancing,’ lockdowns to various degrees, and more regulations on public activities and travel. As individuals may feel isolated from others due to working from home, school shutdowns, and bans on public gatherings, or all of the above, more individuals are connecting through online platforms (Brailovskaia et al., 2021). Along with the rapid increase in social media usage, there is an ongoing debate within the literature on the potential benefits and drawbacks of social media (Majeed et al., 2020). Social media platforms offer the ability to connect with individuals that one may not see in person, reduce loneliness, and provide connection and support during uncertain times (Majeed et al., 2020).

Alternatively, social media use during COVID-19 has been cited as playing a role in increasing anxiety and depressive symptoms due to the overwhelming amount of contradictory information on the pandemic (Brailovskaia et al., 2021). Garfin et al. (2015) noted that, prior to the pandemic, stress symptoms combined with fear of missing a social media update created a feedback loop of anxiety caused by fear of missing information. Based on the presented research, it can be assumed that social media has a “double-edged sword” effect. The conceptual metaphor illuminates the idea that social media can have both favourable and unfavourable outcomes. It can allow individuals to feel connected and close, but not without the possibility of false information, fear-mongering, and unhealthy rumination/worry.

The exploration of the benefits along with the challenges of social media is ongoing. The desire for individuals to remain connected to other individuals through periods of psychological stress and isolation needs to be balanced with users being cognisant of false or misleading information about COVID-19. As sports have been postponed or cancelled in some parts of the world, both amateur and professional athletes may seek out support and mental health resources through social media. Both the positive and negative aspects of social media usage during the pandemic highlights the need for educating users. Athletes, as well as others, need to learn how to discern the impact of social media on their mental health and have the tools to think about the sources of information they are reading critically.

Professional Athletes and Social Media

Recovery from Injury

In recent years, research into the relationship between athletes' mental health and athletic identity has focused on the experiences of injury and recovery. To understand how social media influences an injured athlete's mental and physical health, one must first examine the experiences of an injured athlete. Athletes tend to monitor training, sleep, and extracurricular activities, which must be executed with 100% effort. With the level of perseverance and commitment that athletes dedicate to their sport, there is always the potential for an injury to occur. Most athletes' pain and exhaustion are masked through the euphoria of endorphins after completing a training session; they often push past physical exhaustion, which can potentially lead to an injury (Corazza et al., 2019).

Injury can create various stressors that an athlete must attend to outside of the physical pain. Among other physical ailments, injury can create other conditions that athletes may have to navigate, such as biological, sociocultural, and psychological (Putukian, 2016). The biological

component consists of the biological ailment that the injury causes. Pain, possible physiotherapy, and the ability to regain motion or movement to the injured part of the body can be challenging to navigate. These factors can lead to chronic stress, resulting in muscle tension or high cortisol levels (Putukian, 2016).

Many of the psychological and sociocultural factors that an injured athlete must contend with can be communicated and exacerbated by social media. For example, the athlete may believe they will never recover or have to “tough it out” to continue playing in their sport, highlighting how problematic cultural narratives may become hindrances in healing and recovery. Injury can also lead to long-term or short-term psychological effects highlighted through the athlete’s emotional responses (e.g., sadness, frustration, isolation, irritation, and anger) and related physical responses such as sleep disturbances (Putukian, 2016). Similarly, in their study, Mitchell et al. (2014) found that incapacitation and loss of confidence were the two most notable stressors among injured athletes. These two stressors were the most likely to impact the success of an athlete’s rehabilitation (Mitchell et al., 2014). Having to manage these other factors outside of the physical impairment can lead to increased negative thought patterns and leave the athlete in a constant state of worry and anxiety (Mohammed et al., 2018).

Although worry is a normal human emotion, Daley et al. (2021) furthers Mohammed et al.’s (2018) claim that excessive worry, hopelessness, or helplessness can lead to depression in athletes. What is suggested from both Daley et al. (2021) and Mohammed et al. (2018) is that injuries can create a host of physical, emotional, and cognitive problems (including problematic beliefs about oneself and the world) that injured athletes must learn to navigate.

If an athlete has to take time off from their sport, their routine is disrupted and they may have more time than usual to be alone with their thoughts. These thoughts can cause distressing

emotions and beliefs regarding one's identity as an athlete and future ventures in terms of their livelihood (Mitchell et al., 2014). Injured athletes often face fears of re-injury or not being able to return to their previous level of functioning, which can impact self-confidence (Mitchell et al., 2014). An athlete's livelihood will be affected if they cannot perform at their previous level of functioning or if they need to spend more time in rehabilitation than engaging in their sport (Mitchell et al., 2014).

Mitchell et al.'s (2014) work is complimented by Nankervis et al. (2018) in that their research also attested to how an athlete's emotional responses and cognitive appraisal of their injury are associated with the rehabilitation process. Collectively these studies validate that the athlete's emotional response and fear-based intrusive thought patterns will impact the athlete's rehabilitation process (Mitchell et al., 2014; Nankervis et al., 2018). The research highlights the complexities of a sports injury and provides insight into the intersectional components associated with the injury and recovery process.

Each of these factors can be amplified or challenged through an athlete's use of social media. For instance, the theme of connection vs. disconnection has been highlighted as a factor that can help or hinder recovery from injury in athletes. Grindstaff et al. (2010) used a phenomenological approach in their study and interviewed five athletes to gain an in-depth understanding of the injury experience. The researchers found four common themes among the athletes, one of which was relationships. In this category, the sub-theme of "connected/disconnected" was explored. The athletes interviewed mentioned how they felt "disconnected from teammates" or "out of the loop" (Grindstaff et al., 2010 p. 130). Another layer in the complexity of injury rehabilitation has to do with an athlete viewing other

teammate's social media. The feeling of being disconnected may be heightened as an athlete watches fellow teammates still engage and practice in the sport (Grindstaff et al., 2010).

In contrast to Grindstaff et al. (2010), many authors have explored how social media can be used as a tool for connection (e.g., Graupensperger et al., 2020; Haslam et al., 2017; Neves et al., 2019). Social media has also allowed for the extension of learning in sports education (Lugueti et al., 2019). Athletes can use their social media as a tool to educate other users and athletes on a personal level. Sharing a personal healing journey from an injury is just one way an athlete can feel connected and supported by others.

Nankervis et al. (2018) showed how Australian Football League players used the social media platforms Twitter and Instagram during pre and post-injury. The 335 participants were classified into three categories of injuries consisting of short-term lasting (1–13 days), medium-term lasting (14–28 days), and long-lasting (28 days or longer; Nankervis et al., 2018). The researchers reviewed the injured athletes' Twitter posts at two time periods: four weeks prior to their injury and from the date of the injury to the date the athlete returned to play. The research revealed how the players used Twitter during the time of injury to share personal insight regarding their injury and recovery process and to thank other users for their support. Nankervis et al. also discussed how a social support network improved rehabilitation outcomes that led to a feeling of being wanted by others, which factored into the athletes' psychological readiness to return to the sport. The research in this area showcases how social media can be used as a tool in the recovery process, while also highlighting potential pitfalls (e.g., feelings of disconnection).

Advertising and Appearance on Social Media

Social media has arguably been one of the most effective branding tools available to athletes and athletic teams (Doyle et al., 2020). Other researchers have also attested to the power

of social media as a marketing tool in attracting consumers and promoting athletes (Gdovka & Chen, 2021; Giraudon, 2020; Su, Baker, Doyle, & Kunkel, 2020).

In this section, it is crucial to identify why branding exists as it is relevant to understanding the effectiveness of social media as a branding tool used by athletes. Professional athletes are considered celebrities of the sporting world and are influential figures on and off the field (Hasaan et al., 2018). In athletic branding, athletes represent and express their values, personality, and ideological principles (Arai et al., 2014). Athletes can extend their brand as a vehicle for endorsement deals to increase their popularity and fan base with the company or product they have supported (Arai et al., 2014). In addition to an athlete's personal factors in establishing their athletic brand, Hasaan et al. (2018) stated that professional image, marketability, and fan base are other elements that create an athlete's brand. The compilations of the various traits are what capture the attention of both the fans and associated brands. The information provided describes what the athlete can do for the endorser, but what factors entice an athlete to create a brand or support various products?

