

Understanding Women Athlete Concussion in Socio-Cultural Context: A Media Analysis of  
Eugenie Bouchard's Concussion

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the present study was to explore the news media's portrayal of one elite Canadian athlete, tennis player Eugenie Bouchard, and her performance decline after sustaining a concussion outside of sport. An ethnographic content analysis was used to examine news media reports of prior to, and after the concussion. An overarching theme of 'performance decline beyond tennis' was identified in the pre- and post-concussion North American media articles. These results show the value of studying one media incident focusing on a woman athlete, highlighting the impact of the concussion within and outside of tennis. The present study of Bouchard's career adds to sport psychology injury literature as it demonstrated the inconceivable resiliency and mental toughness an athlete had to face during recovery and return-to-play, inconsistency due to coaching changes, an inability to recover from injuries, and a decline in rankings, all caused by confidence issues.

### **Keywords**

Eugenie Bouchard, Tennis, Concussion, Elite, Women, Performance, Socio-cultural, Sport Psychology, Confidence, Mental Toughness, Sport, Media.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Concussion is a significant problem in sport as it may cause permanent damage after athlete retirement or may be career-ending (Caron, Bloom, Johnson, & Sabiston, 2013). Covassin and Elbin (2011) indicated that the number of concussions related to sport and recreational activities continue to rise, with an estimated 1.6 to 3 million occurring annually in the United States. Specific to sport related concussions, Bloom, Loughhead, Shapcott, Johnston, and Delaney (2008) noted that 300,000 occur in the United States every year, signifying a rising incidence. This trend is demonstrable in a multitude of sports as Daneshvar, Nowinski, McKee, and Cantu (2011) estimated that there were 3.8 million concussion injuries every year sustained in organized youth and adolescent sport in the United States. Their longitudinal study addressed concussion injuries over two and a half decades and defined an athlete as an individual who played at least one season in their sport. For each sport they categorized their results by gender, as well as by level of play (high school or collegiate). At the collegiate level, for males, football was the sport that had the most concussions overall, while for woman, it was gymnastics (Daneshvar et al., 2011). Brooks, Mrazik, Barlow, McKay, Meeuwisse, and Emery (2014) evaluated the sex differences in athletes who had suffered a previous concussion. A key factor discussed in their paper was the lack of information pertaining to women athletes, in particular, the symptoms post-concussion are typically worse for woman, and can last significantly longer.

Concussions are defined as forms of traumatic brain injury caused by biomechanical force on the brain; these forces are categorized as sudden acceleration-deceleration, contact, or rotational forces (Collins, Kontos, Reynolds, Murawski, & Fu, 2013). The brain's chemical composition is delicate; a concussion affects its sodium and calcium balance which is manifested

in the physiology of the body. The most common symptoms after a concussion include dizziness, nausea, confusion, loss of balance, and occasionally, a loss of consciousness. At present, the knowledge surrounding concussion management and treatment is improving, yet there remains “this ‘one size fits all’ approach to concussion care [that] does not address the highly individualized nature of this injury and can result in ineffective management strategies” (p. 235). When an athlete suffers a concussion, the protocol needed for effective treatment will differ depending on the athlete and the situation. In addition, those athletes having had more than one concussion may be treated differently for their subsequent head injury, as repeated head trauma can result in permanent damage (Collins et al., 2013; Kontos & Elbin, 2016). For example, the literature surrounding repeated concussions shows that athletes who have had one concussion are 1.5 times more likely to have another, while athletes who have had three concussions are 3.4 times more likely (Kontos & Elbin, 2016). Athletes who are at a higher risk due to repeated head trauma should be monitored more frequently, and both signs and symptoms of concussion should be noted and reported (Kontos & Elbin, 2016).

Recognizing the signs and symptoms of a concussion vary with the individual, and thus, are harder to discover and diagnose. Concussions and traumatic brain injuries (TBI) are called the “invisible injury” because the symptoms may not be immediately present, making them difficult to detect (Bloom, Horton, McCrory, & Johnston, 2004; Kontos & Elbin, 2016). After the Zurich Fourth International Conference on Concussion in Sport (November, 2012), a panel was formed to develop a consensus statement on concussion. Concussion Consensus is an annual conference held to discuss all aspects of this topic, from definition to treatment, as well as allowing professionals in the field to network and share their research. To create an accurate understanding of this injury, McCrory et al. (2013) highlighted recommendations from this group

who defined concussion into four sub-sections. One; concussions are caused by a direct hit to the head, face, or neck. Two; they typically only affect the body for a short amount of time, however, that is individualized. Three; concussions typically follow acute clinical symptoms, but some abnormalities can be seen. Four; they may be graded on a clinical symptoms scale which includes loss of consciousness, and symptoms can last longer depending on injury severity. Other concussion symptoms can include sleep disturbances and personality changes, which should be monitored carefully as those symptoms can lead to life-long affects. For athletes, the following steps ought to be taken after a concussion has occurred; a) the player should be evaluated by a medical professional or someone who understands brain injuries, b) the player should be removed from the game, c) a sideline assessment tool should be used, d) the player should not be left alone, and e) the player should not return to sport on the day of the injury. Following these steps will allow the athlete to successfully recover (McCrory et al., 2013).

An additional layer within the concussion and sport literature concerning diagnosis, understanding of symptoms, and issues regarding return-to-play and assessment, is gender (Brooks et al., 2014; Covassin & Elbin, 2011; Kontos, McAllister Deitrick, & Reynolds, 2015). As the term is used here, ‘gender ‘refers is a social construction which communicates certain ideals concerning masculinity and femininity in sport. Birrell (1988) discussed the evolution of women, as originally, they were seen as too fragile to participate in sport, which was defined as masculine. The author suggested that the terms “man” and “woman” are biological differences, while “masculinity” and “femininity” are cultural stereotypes of what is deemed appropriate behaviour. Further, Birrell addressed the issue of the lack of women scholars and how that contributed to less literature focussed on women athletes. At the time, women comprised only 36% of the members of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport, which could

explain this underrepresentation noted above (Birrell, 1988). These points mean that ‘gender’ is not biologically given, but instead, a set of social and cultural expectations with respect to how women might act, look, think and perform, when compared to men, in sport.

Within the context of sport concussion, the literature on women athletes (in reference to concussion incidences) has demonstrated that this group is often not well categorized (Covassin & Elbin, 2011; Brooks et al., 2014). Although most studies compare both genders, as well as athletes at the high school and collegiate level, the numbers are often skewed to include more male athletes than women. For example, Covassin and Elbin (2011), completed a study on the differences in sport-related concussion and management techniques. The sample had 72% male athletes, leaving only 28% women. This lack of representation of women in sport leads to less literature, resulting in an overall weaker understanding of women athletes in general, and the impact of concussion injury in women, in particular. To expand on this point, a study by Brooks et al., (2014) compared the difference between men and women who had sustained repeated concussions during sport. The proportion of men compared to women used in the study was five to one, a further indication of the paucity of data directed on athletic women concussion.

A study by Covassin, Elbin, Crutcher, and Burkhart (2013) indicated that men and women differ in relation to recovery time after sustaining a head trauma. At the collegiate level, concussions occurred more frequently in women sport than in men’s. With regards to symptoms and functioning, research showed that women performed better post-concussion in verbal memory and perceptual motor tasks, while men performed better in visual-spatial tasks and quantitative problem solving. These results suggested that there is a difference in the way women and men recover post-concussion relative to their neurocognitive functioning. Concussion diagnostic tests have improved over the past few decades, from grading scales to multi-faceted

approaches. With a greater understanding, concussions are being taken more seriously as athletes are openly discussing the ramifications, and the importance of treatment at a young age. Included in the new methods for testing of concussions is having baseline measures of athletes, so that after an injury, the coach, trainer, or clinician can better identify changes in their behaviour. Better diagnostic testing post injury will help to decrease the amount of secondary brain injuries occurring, as well as creating a better return-to-play plan for the athlete (Covassin et al., 2013; Mainwaring & Trenerry, 2012).

As awareness of the potential dangers of sport concussion has increased, the guidelines for concussion management and return-to-play as key issues have been acknowledged (see Kontos & Elbin, 2016; Mainwaring & Trenerry, 2012). Currently, return-to-play guidelines are mentioned in the literature (McCrorry et al., 2013; Collins et al., 2013; Podlog, Banham, Wadey & Hannon, 2015) and the concussion injury is individualized, which means the time off required by the athletes should reflect the nature of the injury. McCrorry et al. (2013) created the graduated return-to-play protocol which outlined six rehabilitation stages. The rehabilitation stages range from no physical activity at stage one, to full return-to-play at stage six. At each stage, certain physical activities are defined ranging from light walking or swimming, to normal training after seeking medical clearance. Although it has been accepted that gender could be a modifying element with regards to the concussion injury and injury severity (McCrorry et al., 2013), as discussed at the Concussion Consensus conference, the literature surrounding women athletes, and gender, is not conclusive enough. Collins et al. (2014) coined return-to-play guidelines in a simple phrase of “when in doubt sit them out” (p. 243) after a concussion injury. The most important aspects of the return-to-play guidelines are the decisions required for how to treat and manage the athlete. Remembering this phrase is helpful to coaches and trainers as the athlete

needs to be removed from the practice or game setting immediately, while a determination of how to treat the athlete effectively is being formed (Collins et al., 2014).

Coinciding with the return-to-play issue and the misunderstandings concerning concussion, and communication of symptoms and education of athletes, has been the increased media attention (see Anderson & Kian, 2012; Furness, 2016; McGannon, Cunningham & Schinke, 2013), particularly in contact sports (see Caron et al., 2013; Kontos & Elbin, 2016). Outside of contact sports, the literature on sport concussion has shown that the injuries can be high risk in all sports, especially since the long-term adverse effects are extremely dangerous (Randolph & Kirkwood, 2009). The risks can include permanent brain injury, death, career-ending damage, lengthy recovery, and later-life consequences such as early onset brain injuries (Randolph & Kirkwood, 2009). Kontos and Reynolds (2015) discussed the quick time change reaction that occurred in football with regards to decreasing the amount of contact time that was allowed in youth sport. Limiting practice time in contact sport is not going to help the issue of the prevalence of concussion in sport, but making policy and rule changes with regards to contact may help to decrease the rise in concussion injuries. Athletes in contact sports need to learn how to properly tackle in the safest possible way (Kontos & Reynolds, 2015). In addition to research on contact sports, more needs to be done for non-contact sports, since the literature suggests that these athletes also risk concussion (Weinberg, Vernau, & Horn, 2013; Stein, et al., 2016). Hume et al. (2017) studied former rugby players, in comparison to non-contact sport athletes. The results demonstrated that the athletes in contact and competitive sport had an increased likelihood of difficulty with regards to cognitive functioning after sustaining a concussion at some point during their career in comparison to athletes who were not in contact sports. Although the results only showed small deficits, the retired competitive rugby athletes struggled

with small to moderate neurocognitive tasks, while athletes in non-contact sport did not. (Hume et al., 2017). Excluding other sports from research may contribute to misunderstandings concerning who is at risk and what may contribute to concussion (Kontos & Elbin, 2016).

In addition to the above, the psychosocial implications of sport concussion have been explored within sport psychology. Key issues identified within the literature include emotional trauma, anger, social isolation, depression, pain, anxiety (Bloom et al., 2004; Caron et al., 2013), and pressure on athletes to return-to-play (Kontos & Elbin, 2016; Mainwaring, 2012). In order to learn more about psychosocial issues within sport, researchers in sport psychology have recently called attention to the need to understand concussion in a socio-cultural context (Caron et al., 2013; McGannon et al., 2013). To understand concussions in sport through a deeper and more meaningful lens, this researcher chose to review socio-cultural context by analyzing sport media narratives (i.e. news media articles) surrounding Canadian celebrity athlete, Eugenie Bouchard. These align with the broader sport injury literature within sport psychology that draw attention to the importance of considering socio-cultural context to further understand risk, response, and recovery of injured athletes (see Wiese-Bjornstal, 2010; Wiese-Bjornstal, Smith, Shaffer, & Morrey, 1998). Within sport sociology literature, focus on the socio-cultural influences of injury has shown to be important because sport culture encourages and/or rewards pain and injury for athletes to gain respect, adhere to masculine ideals of toughness, and/or put athletic performance ahead of athlete health and safety (Nixon, 1993; 1992; Safai, 2003; Young, McTeer, & White, 1994).

Although the above socio-cultural influences are established in sport and can thus frame return-to-play pressures for athletes, encouraging them to play while injured and/or downplay the severity of concussion leads to athletes becoming isolated or less likely to report a concussion

and thus not receive proper treatment (Caron et al., 2013; McGannon et al., 2013; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2010). For the most part, the socio-cultural context of sport concussion is now receiving a better understanding, however, research related to women and concussion is absent. One way to learn more about the socio-cultural context of concussion is to focus on media representations of high profile, elite level athletes (McGannon et al., 2013). Recent media work in the sociology of sport and cultural studies have explored concussion in sport since McGannon et al.'s (2013) study, but that work has focused on male athletes (e.g., Furness, 2016; Sanderson, Weathers, Tehan & Warren, 2016; Ventresca, 2019), leaving women out of the sport media research on concussion. The study of media representations is rich and extensive within sport studies scholarship (see Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Millington & Wilson, 2016). Such research has shown the media to be a powerful source of cultural representation and circulation of ideologies (i.e., expected behaviours based on cultural values and norms) concerning sport and athletic identities (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Millington & Wilson, 2016). Through circulating certain images and texts, media representations often subvert some identities whilst privileging others. This may result in, for example, gender inequalities (e.g., Bruce, 2016) and problematic constructions of masculinity (e.g., Anderson & Kian, 2012), femininity (Sherry, Osborne & Nicholson, 2016), and heterosexuality (Lenskyj, 2013), which perpetuate limiting ideals and portrayals of men and women athletes, and further impact self-identity expression and well-being.