Athlete endorsement is a powerful marketing strategy for advertisement, but athletes can also reap the benefits from their endorsement deals, especially when promoting on social media. One of the more alluring components of being associated with a brand is financial compensation. For professional athletes, partnering with a company that has a large fan base of consumers surrounding their product sounds like a win-win situation. Take Nike, for example; they have an extensive consumer network expanding globally and partner with top professional athletes to endorse their products (Välkkynen & Niinikoski, 2017). Out of the top 100 highest-paid athlete endorsers of 2019, ranging from tennis to basketball players, endorsements totalled over \$975 million dollars (Lawrence, 2020). Nike monopolises the sports endorsement deal market in terms

of dollar value and can be exemplified in looking at the partnership between Nike and soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo. A lifetime endorsement deal between the company and the famous soccer player has been set to exceed over \$1 billion (De Crespigny, 2021). Brands like Nike rely on athlete endorsements to advertise their products on platforms like Facebook and Instagram as another channel for sales (Fondevila Gascón et al., 2018). The monetary value alone could be persuasive enough for an athlete to sign on with a partnering company and use their athlete brand to promote larger products.

In addition to the financial gain that an athlete can accumulate through an active social media presence, they can preserve their legacy through deriving marketable images and media content to showcase themselves in a positive nature (Geurin, 2016). Athlete engagement on social media paired with sponsor-endorsed products can be mutually beneficial and add to the legacy many athletes strive to achieve.

For example, in looking at Nike's partnership with basketball star Michael Jordan in 1984, the mutual reciprocity is evident through Jordan gaining traction in his career and Nike becoming a household name for sporting goods (Fresco, 2020). Jordan was provided with a generous contract while Nike earned revenue from their declining market shares in having Jordan as the athlete image endorsing their products (Fresco, 2020). Since 1984, Jordans fan base has continued to grow, despite his retirement in 1999 (Kellner, 2003). Jordan still sees continued success in his partnership with Nike for the "Air Jordan" sneakers not only by his success in being a basketball icon, but using social media as a platform to connect with fans and promote products (Berger, 2018). Jordan is one example of how an athlete can utilize their sponsorships and leverage social media to promote themselves and their product. However, what can become enticing to an athlete to take on more prominent brand roles also comes with certain challenges.

As one's brand or sponsorship grows, so does public interest. Social media sharing can have a damaging effect when information spread from other accounts is false or when accusations or harmful speculation are made against an athlete (Na et al., 2020). Under those circumstances, it can also impact an athlete as their social media profiles may appear inseparable from who they are as a person (Su et al., 2020). The Tiger Woods scandal is a relevant example that shows the effects of a viral scandal on athlete brand image. Tiger Woods is a well-known professional golfer who lost his Nike sponsorship when his extramarital affairs were brought into the spotlight (Vredenburg & Giroux, 2018). Tiger Woods became a trending name on social media, with fans sharing the scandal across various social media platforms. This is just one example of how branding or sponsorship can limit an athlete's control over their online image.

Social Media and Activism

Sports activism is defined as athletes engaging in "organized and collective forms of protest and conflict" (Agyemang et al., 2010, p. 420). As such, sports activism is a form of activism, but it caters to a specific sports niche. An example of sports activism is illustrated through the United States Women's National Soccer Team. The team filed a lawsuit against the U.S. soccer federation in 2019, stating that they deserve equal pay to their male counterparts (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020). When the wage gap was brought forth in 2016, the U.S. soccer federation's defence was that women's soccer lacked fans, which they said justified the unequal earnings between women's and men's teams (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020). The women's league outperformed the men's league in more World Cup Wins, Olympic Gold medals, and, in 2015, had the highest-rated soccer match in the Women's World Cup (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020).

The online community gathered to support the Women's National Soccer Team and the movement quickly gained online traction through larger reporting companies such as the New

York Times and Wall Street Journal, utilizing facts and advocating against what they defined as “rank sexism” (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020, p. 703). The traction gained through various online social media and new platforms allowed the movement to gain the momentum it needed, and as a result the U.S. Women’s League earned equal pay to that of the male U.S. team (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020).

Without social media, the equal pay movement brought forth by the Women’s League would not have reached as large of an audience. According to Kalogeropoulos et al., (2017) individuals that use social media to acquire news are significantly more likely to engage with the news outside of social media or become more involved with the cause on the media platforms. Engaging in the news for fans of the women’s league meant vocalizing their outrage and banning together in solidarity with the general public and the athletes. Due to the public outcry, pressure was placed on the federation to listen and provide a solution.

Another area of sports activism is racial inequality (Boykoff & Carrington, 2020; Evans et al., 2020). Anti-racism protests have gained traction on social media platforms, especially within the athletic community. One of the most recognized gestures within the sports community has been to “take a knee.” The gesture has been most recognized when it has been carried out by professional athletes kneeling during the national anthem (Kappeler & Flory, 2019). Taking a knee serves as a visual reminder of athletes protesting against police brutality, racial injustice, and systemic inequality (Kappeler & Flory, 2019).

A catalyst of the movement was when National Football League’s athlete Colin Kaepernick, quarterback for the 49’ers, took a knee during the national anthem (Kang, 2018). According to Kaepernick, the take-a-knee gesture was a way to symbolize the issues of racism without making a larger grand gesture which would take away from the meaning of the national

anthem and thanking those in the military fighting for their country (Vasilogambros, 2016). Kaepernick spearheaded the movement through his take-a-knee gesture that soon gained a massive following on social media (Kappeler & Flory, 2019). Other researchers highlighted how social media could allow these activism groups to reach a larger audience, along with specific tools to reach like-minded individuals (Cosby, 2018; Kappeler & Flory, 2019).

One such tool is hashtags on platforms such as Instagram or Twitter, which are short statements punctuated by a hashtag that can be clicked to highlight various images, resources, and videos related to that specific hashtag. For example, Kappeler and Flory (2019) investigated the use of the hashtag #TakeAKnee as an informational hashtag on Instagram and Twitter. They discovered that this particular hashtag allowed users to access other users' stories and organizations to support and validate others going through racial injustice. The hashtag featured many of Kaepernick's photos and videos of him taking a knee during the national anthem. Kaepernick was viewed as the 'gas to the flame,' the originating source for this movement, thus receiving backlash on social media from individuals who disagreed with the gesture.

The take-a-knee movement became a gesture that both professional athletes and amateur athletes would carry out as a stand of solidarity against racial injustice (Mather 2019). Kaepernick continued his support behind the campaign from the end of his contract in 2016 and from 2017–2018 when he was not re-signed by another team (Mather, 2019). Kaepernick was not selected to be a part of another National Football League team due to the controversy surrounding his gesture (Boykoff & Carrington, 2020). The controversy was due to other social media users who disagreed with his choice of kneeling and saw the gesture as disrespectful to the nation (Houghteling & Dantzler, 2019). President Trump also publicly opposed the actions of Kaepernick kneeling in protest. Trump stated on his social media platforms that it is a privilege

to make millions of dollars and that athletes should not disrespect the country they represent by kneeling during a national anthem (Mather, 2019).

The power of social media can spark significant change, but as research exemplifies, it should be consumed with a critical lens. Content posted online from any activist group or individual can reflect their pre-existing biases as there is no process to filter the accuracy of content posted on social media platforms (Lee, 2020). Online content in any form has a strong potential to mislead its reader by withholding facts, misconstruing evidence or only providing existing beliefs held by the originating source (Kulshrestha et al., 2019; Gearhart et al., 2020).