Although sport psychology researchers have been less interested in the media's role in identity construction, the advantage of studying the media has been advocated within sport psychology writings to learn more about identity and the associated meanings generated (see McGannon & McMahon, 2016). Sport psychology researchers studying media representations

have focused on recognizing the nuanced meanings constructing athlete identities within various forms of media and media narratives along with the psychological and health implications (e.g., Cosh, Crabb, & Tully, 2015; Cosh, LeCouteur, Crabb, & Kettler, 2013; McGannon, Curtin, Schinke & Schweinbenz, 2012; McGannon, Gonsalves, Schinke & Busanich, 2015; McGannon, Hoffmann, Metz & Schinke, 2012).

Media representations of sport concussion and the implications for athlete identities have been less studied, with two exceptions of interest for the present study; one in cultural studies of sport (Anderson & Kian, 2012) and one in sport psychology (McGannon et al., 2013). The American sport of football is a prime example of the masculinity narrative that the players and media have created (Anderson & Kian, 2012). In this regard masculinity in football means that the athlete should remain tough, persevere through odds, and display a strong, fighter approach. American football is one of the most viewed sports, especially during the Super Bowl. It is seen as one of the most 'masculine' sports to play, where the athlete places his own health and safety concerns aside for the sake of the game. An additional finding is that youth athletes are being socialized to believe that male athletes should be sacrificing themselves for the sake of the sport, regardless of pain or injury. Major sport media sites have come on board by understanding that player health is more important than being the most masculine player on the field, especially if attempting to play through an injury such as concussion (Anderson & Kian, 2012). The key finding from this literature is that more attention is being drawn to concussion, as the media coverage is drawing attention to athletes who have had this type of injury, resulting in more open discussion. Furthermore, the governing bodies are being held accountable regarding these issues and are becoming more aware of the affect they can have to lessen or moderate these injuries. For example, the NFL has been sued multiple times for sporting injuries, and as concussion can

have life-long adverse effects, the likelihood of a lawsuit post-injury is increasingly high (Anderson & Kian, 2012; Murray, Murray & Robson, 2015). The literature finds that with regard to media and concussion, a reversal of ideals is developing as players begin to come forward in speaking more openly about their injuries. In addition, the play through the pain theme, the focus on masculinity, and the icon of male warriors which surround the sport of football, are diminishing. As more high-profile athletes are starting to speak out about their injuries, and how concussions have affected their life, the awareness spreads throughout the media is steadily increasing (Anderson & Kian, 2012). Despite this focus, women athletes remain absent from the research and media's focus on high profile athletes, concussion, and the pressure and negotiation of concussion and brain injury that they may face.

McGannon et al. (2013) explored news media representations of the concussions of National Hockey League (NHL) star player, Sidney Crosby. Concussion was researched through a socio-cultural lens by evaluating the media surrounding this high-profile athlete and construction of his concussion and meanings surrounding the injury. The key finding of this study was an overarching theme of the culture of risk and its impact on athletes and three sub-themes that fed into the meaning of Crosby's concussion. The first sub-theme of Crosby's story as a cautionary tale framed Crosby's injury as a warning to the public of risks associated with returning to play too early after a concussion. This also put the spotlight on the lack of knowledge and understanding surrounding concussions. An additional subtheme was that of Crosby's concussion as a political platform. After the injury, Crosby's concussion became more of an issue with the NHL, as the policies and rules surrounding concussions took the spotlight. Additionally, concussion as an ambiguous injury was found as a narrative, which was discussed as the complexity of the concussion injury, and how the media represented Crosby's injury.

Furthermore, it was noted that after the injury, the treatment plan was out of his hands, and the attention moved to the coach, trainer, and physicians involved. These findings drew attention to previous media portrayals of concussion being based solely on physical risks and symptomology, with little, if any, discussion of psychosocial issues and concussion. This is problematic given that sport psychology research on athlete concussion has repeatedly identified psychological and social consequences, which can result in anxiety depression and isolation for athletes. This study again focused on a male athlete's (i.e., Crosby) concussion within the media.

Overall, the literature on the media within sport sociology and more recently, sport psychology, has afforded researchers the opportunity to articulate the value of studying the media as a cultural site that constructs and circulates particular meanings concerning pertinent issues in sport (e.g., concussion). The two studies outlined above on concussion in particular, show the value of focusing on media narratives within the context of key media incidents surrounding recognizable, high profile athletes. Specifically, studying a recognizable athlete, such as a sport celebrity helps to continue the growth and understanding of athletes' identities in sport psychology and sport media. As of yet, no research has explored the media's role in the construction of concussion and the implications for women athlete's identities and potential health and well-being implications. Such work would not only add to extend previous research on media representations concerning women athletes within sport sociology and sport studies scholarship (see Bruce, 2016; Sherry et al., 2016), but also expand work concerning the media's role in athlete identity construction in relation to concussion in socio-cultural context from a gender-perspective.

Underscoring the above points, as noted, while women and sport concussion have been studied within the literature, the findings suggest that the following issues concerning women

concussion in sport remain contentious. There is literature supporting the key finding that women athletes are more likely to have a concussion than men, due to the differences anatomically and physiologically (i.e. chemical make-up) (Covassin et al., 2013; Dvorak, McCrory, & Kirkendall, 2007, Covassin & Elbin, 2011). Low neck strength, lower isometric strength (the ability to hold the neck in place while other surrounding muscles and joints move), as well as lower neck mass and girth define the differences in women anatomy (Dvorak et al., 2007), in addition to the physiological differences that women and men athletes demonstrate during a concussion.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

Given the contentious issues regarding the study of concussion for women athletes, the purpose of the present research was to explore the media's representation of her being injured (i.e., incurring a concussion) outside of the sport (i.e., in the locker room) to learn more about the meanings of the media's portrayal of women and sport concussion. An ethnographic content analysis (see Altheide, 1996) of news reports of this celebrity woman athlete's concussion were used to illustrate how portrayals of Bouchard's concussion and the associated meanings are mediated, and thus, culturally constructed (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; McGannon et al., 2013; McGannon & McMahon, 2016).