According to Diakopoulos (2017), utilizing healthy media criticism can assist social media users in drawing a more informed conclusion. Healthy media criticism involves one's assessment of the validity and reliability of the information posted by an athlete or sports activist groups (Diakopoulos, 2017). When reading news or reports on social media, users can use healthy media criticism to reflect on what bias a group or individual holds and what other sources were used in the presenting information. These findings imply that users should engage in more critical thinking when using information published online to make an inference concerning an athlete or a specific activist group.

Gender Portrayals on Social Media

Media is one of the most influential forms of socialization, specifically involving gender roles, and this is true in social media as well (Field et al., 2019). Patriarchal values that have been evident in prior research and historically through sports are now being reinforced through social media (Trolan, 2013). Research has documented the degree to which gender stereotypes are enforced through particular portrayals of male and female athletes in the media (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004). The difference in gender portrayal is evident through physical

appearance and how the media depicts male athletes based on their physicality, muscularity, and skillset (Carrotte et al., 2017). At the same time, female athletes are often represented using traditional ideas of femininity, which usually means that their achievements are minimized (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004). The gender differences mentioned are evidently seen throughout social media.

When athletes are seen on social media, male athletes' photos or videos typically reflect power and strength (Watson et al., 2019). At the same time, the focus on female athletes emphasizes family and physical appearance according to patriarchal standards of beauty (Xu & Armstrong, 2019). Multiple authors have further investigated the appearance of female athletes on social media over the past ten years, specifically the sexualization of female athletes (Daniels et al., 2021; Kavanagh et al., 2019; Trolan, 2013). The presenting theme within the literature emphasized that underrepresentation and sexualization are still notable (Daniels et al., 2021; Kavanagh et al., 2019; Trolan, 2013). Even if female athletes wanted to portray a more sensual side of themselves on social media, they are caught between societal biases of either being an athlete or being a sexual figure (Allison et al., 2020).

More specifically, Daniels (2009) recognized the conflicting values in sports and sexualization as contradictions. The contradiction occurs because societal norms tend to create boxes in which a person must conform and can be seen on social media. For example, Daniels highlighted a contradiction among women in sport by exploring the public backlash when race car driver Danica Patrick posed almost nude on the cover of *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition*. Ronda Rousey also appeared on the 2015 cover of *Sports Illustrated*, which was seen in stores and on social media platforms such as Facebook (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). Like Patrick, Rousey received distasteful comments regarding her body image on social media platforms

(Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). The contradiction was noted because according to Daniels' research, a woman was either recognized for her sporting accomplishments or modelling career and, according to western societal norms, could not be both a model and a race car driver, which drove public backlash on social media platforms.

A study conducted by Kane and Maxwell (2011) further highlights the backlash that female athletes face, when women are featured in a non-athletic portrayal on social media. The study examined how consumers interpret media images and if those interpretations influence their support for women's sports (Kane & Maxwell, 2011). Twelve focus groups took place from the fall of 2006 until the spring of 2007, with 63 participants across all twelve groups. Like Danica Patrick's *Sports Illustrated* cover, the photo used in the study was classified as "soft pornography" category by the researchers, meaning the photo reinforced sexual objectification. The responses to the photos shown in the focus group were collected in three phases, one of which was having the participants write down 2-3 words that popped into their heads after the image was shown on the PowerPoint slide. The responses from the female participants included "sell-out" and "demeaning herself," while the men used phrases such as "knockout" or "sexy" (Kane & Maxwell, 2011, p. 213). The older women in the focus groups were troubled by the photo, sharing how they would not attend Danica Patrick's racing event based on their perceptions of the sexually suggestive image. When the photo was shown to the focus groups of famous tennis star Serena Williams in her swimsuit on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, most of the women had the same comments. The comments suggested that she should be shown only for her role as a tennis player, with many stating that they were embarrassed for her. The research conducted by Kane and Maxwell (2011) and Daniels (2009) emphasized that women who took on an athletic role while simultaneously exploring other avenues such as Danica Patrick and her

modelling could potentially receive backlash, possibly damaging one's athletic careers and mental health. The research highlights that athletes may have the desire to venture outside of their sport and engage in modelling or other passions. Social media can be a powerful tool to showcase these accomplishments. Like the studies have also emphasized, not every social media user will agree with a certain image or post made by an athlete, thus opening the possibility of backlash and spiteful comments based on the user's individual beliefs.

Current literature suggests that these contradictions are a form of socialized constructs within sport that can be examined through a historical context. The historical context is important to understand so that one can use a critical lens to examine how social constructs are formed and how they appear on social media. Men and women's socialization created a narrative in which North American ideologies associated men with sports (Cooky, 2018). Since men have historically taken up sports, cultural stigmas have influenced individuals to believe masculinity and sports to be synonymous (Trolan, 2013). The masculine ideal depicted across research is showcased through 'mental toughness'- the perceived notion that men in sports are able to endure hardship and are strong and skilled (Souter et al., 2018).

Although these words are subject to individual interpretation, they become harmful when part of a larger narrative that typifies traditional masculinity according to a constrained and oftentimes problematic ideals which can be further exacerbated through social media. To further understand this concept, Liew et al. (2019) explained how current literature understands that mental toughness can uphold other characteristics such as resilience or optimism, but can become damaging when the term is socially constructed and characterized based on gender. For example, if a male football athlete is seen crying during a game, the public may see him as

‘weak’ for exhibiting an emotion that would not usually fit the social construct of a football player.

MacArthur and Shields (2015) highlighted similar findings through their literature review of cultural beliefs and normative male expressions, particularly men’s tears (tears as an example of normative male expressions). In their review, MacArthur and Shields noted that tears are associated with what might be perceived of as ‘weakness’ and do not fit the North American norms for masculine emotions while playing sports. In understanding male portrayal in sports media from a feminist perspective, hegemonic masculinity resides at the top of the sports hierarchy, showcasing characteristics of risk-taking behaviours, self-sacrifice, and the acceptance of pain and injury (Knapp, 2015). Understanding the historical origins of men and women in sport can allow for further exploration of how society can change the current narrative and create more inclusivity.

Outside of the traditional masculine features dominating the media, there is also the extension of these characteristics within sports photography and the images shown on social media platforms. When sports are presented through pictures in newspapers or magazines on social media or in print form, female athletes are underrepresented (Denham, 2020). In examining 245 cover pages from *Sports Illustrated* and ESPN, Frisby (2017) sought to investigate the representation of female and male athletes. The data showed that 88.1% of the sports magazine covers were of male athletes, and 11.9% were of female athletes (Frisby, 2017).

The literature also suggests that larger television networks showcase an alarmingly higher percentage of male athletes than female athletes (Dickson, 2015). One of the larger known networks, ESPN, which broadcasts *SportsCenter*, had over 95% of the 177.5 hours devoted to men’s sports (Dickson, 2015). Sports networks such as ESPN are also guilty of using language to

further the divide of equality. The subtleties of language from commentators may be unintentional, but still maintain these problematic cultural narratives. Commentators have been noted to tie in a woman's gender when describing their play, such as "she is a great women's basketball player," or mentioning their athletic ability as a woman in the sport (Dickson, 2015, p. 15). The commentary becomes troublesome when a male athlete is described for their athletic ability while commentary for female athletes is the association between them being female and talented. Especially when gender constructs are perpetuated by the sharing of language and photos which users can easily share and access information on social media.

Fink (2015) provides further insight into the language used by commentators when describing male and female athletes. Fink investigated the number of times commentators used female athletes' first names compared to the male athletes. The female tennis players were referred to by their first name 304 times compared to the males that were mentioned only 44 times (Fink, 2015). Dickson (2015) also used Fink's study as supporting literature, highlighting how using the first name when describing women is often associated with belittlement and can create ambivalent attitudes towards women in sport. These gender-based narratives create problems not just professional athletes, but for amateur athletes as well, many of whom are younger and may also be dealing with the tasks of identity formation. Social media can transmit and amplify many of these problematic messages that can result in the athlete having a misconstrued evaluation of self. In the sections to follow, we will turn our attention towards how social media impacts amateur athletes.

Amateur Athletes and Social Media

According to the literature, it can take an athlete anywhere from 8-12 years to reach an elite level in their sport necessary to pursue a professional career (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004). To

reach this elite level, an athlete must accumulate a certain amount of practice hours, often referred to as the 10,000-hour rule (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004). The rule translates into the amateur athlete practicing roughly three hours a day for 10 years (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004). Other commitments are factored outside of daily training for a young athlete, such as education, social demands, and extracurricular activities (Senecal, 2017). These and other factors influence amateur athletes' mental health and wellbeing, especially when considering social media. In the section to follow, I will highlight three of these factors: (a) the lure of performance enhancing drugs (PEDs), (b) the influence of coaches, and (c) the importance of social support and community building, all of which are tied into social media use.

Factors Influencing Athletic Performance

PEDs. Athletes face various internal and external pressures when competing against other athletes during tryouts or when being scouted during games by potential universities. Athletes often strive to be the greatest they can be in their respective disciplines (Imperator et al., 2018). While athletes train and push past their physical limits, they also learn comradery and respect for themselves while building character (Imperator et al., 2018). However, these benefits can be quickly diminished through the pressures to perform at optimal performance during every game or by comparing themselves to other athletes on social media. There are some instances where a young athlete may not be performing to the coach's expected level, may not be physically strong enough, or may become fatigued quickly in endurance sports (Henning & Dimeo, 2018). In extreme cases where no other options appear available to increase sports performance or endurance, an athlete may turn to PEDs (Performance-Enhancing Drug) (Henning & Dimeo, 2018).

The term “doping” generally indicates when an athlete has used illegal or prohibited performance-enhancing substances (Miskulin et al., 2021). A recent review of the literature showed that the average number of adolescent athletes who have used PEDs at one point in their lives ranged from 3-12% (Calfee & Fadale, 2006; Miskulin et al., 2021; Mudrak et al., 2018), although the actual number may be higher due to under-reporting. Although adolescent athletes may use PEDs to enhance their sports performance, there is also the potential for adverse health risks. It is through exploring the health risks of PEDs that one can see how social media can influence an athlete and their self image to use these drugs, regardless of the side effects.

The health risks that have been linked to the use of PEDs have been associated with various health conditions. These conditions range from short-term to chronic such as diabetes, heart disease (Miskulin et al., 2021), and other problematic cardiovascular effects (La Gerche & Brosnan, 2017; van de Bovenkamp et al., 2020). Mental health effects of PEDs use have also been investigated within the current literature pointing to increased aggression, body image disturbances, manic symptoms, and anxiety (Bates et al., 2017; Gestsdottir et al., 2020). Despite the negative health side effects, many young athletes continue to use PEDs, leading researchers to ask the question: what are the driving factors behind why amateur athletes use PEDs?

Social media has been a limited area of research when examining the broader perspective of intrinsic reasons why amateur athletes are taking PEDs. Current literature has recognized amateur athletes will take PEDs because of poor body image and comparing performance to other teammates or both (Henning & Dimeo, 2018; Kabiri et al., 2018). When it comes to social/environmental factors that sway athletes’ use of PEDs, Donovan et al. (2002) found that athletic groups and their socialization effects are extremely influential.

One of the most widely accepted theories of criminal/deviant conduct is Akers' (2009) social learning theory. Social learning theory provides a perspective to which one can examine the connection to what is learned and the influence of social media as a contributing factor to learned behaviours and athletes taking PEDs. According to social learning theory, a learning process plays a significant role in adopting deviant and criminal behaviours like doping (Akers, 2009). The literature highlights the influence that peer and environmental factors have in an athlete deciding to take PEDs (Barkoukis et al., 2019; Guo et al., 2021). Social media provides a platform to which socialization becomes constant, shifting from in-person contact to virtual connection.

Research has shown one of the reasons amateur athletes start taking PEDs is that they want to be physically appealing and associate a specific body image with their sport (Mudrak et al., 2018). Likewise, Piacentino et al. (2017) observed that amateur athletes who used PEDs wanted a more athletic appearance and associated how their bodies reflected their level of athleticism compared to other athletes who did not use PEDs. Social media can be a catalyst for social comparison in that access to other athletes' images and videos are readily accessible. Social media users have access to frame themselves in a way that can be appealing to other users. Amateur athletes can benefit from connecting to other athletes, but they may also fall victim to unhealthy or damaging comparisons.

Social media provides a platform where athletes can compare and form perceptions of themselves based on posts or videos shared by other athletes (Bardel et al., 2010). Athletes will use social media as a way to search for skill-building content, follow pages of similar interests, or to appraise their competitors' skills (Raggatt et al., 2018; Park et al., 2020). If an athlete does not know their opponent's skillset, it is difficult to predict their ability to win a match against the

other opponent(s) and to assess the athlete's degree of talent (Bardel et al., 2010). As a result, athletes may place additional pressure on themselves to perform when trying to scope out the competition. In looking at the social comparison in PED use among athletes and the influence of social media, individuals are more likely to engage in upward comparison (Latif et al., 2021).

The upward comparison involves the individual comparing themselves to another individual they deem as superior (Gerber et al., 2018). Comparing to a high-level athlete or competitor can be beneficial if the objective is to learn from another athlete or gain insight into new areas of improvement. However, upward comparison can be harmful when the athlete becomes envious and the envy manifests into their internal belief pattern about themselves. Social media can be a tool that helps athletes connect with other athletes and formulate new skills or a tool that promotes maladaptive thought patterns and beliefs, resulting in the use of illegal substances such as PEDs.

Coaches. Coaches are highly influential figures in supporting and mentoring young athletes (Nicholls et al., 2020). Amateur athletes also rely on their coaches to develop technical and tactical skills catered to their specific sport (Lagestad et al., 2017). Research shows that feedback is necessary to increase performance levels, delivered through positive statements and encouragement (Lagestad et al., 2017). Coaches must continuously revise their coaching methodology and delivery of constructive feedback to assist in athlete skill progression. At the same time, coaches must adjust to the athletes' characteristics, including personality, strengths, and weaknesses in their sport (Otte et al., 2020).

However, coaches adapting to athlete characteristics is even more important now as a new generation of athletes emerges (Gould et al., 2020). The new amateur athletes arising (i.e., those born after 1996) have grown up in the digital age, which can impact their characteristics

and behaviours on and off the field (Gould et al., 2020). As prominent figures to athletes, coaches can offer guidance and support around the benefits and consequences of using social media.

For instance, Snyder (2014) conducted a poll of 169 student-athletes to determine how they felt about the athletic department's social media regulations. According to the findings, student-athletes considered social media monitoring by their coach, team captain, or members of the athletic governing body to be an appropriate policy (Snyder, 2014). Student-athletes shared how they would be less likely to follow social media policies or consider social media surveillance by anyone other than their coach or the athletics administration. Snyder's findings highlight how athletes value the guidance of their coach when sharing or reiterating social media policies. One lapse in judgement or one angry message or post online can have detrimental consequences to athletes and their careers. Coaches can advocate for social media policies and supporting athlete autonomy for young athletes to use social media leisurely. To promote a balance of governing policies and athlete independence, coaches must educate their athletes on social media sensibility.

Coaches can promote social media sensibility by educating their athletes on the implications of posting inappropriate content. What athletes post online is not only a reflection of them, but can also reflect poorly on the affiliated sports organization. A social media miss-step by an athlete can instantaneously go viral and fall into other media outlets with possible headlines throughout local or national news (Naegeli, 2020). For example, Jamal "Gucci" Shuman, an Elon College football player, took to Twitter to express frustration with his lack of playing time (O'Connor et al., 2016). Using the hashtag #SlapGuccisCoach in reference to his

coach Pete Lembo, Shuman was suspended indefinitely from his football team (O'Connor et al., 2016).