Eugenie Bouchard was born in Montreal on February 25, 1994. Her amateur tennis career began at age 14 and since that time she has achieved many accolades and titles in sport. Once turning professional at the age of 19, Bouchard made her first top 50 season and played in a number of matches including Wimbledon, and the Australian Open. As her professional career continued, she began to receive more accolades such as having a Grand Slam Breakthrough at age 20 and being the first Canadian tennis player to attend the Grand Slam final. Additionally, she was a member of the Canadian Federation Cup Team throughout 2013-2015, as well as being

part of the Canadian Olympic team in 2016 (WTA, 2016). At the time of the concussion in 2015, 22-year-old Bouchard was 46<sup>th</sup> ranked singles tennis player internationally according to the World Tennis Association (WTA). The media incident associated with Bouchard is the concussion she sustained on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The concussion occurred after a practice for the U.S. Open match which was taking place that upcoming weekend. Bouchard had finished practice and had gone into a dark training room to get through to the women's changing area. After she had won her two matches in practice, she was heading to a press conference before wanting to take an ice bath for muscle stiffness and soreness. After the press conference, Bouchard returned to the training room where she slipped and fell hitting the back of her head and elbow. She was unable to continue to play in the U.S. Open, and the media framed her injury as potentially career changing (DiManno, 2015). In the coming months following the injury, Bouchard's concussion garnered a great deal of media attention as the injury did not happen while she was playing or practicing in her sport. This concussion could have cost Bouchard her career, as she was out of practice and playing until January of 2016, which was also the start of the Olympic year. This incident provides the opportunity to explore the various meanings generated by the media surrounding one-woman athlete's concussion. This study brings a new and additional understanding of concussion in a socio-cultural context and adds to the growing genre of cultural sport psychology, opening up the possibility for further research in relation to cultural research on self-identity (McGannon & Smith, 2015).

This study is unique as the injury occurred outside of the sport, which directly affected Bouchard's performance, and ability on the court. Additionally, by adding the layer of analyzing her performance before the injury allows for a deeper understanding of Bouchard's subsequent performance decline, as framed and constructed by the media. The following research questions

guided this study:

1. How is the concussion of a high-profile professional athlete (i.e., Eugenie Bouchard) developed and/or contested within sport media (i.e., daily news) narratives?
2. What specific meanings can be identified within sport media narratives concerning Eugenie Bouchard's performance decline prior to and/or after the concussion incident?
3. What are the implications for sport psychology in relation to the study's findings?

To accomplish this purpose and answer the research questions, the following chapters are included within this thesis. First, a literature review chapter where the following forms of literature will be reviewed: concussion incidence and prevalence, nature of sport concussion (definitions, diagnosis, and treatment) psychosocial issues in sport concussion and sport media, (understanding concussion in socio-cultural context). This chapter will conclude with a summary of the contentious issues based on the literature reviewed and gaps that remain, followed by the purpose of the present study and how it will seek to fill those research gaps. Subsequently, the research methods and methodology will be outlined that were used to answer the research questions of interest. This chapter will include the key media incident, data collection, reflexivity in research, and data analysis. Next a results/discussion chapter will outline the pre- and post-concussion sub-themes generated from the data analysis. Finally, a conclusion summarizing findings and its relevance, as well as future directions for research based on the findings will be discussed.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Within this chapter the prevalence and incidence of concussion will first be introduced to outline the broad scope of the problem, followed by a discussion of the nature of concussion and how it is defined along with issues related to diagnosis. Next, the literature pertaining to sport psychology, particularly in terms of psychosocial issues in concussion will be outlined, followed by research on media, in order to make the case for why studying the media as a cultural site is advantageous to learn more about sport concussion within the socio-cultural context. Where relevant, literature on gender as it relates to various aspects of sport concussion will be integrated within all sections. Based on the literature reviewed, the gaps in current knowledge and the issues that remain contentious will be summarized. Finally, the purpose for the proposed research will be outlined, followed by the specific research questions that will guide the proposed study in filling these literature gaps and address contentious issues.

#### **Concussion Incidence and Prevalence**

Concussions are on the rise worldwide, as there are over 38 million reported concussions in the United States every year, and are responsible for 75% of all reported brain injuries (Bloom et al., 2008; Daneshvar et al., 2011, Murray et al., 2015). Broshek, Kaushik, Freeman, Erlanger, Webbe, and Barth (2005) stated that woman participation in high school sports increased from 39% in 1996 to 42% in 2005. With greater numbers of women participating, the occurrence of sport injury is on the rise. Based on results from a three-year study in the late 1990s, Broshek et al. (2005) suggested that women at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) level had more concussions during sport than male athletes. Specifically, in sports such as soccer and basketball, women surpassed males with regard to the incidences of sport-related concussions

(Broshek et al., 2005).

Cusimano, Sharma, Lawrence, Gabriela, Silverberg, and Jones (2013) found that concussions and traumatic brain injuries (TBI) are on the rise across North America, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention named sport-related concussion as a “silent epidemic” as well as a designation that may require more in-depth research. Concussions are a serious injury on their own. However, multiple brain injury trauma is a concern for many athletes due to the potential for long-term cognitive and psychosocial discrepancies. Although concussions can occur in any sport, contact sports such as hockey are common sites for concussions. Specifically looking at the National Hockey League (NHL), playing aggressively with the intent to cause harm is a common strategy used within the sport. Hockey is known as “exciting” because of the fights and aggressiveness that comes with the fan experience. “Moreover, there still exists, among the sports community, a widespread attitude that concussions are ‘a part of the game’ and resiliency to medical council is considered a sign of toughness” (p. e61865-1). This mentality that concussions are a part of the sport to portray toughness is a theme throughout the masculinity in sport ideal. Athletes are to act tough, and avoid medical attention after an injury, for the sake of the fans and the game. The literature clearly demonstrates that concussions are serious injuries that can have life-long and life-altering negative effects (Cusimano et al., 2013).

The culture of risk discussed in articles (McGannon et al., 2013; Safai, 2003) means the pain and tolerance of pain that an athlete would experience as a sign of strength and commitment in their sport. In turn, due to the culture of risk that is prominent in sport, athletes are often accepting of the potential hazards of sport, yet continue to play in order to demonstrate commitment and mental toughness (Young et al., 1994). Despite the risks being downplayed

and/or embraced in sport culture, there are risks when an athlete is hurt or injured, particularly in relation to concussion (McGannon et al., 2013). The literature suggests that athletes who play through the pain or continue to participate after the injury, are rewarded for appearing more masculine or tough, which is a narrative reinforced within media portrayals of injured athletes, particularly male athletes (Anderson & Kian, 2012; Young et al., 1994).

Brooks et al. (2014) discussed the lack of research concerning gender and concussion. In addition, they wanted to understand if athletes who have had prior concussions differ in cognitive functioning post-concussion, and with how they report their symptoms. Supporting other literature, the authors stated that women athletes are at a higher risk of having a concussion than male athletes, and found that how symptoms manifest is gender specific. With regards to multiple concussions, they hypothesized that women may have more issues with cognitive tasks post-concussion, and experience more symptoms (Brooks et al., 2014).

Bloom et al. (2008) studied the prevalence and recovery time differences between men and women athletes competing at the collegiate level in Canada. Specifically looking at gender, they reviewed multiple studies and found that males may be more likely to suffer from concussion due to their aggressive playing. The participant pool included 348 men and women athletes representing two Canadian Universities. The Sports History Questionnaire (Delaney, Lacroix, Leclerc, & Johnston, 2000) was employed as a self-reporting inventory that detailed the concussion history of an athlete over the past 12 months of their sporting career. Those that reported concussions (170 athletes), were included in the study. The gender breakdown for this group was 91 men and 71 women. Participants ranged from first to fifth year university students playing a variety of sports (i.e., ice hockey, football, lacrosse, soccer, basketball, and rugby). Both genders participated in all sports with the exception of football for males only, and lacrosse,

which was only played by women. The self-report Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) focused on six hypothetical positive and negative situations. The results of this study concluded that male collegiate level athletes had more concussions than women. Further, most participants did not know they had a concussion until they were told by a medical professional (unrecognized concussion), therefore not receiving professional treatment which could lead to an undiagnosed concussion. With regards to return to sport, men stated that they returned to sport earlier than women, thereby increasing the risk of potential long term affects. This study demonstrated that men and women differ with regards to concussion not only in the number had, but also in the recovery time needed after concussion.

Within the United States, there are approximately 3.8 million concussions per year (Murray et al., 2015), a number that does not include the multitude that go unreported. Sport related concussions are often seen in high contact sports such as soccer, football, rugby, hockey, as well as in skiing and equestrian. In some of these sports the athletes are required to wear protective head equipment, although not often reporting their injuries to the coach or trainer. Murray et al., (2015) discussed the issues that coaches and trainers may have not demonstrated a serious attitude to concussion management, thereby changing the athlete's perspective with regards to reporting of their injury.

After several lawsuits were filed, a 765-million-dollar settlement was used to compensate athletes suffering from concussion in the National Football League. Their symptoms included headaches, memory loss, dizziness, behavioural changes, and several others linked to long term untreated concussions (Murray et al., 2015). For the management of the concussion, Murray et al. (2015) identified key factors such as underreporting of symptoms by players, observers not recognizing symptoms, and improper mismanagement of injury after occurrence. This was

verified with a statistic from the Rugby World Cup showing that only 42% of athletes were removed from the game after a concussion. An athlete's desire to continue playing, or the trainer misdiagnosing and allowing the player to continue to play before seeking medical attention, can dictate the team climate regarding taking concussions seriously.

### **Nature of Sport Concussion: Definitions, Diagnosis, and Treatment**

Concussions are typically defined as “a traumatically induced alteration in mental status that may or may not involve a loss of consciousness” (Kontos, Collins, & Russo, 2004, p. 221). According to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC, n.d), concussions are a subgroup of Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBIs) caused by either a blow to the head or by the head striking a stationary object. Anatomically speaking, the brain is surrounded by fluid, and thus floats within the skull. Since the brain is floating, if a force of great impact is applied to the skull, the brain may collide with bone, causing concussion. Most commonly, a concussion follows either a rotational or an acceleration-deceleration force (Kontos et al., 2004). A rotational force happens when the head moves angularly, and the brain remains stationary, causing the brain to shift within the skull. An acceleration-deceleration force occurs when the athlete is stationary, and a fast-moving object hits their head. The indicators of concussion may differ dependent on location in or type of injury of the brain (Kontos et al., 2004). Although a typical symptom is memory loss (either short or longer term), this symptom may not always be present when an athlete has a concussion. As the literature demonstrates, concussions are common, yet remain undiagnosed, potentially causing young and elite athletes to retire from sport earlier than planned (Kontos et al., 2004).

Sport concussions are not injuries that are decreasing. This literature reviews finds that there are between 1.6 and 3.8 million concussions annually from sport and athletics alone

(Covassin, Elbin, & Sarmiento, 2012). Due to the lack of signs and symptoms observed with concussion, their detection is often difficult. Another opinion expressed by Covassin et al. (2012) was that coaches are required to be responsible for concussion detection, especially for young athletes who lack medical and financial coverage. As coaches are the first line of defense, they must be responsible for addressing any observed medical issues, a requirement that makes an understanding of the symptomology behind concussions a necessity. Typically, during sport, the coach spends most time with the athlete; they need to be able to recognize the signs of concussion in a timely and effective manner to prevent a serious. Over 45 million youth are a part of sport, and those between the ages of 5 and 18 are at the highest risk for a brain injury, thus it is necessary to educate everyone involved in sport about concussion (Covassin et al., 2012).

Once a concussion or TBI has been determined, management and treatment is the next step to ensure athlete health and well-being (Bloom et al. 2004; Kontos & Elbin, 2016). If proper management and recovery of concussion is not followed, both the athlete's recovery and return-to-play (RTP) time can be greatly impacted (McCrory et al., 2013; Covassin et al., 2013). McCrory et al. (2013) outlined a protocol of concussion management as "physical and cognitive rest until the acute symptoms resolve and then a graded programme of exertion prior to medical clearance and RTP" (p. 3). They go on to advise that "low-level exercise for those who are slow to recover may be of benefit" (p. 3). Covassin and Elbin (2011) advocated for "a multifaceted approach that consists of various measures that may include a sideline mental status examination, a postural stability assessment, and a neurocognitive test battery" (p. 128). Collins et al. (2013) demonstrated the importance of understanding the impact to daily living a concussion may have on an athlete, especially if the athlete experiences anxiety while coping with the injury. All three

authors had similar protocols with regard to concussion management, but none were specifically geared for treatment and management when dealing with women athletes.

Some researchers have suggested that gender needs be taken into account for concussion treatment. For example, Covassin et al. (2013) highlighted the different considerations needed when treating women versus men with regard to concussion. Concussion diagnostic tests have improved over the past few decades, from grading scales to multi-faceted approaches. With greater understanding, concussion is being taken more seriously, and athletes are openly discussing the severity and importance of treatment, especially at a young age. Included in the new methods for testing of concussions is having a baseline measures of each athlete, so that after an injury the coach, trainer, or clinician can better identify changes in their behaviour. Better diagnostic testing post injury will help to decrease the number of secondary brain injuries occurring, and thus create a better return-to-play plan for the athlete. More needs to be known about the impact of concussion for women in sport.

Covassin and Elbin (2011) explored the issue of concussion reporting, and identified the major problem of improper diagnosis or under-reporting by athletes. Although athletes are typically aware of the potential risks of their sport, injuries can transpire in those that are contact or non-contact, and even ones that require little or no equipment. The amount of contact in a given sport increases the risk of head injury. Concussions occur more frequently in high contact sports such as football, hockey, and wrestling, sports dominated by males.

For male athletes, reporting injuries is considered 'less masculine', and so will 'play through pain', and 'suck it up' because of this stereotype (Nixon, 1993). The issue of concussion under-reporting is found for both genders; women tend to be concerned about the long-term effects of a brain injury, while men only want to continue to play the sport regardless of the side

effects (Weiland & Schmude, 2014; Covassin & Elbin, 2011).

Covassin et al. (2013) indicated that men and women may differ with regard to recovery time, and further that concussions occurred more frequently in women than men, in collegiate level sports. This may be due to the physiological differences between men and women and/or the chemical make-up of injury (Brooks et al., 2014; Covassin et al., 2013). With regard to symptoms and functioning, research has shown that women perform better post-concussion in verbal memory and perceptual motor tasks, while men perform better in visual-spatial tasks and quantitative problem solving. These results suggested that there was a difference in the way that women and men recover post-concussion related to their neurocognitive functioning (Covassin et al., 2013).