Although there are policies in place to prevent athletes from sabotaging their athletic careers, amateur athletes have the autonomy to decide whether or not to post within the policies of the governing university or organization. The literature suggests coaches can play an essential role in creating a space where athletes' can exercise their autonomy while gaining the skills necessary to think critically before posting (Cho & Baek, 2020; Gould et al., 2020). Having coaches discuss the institutional policies with their athletes' can aid in awareness and answering further questions on what is deemed an appropriate or inappropriate post. Having coaches initiate conversations around social media can help open up further communication if there is ambiguity in these policies.

Community Building and Social Support

Community and social support are vital resources, especially adapting and making these resources available on social media for amateur athletes. Outside of their sport, athletes' have various interpersonal relationships and life events that require time and attention. Both research and practice have attested to the role of social support, stating the reduction of student-athlete burnout, increased athlete skill retention, and providing comfort for athletes' navigating the mental and physical impacts of an injury (Maurice, 2019; Von Rosen et al., 2018; Gabana et al., 2019).

Fostering healthy social relationships from an attachment theory perspective indicates that having healthy and secure attachments with others can help an injured athlete, and social media can aid in nurturing this connectedness (Dock & Kvarnström, 2020). For example, when an athlete is injured, attachment theory can provide a lens to understand how the specific

relationships an athlete has can provide a buffer or resilience to help navigate the psychological and physiological impact of an injury (Mitchell et al., 2014). Secure connections offer a sense of security to an athlete that people will be available and provide support during periods of stress (Teck-Koh et al., 2019). Athletes can communicate their emotions instead of feeling that they have to manage their stressors without support. One type of support that caters explicitly to amateur athletes is support during an injury. Along with managing external pressures, amateur athletes face the possibility of injury within their sport. Research has shown that injury support groups among young athletes have helped with the healing process associated with the injury by hearing and sharing information and stories (Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2018).

Similarly, online social media platforms can provide comparable aid to a support group as fellow peers and other individuals can offer words of encouragement and support (Nankervis et al., 2018). One of the common feelings reported among injured athletes is the effect of social isolation and the perceived thought of no one caring for them (Cassilo & Sanderson, 2019; Claytor, 2019). Social media has allowed athletes to feel connected to their team and supporters through injury recovery- highlighting how it can be used as a tool for social connection (Nankervis et al., 2018). The supporting evidence sheds light on the importance of having groups that cater to the niche market of amateur athletes. An injury can impact any individual, but when understanding the effects of an injury on a young athlete, specific supports need to be utilized that cater to both the athletes' physical and mental health.

Social media is the platform to which athletes can connect with other athletes to share their mental health experiences (Naslund et al., 2020). A research review conducted by Naslund et al. (2020) highlighted the benefits that social media can provide to individuals struggling with mental health. The research highlighted three types of support that social media provided these

individuals, one of which was facilitating social interaction. Within Naslund et al.'s review, Brusilovskiy et al.'s (2016) study emphasized social support on social media. The study highlighted that almost half of the participants (47%) who sought mental health support utilized social media platforms to feel less alone (Brusilovskiy et al., 2016).

The review also provided insight into the peer support benefits enabled through social media, including individuals sharing support, coping strategies, and informational resources (Naslund et al., 2020). These benefits can lead to exploration in educating young athletes on available mental health resources, how to connect with other athletes, and how to share personal experiences of the difficulties within the sport while having security in the choice to remain anonymous.

Not only is mental health being shared from an individual perspective, but a larger number of respected health organizations such as hospitals and mental health organizations have a social media account (Li et al., 2018). The interaction amongst users on these various platforms allows people to seek out more information on mental health. It has been shown that for those who sought out health information on social media, 40% of those individuals shared their personal experiences (Li et al., 2018). Therefore, there is a greater chance that those seeking information on social media about mental health will find something useful, thus developing a positive attitude towards mental health and treatment (Li et al., 2018).

To further substantiate Li et al.'s (2018) findings, Deshazo (2016) collected the response of 1300 student-athletes; 97% of those athletes used Facebook and a large majority used Instagram and Twitter. Having organizations and health professionals online allows athletes to view content, ask questions, and engage in finding resources that might otherwise not be followed through in person. Having platforms to which personal experiences and educational

content is shared can lead to more positive, help-seeking behaviours from the athlete (Deshazo, 2016).

Implications for Counselling

Understanding how social media influences athletes' mental health and performance is necessary for counselling practitioners. The literature I have compiled will help practitioners better assist athletes in navigating the intersectional components that impact mental health and wellbeing. Counsellors and other helping professionals can offer a safe space for athletes to share their concerns, while offering specific tools that can be used outside of the clinical setting. In the sections to follow, a discussion of athlete transitions will be reviewed. These transitions are necessary to understand the intersectional dynamics between social media and the various factors influencing athletes' mental health and performance. Secondly, social media as a tool for connection and identity is explored. In addition, social media as a tool for change and innovation is addressed. Specific recommendations for assessing social media use and exploring athlete identity are also discussed. In conclusion, suggestions are presented for areas concerning future research.

Social Media as a Tool for Connection and Identity

A substantial amount of the current research highlights the importance of understanding the various changes athletes undergo and how such changes impact mental health (Eggleston, Hawkins, & Fife, 2020; Miller & Buttell, 2018; Park et al., 2013). To understand how athletes interact with social media, clinicians must also understand how social media is influential in the identity formation of athletes. How an athlete interacts with social media may provide important insight into how clinicians can offer support and help athletes manage other elements of their identity. Supporting an athlete in exploring their identity outside of the sport and how social

media contributes to forming one's identity can mitigate the severity of unforeseen transitions such as an injury that may necessitate considerable recovery time or even leaving the sport. (Cogan, 2019; Jewett et al., 2019).

When working with athletes, clinicians must be aware of the physical and cognitive impact of injury and how social media can be used as a tool during the rehabilitation process. A theme in the literature reveals how many athletes experience isolation, a loss of confidence, or feelings of hopelessness (Mohammed et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2021). The athlete's feelings of discouragement may be exacerbated by navigating new challenges associated with an injury, such as physiotherapy, healing, or undergoing evaluations to return to sport (Kunnen et al., 2020; Trainor et al., 2020).

Clinicians may benefit from leveraging social media as a tool for facilitating connection and maintaining a sense of identity among injured athletes. Connection and support through social media have been a prominent theme throughout this review, particularly among injured athletes (Graupensperger et al., 2020, Neves et al., 2017; Haslam et al., 2017). Remaining connected with teammates and other social supports, such as friends or coaches, can help athletes overcome the negative implications of an injury (Maurice et al., 2017). Furthermore, athletes who reported higher fulfillment levels from the support they received were less likely to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression when they returned to sport (Covassin et al., 2014; De Groot et al., 2018). Mental health clinicians can probe further by gaining insight into how support is offered through social media, ways to reach out for support online, and identifying deficits in an athlete's support system (Griffin et al., 2021).

Counsellors can also work with athletes to gain insight into how these clients engage with their supports on social media. Practitioners can lean into their ability to help these clients feel

supported by exploring ways to maximize connection through social media. Whether an athlete experiences an injury, psychological distress, or is busy with training, the literature reveals the various reasons an athlete needs to feel supported (Naslund et al., 2020; Naegeli, 2020).

Facebook and Instagram are platforms that have allowed individuals to remain connected and receive support from friends and family (Nabity-Grover et al., 2020). During COVID-19 lockdowns, instant messaging platforms such as Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and Instagram saw a 70 percent increase from February 2020 to March 2020 (Nabity-Grover et al., 2020).

Transitioning from the start of the pandemic and adjusting to a new way of life, social media is the one constant these athletes have to remain connected to family, friends, and members of the sports community.

The literature featuring professional athletes contains a plethora of information on the benefits of community. My review highlights the power of support through the online community, specifically social media. (Lugueti et al., 2019; Arai et al., 2014). In the Social Media and Activism section of this literature review, athletes exhibit a united front alongside other online members to rally against various social injustices (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020; Kappeler and Flory, 2019). Similarly, in the Athletic Identity section, athletes were shown utilizing social media to help fellow players in similar predicaments or seek out a group of people for support during the rehabilitation process (Nankervis et al., 2017; Haslam et al., 2017).