Current concussion literature discusses the need for a standardized set of diagnostic tests to be used in all sports. Although there are many concussion protocols (i.e. The Concussion Consensus), there is little mandated procedure that is practiced (McCrory et al., 2013). In some countries and states, there is legislated protocol to be followed post-concussion, yet not all athletes, including both elite and non-elite, follow those procedures. Benedict et al. (2015) examined the several different types of assessment tools used in an outpatient concussion clinic. This centre was studied in a multidisciplinary setting that evaluated sport and non-sport related concussion injuries. Their research analyzed the use of four concussion assessment tools on data collected from two hundred and six participants who ranged in age, gender, and number of concussions. Benedict et al. (2015) studied symptom evaluation, performance measures, and memory scores. According to the SCAT Symptom Severity Score, their results showed that older participants and women, experienced greater severity symptoms than their younger or male counter-parts. Those that reported not seeking treatment after concussion experienced more

symptoms of greater severity than those who had accessed immediate medical aid. Gender was used as a constant to compare scores throughout this study. The symptom severity scores demonstrated that indicators in women differ from men post-concussion, and demonstrated there are other contributing factors to be examined specific to gender. Finally, those participants who had higher symptom test scores had referrals to concussion or brain specialists after their injury. The authors discussed how this multidisciplinary approach was an effective method to diagnose and treat concussion injuries (Benedict et al., 2015). These findings are significant as exploring the differences in age and gender post-concussion using an assessment tool will help to create a better understanding of the individualized approach needed for treatment and management.

The purpose of Collins et al. (2013) study was to discover the risks and factors of assessments for sport-related concussions. Concussion symptoms can be diverse, especially as they manifest based on no specific timeline making them difficult to assess. Collins et al. (2013) have categorized concussions based on risk factors. Primary risk factors are defined as existing before the concussion takes place which could include persistent migraines and headaches, age (younger), gender, sensitivity to light and sound, nausea, or abnormal brain medical history. Secondary risk factors are defined as post-injury or concussion. Immediate treatment, and a consideration of these primary risk factors, should be considered in a concussion management plan. Collins et al. (2013) demonstrated that concussion treatment and management should be individualized. Treatments should be aligned with the athlete's needs, and return-to-play timeline specific to them and the medical decision-making team (Collins et al., 2013). This finding is important as men and women experience concussions and express their symptoms differently. Of interest, Covassin and Elbin (2011) find that there may be physiological or hormonal differences related to gender affecting the number of concussions and expression of symptoms, at this time,

this linkage lacks a field of research to fan it.

Covassin and Elbin (2011) explicitly studied women with regards to the management of a sports concussion. They examine data from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) over the years 1997-2000, and demonstrated that women at the collegiate level are more likely to experience concussions than men. Of interest to the study, the authors indicated that women are rarely studied without comparison to men and there are few studies that demonstrated the differences in concussion between the two. In addition, they point out that there is a paucity of research regarding young athletes, who are highly susceptible to concussion.

Covassin and Elbin (2011) recognize that the most important factor regarding the management of concussion is to be diagnosed by a sports or medical professional. With immediate care, the medical or sports professional can properly assess the athletes' needs for return-to-play guidelines. The current multifaceted approach should include: a mental status exam, a postural stability assessment, as well as a neurocognitive test battery. They emphasize that all of these tests should be done by a sport medicine professional, to develop a standard for sport related concussion. Further, practitioners need to understand the relationship between gender differences in concussion, and coaches and parents need to be aware that women report and show symptoms differently from males. Recovery time management should be tailored to the individual.

Brooks et al. (2014) also discussed the lack of information regarding concussion in sport as related to gender differences. Furthermore, they wanted to understand the impact of a prior concussion on symptom reporting and cognitive function with the occurrence of future concussions. They confirm the literature stating that women are a higher concussion risk and suggest that how symptoms manifest is gender specific. For a first concussion, Brooks et al.

found that women exhibited more symptoms and have more issue when required to complete cognitive tasks. However, when the participant had a history of prior concussion, regardless of gender, cognitive task completion showed few differences. Women typically report their symptoms more frequently than men (Brooks et al., 2014).

Overall, an understanding of how gender impacts concussion symptoms, treatment and management, could add to expanding knowledge of concussion in sport. By attending to issues in concussion, a better understanding of athlete reporting and/or misreporting and misdiagnosis could be achieved. Including women in sport concussion research, acknowledgment of the vulnerability of these athletes to concussion will create a better climate of acceptance and performance. With acceptance, women will more likely come forward and report their concerns and injuries. A review of the literature which connects gender and concussion supports the importance of considering women as a significant socio-cultural influence when creating treatment and a return-to-play plans (McCrory et al., 2013; Covassin & Elbin, 2011; Nixon, 1993). Treatment plans, management plans, and return-to-play plans are identical for both males and females, and since past research specifically related only to males, these studies shed important light to inform practice as to the necessary requirements for dealing with concussion.

### **Psychosocial Issues in Sport Concussion**

The psychosocial implications of sport concussion have been explored within sport psychology. Several key issues have been identified within the literature (see Kontos & Elbin, 2016; Mainwaring & Trenerry, 2012) which will be explored in this section. Bloom et al. (2004) studied the effects of sport psychology on concussions by looking at the psychological effects of an injury. According to Bloom et al., a concussion is “an ‘invisible injury’”. This means there are no crutches, swelling, stitches or other visible signs of the injury. This makes it difficult for a

casual observer to identify the athlete as injured” (p. 519). The authors examined the possible emotions that might be felt while recovering, and also looked at the coping strategies used by athletes after a concussion. The potential emotional consequences of a concussion included: loneliness, isolation, pain, anxiety, depression, denial, guilt, stress, anger, and concern regarding one’s ability to integrate back into daily life, alongside issues such as light and sound sensitivities, balance, and nausea. As Bloom et al., discussed, concussions are devastating for an athlete’s physical ability as recovery time can be extensive, however, the psychological impact of the injury is just as, if not more serious. The psychological impact needs to be addressed at the time of diagnosis, and a treatment plan should be developed alongside the physical therapy or injury rehabilitation. One of the most common emotions felt by an athlete after a concussion is loneliness or isolation as the feeling of being left off of the team, or the sporting community, can be devastating. During recovery, athletes may be told to stay home and rest, avoid looking at screens, and to take short naps. For those who are very active and involved in the social aspect of their sport, being forced to withdraw for a prolonged period of time may result in a negative psychological reaction (Bloom et al., 2004).