Likewise, amateur athletes need to foster community connections as another form of mental health support. What is evident from the data collected by professional athletes is the opportunity that social media provides to engage with an online community. Similar to professional athletes, the research demonstrates how a sense of community and support allows

amateur athletes to feel safe and included rather than going through stressors such as the rehabilitation process alone (Rohrs-Cordes & Paule-Koba, 2021).

It is vital for therapists to offer resources to athletes that foster a sense of community and leverage the opportunities that online connection presents. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, counsellors can provide referrals to online support groups or engage with the client in understanding what community means to them. Questions that counsellors can ask clients to evoke self-reflection include, “How do you define community?” “What is your online community like?” “Are you a part of any larger support groups online?” “Are you involved in activist groups, online or in-person?” and “How does your online community influence how you see yourself?”

Another implication that has emerged from this review is the importance of exploring an athlete's identity outside of their sport. One question that has emerged based upon the current findings is “Are athletes equipped with the support and tools needed to explore the possibility of not pursuing an athletic career?” Such a question can sound existential, and even the mere thought of not pursuing one's love of sport can seem unfathomable. Undergoing identity development is an ongoing process that evolves throughout the athlete's sporting career (Champ et al., 2020; Menke & Germany, 2019). One challenge to an athlete's identity, as revealed in the literature, is the experience of an unexpected event or situation, which may necessitate exploring a career shift. Social media can be utilized to help in this exploration as it provides information and connection that can either challenge an athlete's current beliefs about themselves or aid in the construction of who they want to become.

Social Media as a Tool for Change and Innovation

Another significant implication provided by the literature is how social media can foster change and innovation. Throughout the research, professional athletes have turned to social media to evoke change (Yan et al., 2018; Sanderson, 2018; Thorpe et al., 2018). Athletes have flocked to social media to reach a larger audience, whether through social justice groups such as “Black Lives Matter” or sports teams such as the United States Women's National Soccer Team. Employing advocacy across a more extensive network has been noted to unify both users and athletes while featuring the possibilities of backlash from opposing individuals and larger sports institutions (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020; Cosby, 2018; Kappeler & Flory, 2019). Other areas of change that have been identified in the research include gender stereotyping, representation of athletes according to gender in the media, and language that exists when commentating on athlete’s gender in sport (Dickson, 2015; Fink, 2014).

Given the research on professional athletes and the influences of social media, practitioners may work more effectively with athlete clients by addressing injustices from a systemic perspective while also providing support at the individual level. It is not uncommon for amateur athletes to fear speaking out against social injustices, racial inequality, bullying, or wrongdoing (Hampel, 2018; Minikel-Lacocque, 2020; Dyer, 2018). The fear can result from a perceived or real threat from individuals or organizations, fear of losing playing time, or other consequences that may impact one’s sporting career (Hatteberg, 2018). Support at the individual level will give the athlete a safe space to address these fears and explore a path forward. Counsellors can provide support at the individual level to amateur athletes in addressing, exploring, and challenging potentially harmful gender stereotypes and social injustice exhibited through social media.

Young athletes are also more likely to face discrimination, stereotyping, and other biases that impact one's mental health compared to non-athletes (Osborne, 2014; Gerlach, 2017). Discrimination or outward attacks can be in-person, but are also rampant on social media (Watanabe et al., 2017; Gin et al, 2017; Kavanagh et al., 2019). Whether it is a hurtful comment from a fan or intentional aggressive behaviour towards an athlete, athletes are not immune to harassment on social media, which may negatively impact their mental health. Counsellors can help these clients process emotions of hurt and anger, while exploring healthy coping strategies to deal with harassment or negativity online. This includes reporting online bullying and harassment, either on the social media platform itself, or other organizations or individuals who can offer assistance (e.g., coaches, school principals, sports organizations, etc.)

Furthermore, counsellors can be allies in addressing athletes' mental health issues at the systemic level within sports organizations and educational institutes. Counsellors can advocate for athletes' mental health in that they can describe stressors unique to student-athletes. Stressors specific to social media include how athletes compare themselves to other athletes, negative comments from other users, witnessing or being subjected to online bullying, harassment, racism, and navigating social media without a critical lens (Duffy & Hund, 2019; Hayes et al.,2020). Counsellors, coaches, and other key figures can work together to provide suggestions and implement effective strategies to educate athletes on social media. The education process might involve coaching athletes on how to view posts or other articles online with a critical lens and creating platforms through which athletes and coaches can connect and form a sense of community.

Another implication that has been inferred from the literature is the importance of educating amateur athletes on social media policies. While examining the cases of student-

athletes violating social media policies, it became evident that a lack of awareness of specific policies may be to blame. In one study conducted by O'Connor et al. (2016), 70% of the students did not know if their university had a social media policy. Other research mentioned that student-athletes had stated they were unaware that others could see their posts or did not know what the term “inappropriate” meant regarding posting on social media.

Education in the form of a discussion between the student-athlete and counsellor regarding social media policies and implications will allow for more reflection from the athlete instead of a reactive position. From an angry post against a coach or rebelling against the rules, there can be many underlying reasons why an athlete would go against institutional social media policies (Sanderson & Truax, 2014; Savitz & Stewart, 2019). When athletes know the consequences and still go against policy, counsellors can notice this behaviour and work with the athlete to delve deeper into the rationale behind the content. Mental health practitioners can provide coping strategies to regulate the athlete and provide a safe space to explore frustrations and concerns instead of posting frustrations online

Recommendations for Practice

Counsellors are a proactive resource and can assist athletes in exploring how social media may influence their mental health and performance. I offer two distinct recommendations for therapists to consider when working with athletes in the counselling setting. One recommendation features suggestions for assessing social media use in athletes, while the other consists of using counselling to facilitate an exploration and deeper understanding of athlete identity.

Assessing Social Media use in Athletes

This literature review illustrates how navigating social media as an athlete can have both benefits and challenges. The role of a sports psychologist or a counsellor working with athletes is multifaceted as athletes have distinct personalities and identities embedded in organizations and other settings (Gardner & Moore, 2006). The extent to which social media influences an athlete's well-being and sense of self should be assessed on an individual level. The practitioner can use both existing research and the lived experience of their client to provide personalized care and resources. Part of the assessment process is the clinician's ability to demonstrate competency in conducting assessments. I define counsellor competency as the extent to which one has the knowledge and skillset to deliver effective means of therapy, and to seek out support when attempting to integrate other viewpoints and experiences outside of their own for the benefit of the client. When working with an athlete outside of the scope of practice, it is crucial to refer them to someone who specializes in the specific need or case that is presented by the client.

Counselling competency when working with athletes requires awareness and sensitivity relating to sports culture. Competency also requires assisting counsellors to understand how social media ties into the influences of sports culture on athletes. Mental health professionals can learn more about the influences of social media by reflecting on their purpose when engaging on social media, asking questions to fellow peers, and asking questions to clients about their experiences when appropriate. Although competency is necessary for all mental health practitioners, working with athletes involves knowledge of how stressors in their personal lives, sports careers, and social media manifest into mental health symptoms.

More practitioners working within the same organizations or institutes will need to be aware of specific organizational policies. The current research suggests that counsellors appear more relatable when they are aware of specific mental health issues athletes face along with the

policies implemented by the governing sports institution (Gulliver et al., 2012; Mack et al., 2018). When athletes can relate to their counsellor, it assists in building the therapeutic alliance and the athletes' ability to trust that the practitioner is equipped to handle their unique mental health concerns (Hall et al., 2018; McNerney, 2019).

Counsellors must also be competent in the area of assessment and assessing social media use. Assessment is one tool clinicians can use to gain further insight into the factors associated with athletes' mental health and social media. One evaluation recognized among mental health practitioners to measure internet use is the Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale (PRIUSS-18) (Jelenchick et al., 2014; Moreno et al., 2019; Klavina et al., 2021). The scale was developed to assess internet use in adolescents and consists of 18 questions, each with an answer section ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often) (Moreno et al., 2013). The assessment tool consists of three subscales: social impairment, which assesses the impact of internet use both online and offline; emotional impairment, which evaluates the degree of emotional attachment the individual has to use the internet; and risky, impulsive internet use, which seeks to assess problematic behaviours regarding internet use (Moreno et al., 2013). A cut-off score of 25 overall can be deemed for risk of problematic internet use. Being well versed in the PRIUSS-18 can assist counsellors in understanding what impairments are prominent for adolescent athletes.

The PRIUSS-18 has also been used on young adults and to develop shorter scales to detect problematic internet use (Moreno et al., 2016; Guinta & John, 2018). The data collected from the PRIUSS-18 can provide information that the counsellor can use for future interventions and education to examine if social media is connected to problematic online behaviours.

There are specific assessments such as the Facebook Intensity Scale (FBI) that focus on particular social media platforms. The scale was designed to measure an individual's Facebook

use such as their emotional connection and integration of Facebook into their lives (Sigerson & Chen, 2018). The eight-question assessment requires the individual to provide their answers using a five-point Likert Scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Sigerson & Chen, 2018). The FBI was adapted by Orosz et al. (2016) to form the Multidimensional Facebook Intensity Scale (MFBI) to explore the four dimensions of Facebook use: persistence, boredom, overuse, and self-expression.

Formal evaluations also provide the counsellor with a starting point to intervene through psychoeducation. Psychoeducation aims to educate the athlete on social media use. Counsellors can use data collected from assessments – such as the PRIUSS-18 to create a conversation between themselves and the athlete. For instance, a counsellor can address areas and categories that the athlete scored higher in, as these areas may be more cause for concern. Counsellors can guide the athlete to achieve a healthy balance with social media use and developing their sense of identity. During the therapy sessions, counsellors can also focus on the narrative of what the athlete would like to see and experience when interacting online (Bray, 2020). The practitioner can then encourage more thoughtful engagement and empowerment (Bray, 2020). Guiding questions that counsellors can use to promote deeper self-reflection from the client can include: "How often do you use social media?" "What platforms do you use?" "How does it benefit you?" "How does it limit or harm you?" "How many hours a day do you spend on social media?" "What types of content do you consume?" and "Do you ever find yourself using it in unhealthy ways?"

Exploring an Athlete's Identity

Self and identity are concepts that are continually evolving throughout one's lifetime. A scandal being leaked online, comparing one's skills to an opponent's, being a successful athlete

and deciding not to pursue a career, and witnessing social injustice are just a few of the ways social media intersects with an individual's developing identity. As such, counsellors must be equipped to ask potentially difficult, existential questions (e.g., "Who are you without this sport?" or "What if your injury prevents you from returning to sport?"). These inquiries can help to explore identity and create new possibilities outside of sport and social media.

Prior to asking reflective and potentially difficult questions, clinicians must first build rapport and trust with the athlete. There is a classic saying among mental health practitioners of "meeting a client where they are at." Meeting the client where they are at allows for trust and an alliance to form naturally, embracing the client's current reality while working towards the athlete's goals. Many studies have highlighted those individuals who have found meaningful experiences in therapy cited that they had a safe place to talk, and the counsellor accepted them during different stages as they progressed throughout treatment (Sacket & Cook, 2021; Tomalski et al., 2019; Bhatia & Gelso, 2018). Meeting the client where they are at during different points in their lives also involves validating the individual experience of the athlete. Understanding what constitutes a loss or the difficulties an athlete faces will establish a foundation of trust and safety so that clinicians can further explore the relevancy of social media in an athlete's life.

Many athletes have never explored life outside of their sport or set aside other career prospects to pursue a sporting career (Nam, 2021; Franck & Stambulova, 2019; Menke & Germany, 2019). Some athletes might not have had the opportunity to engage in meaningful exploration of other career ventures or have been unwillingly removed from sports participation (Gerlach, 2018). Similarly, other sports participants have mentioned feeling lost and alone navigating through their circumstances that their training was all for nothing, or trying to engage in a new routine outside of sports (Menke & Germany, 2019). Counsellors can play an essential

role in delving deeper into the other emotions the athlete may not be sharing, recognizing the grieving process of losing a part of their identity, and exploring what identity means to them.

Counsellors can support athletes during their exploration of self by providing coping strategies and tools for self-empowerment when using social media platforms. One of the strategies discussed in various articles regarding athletes and mental health has been mindfulness (Fogaca, 2019; Kaufman et al., 2018; Nien et al., 2020). Mindfulness requires the athlete to pay attention in a certain way and be present in the moment (Baslet et al., 2020). By bringing the athlete to the present moment, counsellors can redirect the athlete's focus to becoming more aware of their thought patterns and anxieties surrounding their identity and engagement on social media. Assisting the athlete in self-reflection will empower the client as they will have more awareness when deciding the direction they want to go in therapy. Mindfulness also allows the athlete to be more aware of how they navigate and connect online. In paying attention to the material and ways they interact online, athletes can engage in critical thinking and become more cognizant in what forms of social media benefit their mental health or cause emotional disturbances.

Another coping strategy that practitioners can utilize in working with this population as they continue to navigate social media is reframing. Reframing involves taking maladaptive thoughts and seeking to put a more logical or compassionate alternative to those same situations or thoughts (Van Raalte et al., 2016). For example, Rodrigues et al (2020), highlighted that social media may amplify feelings of loneliness as these platforms convey a positive curated version of an individual's reality. Scrolling through these carefully selected images may perpetuate maladaptive thoughts of loneliness, isolation or unworthiness (Rodrigues et al., 2020). Reframing brings awareness into the cycle of passively scrolling through social media, leading to

distorted thoughts, so the individual is present while working to reinterpret the meaning of the situation to achieve more adaptive emotional responses (Yue et al., 2021).

It is not to suggest that false positivity is the solution, nor do I suggest that clients should not feel sadness or anger towards a situation. Reframing is beneficial because it allows both the therapist and athlete to explore the distressing thoughts and provide empowerment by changing the narrative. Reframing allows the athlete to engage in positive self-talk and express gratitude for other areas in their life. Many researchers have pointed to the benefits of positive self-talk in athlete confidence and sports performance (Latinjak et al., 2017; Hansen et al., 2018; Davis et al., 2020). Reframing, like mindfulness, emphasizes being aware of the environment and factors influencing the specific thought or reaction. Reframing is beneficial for athletes navigating social media as it is another tool that can help ground them when experiencing an overwhelming emotional response to content online.

Limitations and Fundamental Next Steps for Research

While the literature review presents information on both the benefits and challenges of social media on athletes' mental health and performance, there are limitations present within the research. One of the limitations inferred based upon the literature is the lack of representation among the younger population of athletes. The recommendations and coping strategies I provided earlier for mental health clinicians were presented with college athletes in mind. Since college and university athletes account for a large portion of the amateur sports category, younger amateur athletes (16 and younger) have been overlooked. As a result, the generalizability of the data collected is significantly reduced.

Given that a large portion of research focused on athletes at the college level, the recommendations were tailored to assisting amateur athletes of a higher developmental level.

The suggestions for clinicians to help athletes critically examine their relationship with social media, such as reframing or existential questioning, may not be as beneficial to a younger athlete due to their developmental age and understanding. Further research is needed on this younger group of athletes to ascertain what specific issues, challenges, and strengths social media presents, along with tailored strategies and tools to help them navigate this.

Future research may also benefit from more qualitative studies on athletes, given that the majority of research thus far has been quantitative. Insight and exploration into the lived experiences of athletes navigating social media may be helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of certain themes or issues. In addition, qualitative studies could introduce new elements relating to social media and athlete mental health that can direct future quantitative studies.