A common issue for the athlete who has been injured is the emotional impact of concussion. Key emotions include anger, fear, depression, anxiety, and pain (Bloom et al. 2004; Caron et al., 2013), which, depending on their severity, can inhibit the recovery period for the athlete. Furthermore, research has verified that in elite level players, (i.e. NFL), the long term affects of a concussion can be life altering. Kerr, Marshall, Harding, and Guskiewicz (2012) used a longitudinal study to evaluate the long-term impact of concussion using former professional football players. Their purpose was to evaluate the differences and psychological state of both athletes who reported their concussions and those who did not. When assessing retired athletes

later in life, their findings indicated that those who had multiple concussions within their football career were more likely to suffer from depressive episodes, unlike those who had not sustained concussions. Further, some of these athletes were diagnosed with clinical depression, demonstrating the potential life-altering impact of concussion and multiple traumatic brain injuries. Mainwaring, Hutchison, Camper, and Richards (2012) discussed the emotional consequences an athlete may have after sustaining a concussion. Their research showed that athletes could experience depression, confusion, mood and emotional disturbances, along with fatigue, after having a concussion. The athlete must deal with these difficult emotional disturbances, as well as their effect, perhaps resulting in an increased return-to-play time and delayed recovery. Seeking professional help after concussion is necessary, as prompt recognition of emotional disturbances will benefit the athlete during their recovery and potentially allow them to return to sport quicker. McGannon et al. (2013) identified concussion as a cautionary tale narrative. In the case of elite athlete Sidney Crosby, concussion was framed as a way of sending an important message to other athletes regarding the risk, and risk culture (Safai, 2003) surrounding contact sport, and sport in general. Athletes know that participation in sport comes with some risk, as they use their bodies in ways requiring extensive training and practice. Within injury, elite level athletes are not the authors of their own treatment plans, which can generate feelings of exclusion, compounding the loneliness and potential depression felt after a concussion (Caron et al., 2013).

Role identity in the sport setting is defined as how the player views their athletic role (Weinberg et al., 2013). According to Weinberg et al., athletic identity is a major component of athletic status; to keep their identity safe, they will place great stresses and pressure on themselves, even playing through personal pain and injury. Over time, the athlete normalizes the

pain of injury, and continues to participate while injured. This same identity carries over into behaviours related to concussion. As athletes, coaches, and support staff are gaining a clearer understanding the severity of injury, specifically in relation to concussion, the literature regarding sport injury risk and prevention is increasing. Matheson, Mohtadi, Safran, and Meeuwisse (2010) elaborated on cultural change and concussion, as well as the culture surrounding competition. “Concussion has been a long-standing underreported condition notoriously difficult to diagnose accurately and clearly influenced by both the implicit and explicit pressure of sport culture to ‘play through it’” (p. 400). As mentioned previously, there are documented concussion protocols to be followed (McCrory et al., 2013; Collins et al., 2013), yet in Canada, the legislation has yet to be mandated.

A number of sport psychology intervention tools exist which could be used to mitigate or alleviate the psychosocial issues athletes potentially experience post-concussion. Bloom et al. (2004) highlight some of the common interventions, including: imagery, relaxation techniques, positive self-talk, modelling, and seeking help from support groups, all techniques used for injury rehabilitation. Upon meeting a sport psychologist, an athlete should be encouraged to be open and continue the therapy by discussion the injury with peers and friends. After a concussion, sharing experiences with others promotes an open and communicative environment, which can benefit other athletes, as well as the coaching and training staff. The support received from teammates or other athletes can have a greater positive affect on long-term recovery, even greater than that received from the coaching staff or professional staff. According to Bloom et al. this communicative environment can result in fewer long-term issues, and a decrease in post-concussion symptoms.

The use of the sport psychology intervention, imagery, is most commonly observed in

concussion literature. Gagnon, Grilli, Friedman, and Iverson (2016) conducted a pilot study on rehabilitation of children with a sport-related concussion, using sport psychology interventions among other healing tools. Imagery and visualization were used as positive experiences to help the child relate to their sport participation. The child was asked to pick a skill or task they enjoyed doing from their sport to practice during their rehabilitation sessions. The visualization, plus addition of motor movement to practice the skill, helped these child athletes to recover more quickly post-concussion (Gagnon et al., 2016). Contrary to this finding, there is a common theme surrounding concussions that athletes should not do any physical activity until they are asymptomatic. However, the research suggests that light walking, or light physical activity shortly after the injury, could decrease the duration of post-concussion symptoms (Gagnon et al., 2016; McCrory et al., 2013). Although the athlete should not return-to-play immediately, starting a light physical activity plan after seeing a medical professional could decrease the amount of recovery time needed (McCrory et al., 2013).

Once an athlete is injured, it is critical they seek professional medical attention, as well as the support from the appropriate staff to ensure a full and complete healing process. Unfortunately, problems such as the competitor losing their position on the team, or being replaced by another player, may keep some athletes silent or prevent them from acknowledging their concussion injury (Kontos et al., 2004). According to Kontos et al., working with a sport psychologist could promote a positive healing experience so that the athlete is ready to return-to-play psychologically once they have received permission from their doctor. Sport psychology consultants (SPC) can be an important part of an athlete's recovery, aiding the healing process and assisting the athlete to return to their sport earlier. SPCs assist in the recovery process, manage post-concussion rehabilitation, and provide a range of coping mechanisms.

In addition, the SPC is valuable in a multi-disciplinary team approach (i.e., a neuro-specialist, an athletic trainer, a coach, and family members) to enable the athlete to manage their concussion. The greater the support an athlete has during the recovery and management stage, the better the healing process, and the more optimistic they are to return to their sport. With appropriate training, the SPC informs and educates trainers, coaches, and athletes of the latest concussion information including recognizing the signs, symptoms, and preventative measures, as well as discussing any additional support they can provide (Kontos et al., 2004). The communication piece is an important aspect when working with an athlete. Keeping lines of communication open, from athlete, to trainer or coach, to the SPC will ensure that all are in agreement regarding the treatment plan. Changes in the athlete's treatment or management plan, symptoms or medical changes, as well as a return-to-sport agreement should be discussed frequently with all members of the athlete's multi-disciplinary team.

Although the sport psychology literature authorises the finding that athletes experience a myriad of psychosocial issues related to sport concussion which are most constructively handled by an SPC and the multi-disciplinary team using open communication, it is not always possible for individual athletes to get the assistance they require. In order to learn more about psychosocial issues in sport, researchers within sport psychology have called attention to the need to understand concussion in a socio-cultural context (Caron et al., 2013; Kontos, 2014; McGannon et al., 2013). These calls align with the broader sport injury literature within sport psychology which has put forward the importance of considering socio-cultural context to further understand injury risk, response, and recovery of injured athletes (see Wiese-Bjornstal, 2010; Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998). Many high or elite level sports teams have athletic trainers working in conjunction with them to provide physical training, but who also have some

experience dealing with sport-related injuries. Further, Covassin et al. (2012) have discussed the potential inaccuracy related to the grading scales used for concussion, in particular related to their current relevance. Using outdated scales can result in misdiagnosis; the athlete with concussion may be subjected to improper treatment, or indeed, the concussion may go unreported with improper recognition. Covassin et al. highlighted the importance of a proper diagnosis and management of concussion, and in particular emphasised the major deficit in athletic ability should a further injury occur during healing. Finally, regarding gender, the literature has established that women have had more unrecognized and un-diagnosed concussions when compared to the number of realized concussions (Bloom et al., 2008). With respect to return -to-sport, men stated that they returned earlier than women. There are psychosocial aspects of concussion that must be addressed related to availability of care, outdated methodology, and specific treatment differences related to gender.