Another potential area for future research includes examining how social media can be used to break the stigma surrounding athlete mental health. The review has emphasized the array of scenarios impacting an athletes' mental health and the barriers to seeking help. In light of stigma and individual circumstances which have prevented health seeking behaviours, there is a need to provide innovated strategies that will increase the likelihood of young athletes seeking mental health services (Kern et al., 2017). Investigations should take place to understand athletes' knowledge of online resources or support groups that athletes can join through social media platforms. In working towards eradicating the stigma of mental health, helping athletes' understand their perceptions of help-seeking behaviours and nuanced ways of connections are the first steps in addressing the barriers that reside within the individual and working towards reducing the stigma on a larger scale. Through breaking individual barriers, athletes may begin to feel more comfortable discussing their mental health, voicing concerns within sports institutions, and creating change on a larger scale.

Finally, further studies should also be conducted involving athletes speaking about mental health on social media. The literature review shows that athlete activism brought other online users together in support or brought forth opposition. The interests in future investigations lie in how professional athletes' beliefs influence the younger generation of athletes. Understanding the connection between what is posted online and the impact that content has on athletes and their sense of self can benefit researchers and counsellors.

Conversations about mental health that emerged during the 2021 Olympic Games also provide anecdotal evidence of the importance of continued research in athlete mental health and social media. Simone Biles dropping out of the Tokyo 2021 Olympics due to mental health reasons was a trending topic on various social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Unfortunately, the mental health movement that has seemingly arisen across social media originating from Biles statement regarding the 2021 Tokyo Olympics had just gained traction as my research ended. I use the term “movement” to imply the ripple effect that has been seen on social media from Biles, which has caused other Olympian athletes to release statements about their mental health. I can only provide my assertion to which social media has provided the platform for these Olympians to reach a global audience and initiate change. Since Biles released the statement on Jul 29, 2021, additional research and follow-up will be crucial in assessing the influence of social media in addressing mental health among Olympian athletes.

For instance, such research can provide insight into how the sports institution, coaches, and other key figures can support younger Olympian hopefuls. It also provides a point to which researchers can assess how social media can be used to work towards the destigmatization of mental health and help-seeking behaviours. It would be an intriguing area of investigation to take amateur athletes that have seen Simone Biles posts related to her speaking out about mental

health on social media and evaluate their perceptions towards the events. Researchers could then gain insight into emerging themes, similar attitude changes, or any preconceptions relating to mental health.

Reflexive statement

Reflecting back to when I started this exploration, I admittedly began with self-serving intentions. I wanted to report the facts presented in the current literature and finally complete this yearlong investigation. As I began to move through the research, I became overwhelmed as so many articles spoke to the variables of social media and athlete stressors. I became defeated as I had wanted to address the many areas of research on social media and athletes, and yet if I did, I could not provide the detail and summaries the research deserved.

I also became caught up in the imposter syndrome and lost my “why” value as I started to write. My ego then took over, creating the narrative that this paper had to create a massive shift in the world of sports and mental health or else it would be written for nothing. I forced my ego to take a back seat; I began to engage in self-reflection to reconnect with why I wanted to speak to such a niche topic. I asked myself, “What is the message I want to deliver through this literature review? How can we as individuals and the collective society assist in changing the narrative to which these influences impact athletes' mental health?”

It was in that moment of reminiscing where I began to think about the younger generation of athletes. I reflected back to when I was a young athlete and the immense pressure coming at me from every direction. From bullying, being the odd one out, or not wanting to let down my mother, who invested so much money into me as a soccer player, it was difficult to enjoy my sport when I was in a constant state of worry. My thoughts led me to feel empathy towards amateur athletes, having faced isolation from COVID-19 and having to navigate other unique

stressors along with social media. My heart sank as I wondered what supports are available to these athletes and how these events will impact them if they choose to progress further into their athletic careers.

I can say with confidence that my goal in writing this review is to provide a voice to the younger generation of athletes. In sharing the content with you as the reader, I express my unconditional gratitude that you have taken the time to read the compilation of literature conducted by researchers in various fields. If the research enlightened you in any way, sparked an insightful question, or even provided you with one new piece of information, then my goal for this paper has been reached. I know the education and awareness I received through assessing the literature was a way to become an ally to the younger generation of athletes. It is essential to understand that advocacy can manifest in many ways. Creating awareness of how social media benefits and challenges athletes' mental health and performance is the starting point.

I encourage those reading and who want to learn more to go out and investigate. There is a plethora of research and so many personal stories from professional athletes that are so profound and inspirational that, unfortunately, I could not include them in my review. My hope in sharing this compilation of the literature is that it sparks further research into how social media can be a platform for innovation in accessing mental health resources. To ignite change towards the way we discuss mental health and move away from stigma towards creating a safe place online. I want to encourage help-seeking behaviours regarding mental health supports and find more ways to deliver those supports, whether through a support group or online counselling. I hope to see more initiatives involving younger athletes regarding availability and accessibility to counsellors and mental health practitioners, education on social media policies, and ways to promote personal growth and self-discovery within the athlete outside of their sport.

Conclusion

Social media is a widely used platform, and it is crucial to explore how athletes view themselves and their sport as a result of engaging and viewing content online. While there is a plethora of research regarding the various stressors that are unique to athletes, this literature review highlights that the influence of social media is an overlooked factor regarding athletes' mental health and performance. The compilation of research I have provided contributes to the existing literature involving factors influencing athletes' mental health. This review emphasizes the unique intersectional experiences of athletes as they navigate both real-world and online world experiences.

In this literature review, I examined the existing body of research focusing on the influences of social media on athletes' mental health and performance. There were two significant populations of athletes to which the literature examined: professional athletes and amateur athletes. I aimed to explore the ways amateur athletes utilize social media and the contributing factors these platforms have on young athletes and their identities. Young athletes undergo immense pressure balancing their sporting commitments while attending to other life priorities (Gerber et al., 2018; Breslin et al., 2017). The findings highlighted the relevancy of social media in either benefiting the young athlete and their mental health or how these platforms can negatively impact their identity. The research was also collected on professional athletes as a supplement to explore the influences of social media in an athlete's professional career. The review effectively showcased how professional athletes have used social media to leverage their careers and used it as a tool for connection, greatly benefiting one's mental health. Alternatively, there is supporting literature that provides insight into how social media can negatively impact an athlete's mental health and career.

The studies cited in this review involving professional athletes and amateur athletes gave clear direction into the implications. The implications I proposed were crafted to encourage those in the mental health field to extend their knowledge and competencies in working with athletes. Counsellors need to be aware of the emotional and psychological stressors athletes face and how social media can exacerbate those feelings and be used as a tool to foster connection and support with others. Among the implications, I identified key themes within the supporting literature, including social media as a tool for athletic identity, change, and innovation.

I intended to condense the factors discussed in this literature review to provide more helpful guidance and practical recommendations. I sought to intervene with appropriate interventions by focusing on assessing social media use among athletes and exploring athletic identity. Studying the current reviews on the interplay between social media and athletes, I wanted to provide practical ways counsellors, and other mental health practitioners can measure social media use among athletes while focusing on other tools that can assist in self-exploration.

Lastly, I reviewed the limitations and fundamental next steps for research. I acknowledged my lack of inclusivity regarding the amateur athlete population by only referring to articles using college-level athletes. What resulted from this limitation was the reduction of generalizability within my review to the entire generation of young athletes. The inclusion of qualitative studies is necessary for more informal yet individualistic data that is needed to merge lived experiences with qualitative data. In limiting myself to a majority of quantitative studies, I could not attest to the individual experiences of athletes and social media use which would have enhanced both the review and future recommendations for practice. Beyond the limitations of this review, I was able to craft future considerations involving the next steps for research. These suggestions catered to increasing counsellors' understanding of how to improve support and

resources for athletes online and breaking the stigma of mental health struggles. It is my hope that this review can help direct counsellors and other helping professionals to the importance of working effectively with this population.

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