Concussions are brain trauma, and mis-treatment and mis-diagnosis can result in serious issues. The culture of risk, which is defined in the sport sociology literature by McGannon et al. (2013) as “pain and/or injury tolerance are linked with desirable athlete-attributes of toughness, strength and commitment” (p. 891). The commitment to playing through the pain has given a heroic sense the media portrays to the mass audience as acceptable and even desirable, yet the research endorses concussion injuries should be dealt with immediately. Further, male athletes are portrayed as weak or un-manly if they stop playing the game, or remove themselves from the sport to recuperate. The warrior or hero narrative surrounding athletes to continue to play through the pain regardless of injury severity creates an unhealthy risk (Anderson & Kian, 2012; McGannon et al., 2013; Safai, 2003; Young, 1994). These created identities and psychosocial factors are the exact opposite of what the literature prescribes, what should be preserved for the

health of the athlete, and for safety within the sport. After an injury, a player should be removed from sport until they fulfil their mandated return, yet the sport media identities given to elite athletes make this problematic. If an athlete were to leave their sport for a prolonged period of time, their fan base and media support may decline, or, in the case of male athletes, their “manliness” may be called into question and scrutinised. Specifically, in the media, athletes are framed as “heroic” individuals who cannot be harmed or hurt, which they feel compelled to represent. By playing through injury, the athlete is actually displaying an un-healthy behaviour to an impressionistic mass audience (McGannon et al., 2013; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2010; Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998). Not only can the identity narrative an athlete chooses to portray impact their concussion diagnosis, it can also harm their recovery and return-to-play strategies. Applied sport psychology personnel can learn much by understanding the media approach to athletic sensationalism and how it impacts concussion reporting, treatment management, the healing process post-concussion. As a personal reflection, there should not be reward for continuing to play sport through the pain; the stark truth is the concussed athlete is exposing themselves to the risk of life-long, life-altering side effects, while at the same time, continuing to perpetrate an unsustainable myth.

### **Sport Media: Understanding Concussion in Socio-Cultural Context**

The media serves as a cite of influence because it provides a vehicle to understand concussion in a socio-cultural context by analysis of high-profile athletes (McGannon et al., 2013). Within the context of sport, the media ‘constructs’ certain meanings, values and identities about what it means to be an athlete (in the case of the present study, a woman athlete), as well as certain meanings about what it means to be injured (in the case of the present study what it means to have a concussion) (Millington & Wilson, 2016). As sport has been traditionally male-

dominated, there is a strong masculine socio-cultural influence which means that expectation of athletic ability is held to a rigorous, potentially dangerous standard. Additionally, the ‘warrior narrative’ surrounding male athletes encourages them to play through the pain, and partake in risky sport behaviour. These male athletes are portrayed as heroes in the media (Anderson & Kian, 2012). Sport studies scholarship on these issues concerning male athletes is extensive, although sport media work concerning athletes in general is surprisingly underdeveloped (see Young, 2019). Focusing on the sport media narratives surrounding sports injuries and high profile or elite athletes can expand further knowledge base of the socio-cultural context surrounding concussions (Sanderson et al., 2016; Young, 2019).

Women’s sport participation has increased throughout the twentieth century (Sherry et al., 2016). Additionally, women are starting to obtain different roles in sport such as newscasting and sports commentary positions (Bruce, 2016). Still, the media has been shown to often portray women athletes in a sexualized way including posing semi-nude, in lingerie for calendars, or commonly, pre-Olympic photoshoots spreads in magazines (Bruce, 2016). Women are often accredited based on their appearance and their femininity, rather than on their sporting contributions or accolades (Fink, 2015). Additionally, studies have revealed that male athletes are shown four times more frequently in media when compared to females; lead articles or photographs are almost always males (Fink, 2015). Gender marking in sport media is described by Fink as “the verbal and visual presentation of male athletes and men’s sport as being the norm, while rendering women and women’s competitions secondary status” (p. 333). An example of this can be found when watching a sport event (e.g., golf), and a commentator of the play might say of a female is that she is the best in women’s golf, yet simply describe her male counterpart as the best golfer. This terminology creates a notion that men’s sport is the

‘standard’, while women competing in the same sport are positioned as the ‘other’ (Fink, 2015).

Within sport psychology, the advantage of studying media to expand the social and cultural construction of athlete identities and lives has been outlined (McGannon & Mahon, 2016). Exploring the media representations of athletes’ identities, specifically at the elite level, is increasing, with sport psychology (McGannon et al., 2013) thereby providing an understanding of how the media constructs an athlete’s identity. Additionally, using the media as a cultural site in sport psychology to learn more about athlete identities and the implications for their lives increases the amount of awareness surrounding sporting and health issues (Bonhomme, Seanor, Schinke & Stambulova, 2018; Cosh et al., 2015; McGannon et al., 2013), especially as the public’s access to media is increasing rapidly. The media can contribute athlete’s perceptions of themselves as well as have an impact on the public’s perception concerning certain issues (e.g., sport injury) in relation to health-related issues and pressures that athletes navigate (Millington & Wilson, 2016). Work on gender and sport media has been advanced in sport psychology concerning elite athletes and motherhood identities and the implications for sport performance and health (e.g., McGannon, Curtin, Schinke & Schweinbenz, 2012; McGannon, Gonsalves, Schinke & Busanich, 2015; McGannon, McMahon, Schinke & Gonsalves, 2017). Despite the potential of studying media texts and images concerning pain, injury and risk culture to learn more, as noted there are relatively few systematically studies in sport sociology and fewer in sport psychology (McGannon & McMahon, 2020). Studying the media’s representation of high-profile athletes has much to contribute toward greater understanding of the social construction of athlete identities in relation to sport injury meanings.

In terms of learning more about the cultural meanings surrounding sport concussion, studying the media is also advantageous, particularly given people’s ability (e.g., fans) to

produce and/or react to various athlete stories and images produced surrounding their injuries (McGannon & McMahon, 2020; Millington & Wislon, 2016). As example, around the time of the SuperBowl, the concussion conversation has been seen to upsurge, especially on media sharing sites (Hull & Schmittle, 2015). In addition, as noted the media has been used to frame athletes' injuries in a political manner, or to send a message about the dangers surrounding concussion injuries (McGannon et al., 2013; Ventresca, 2019). Major sport associations such as the NHL have begun to take concussion injuries more seriously, as athletes are more aware of the long-term adverse effects (Caron et al., 2013). Athletes have also taken legal action against major sporting industries, as increasingly, the pain of injury has affected their personal daily life after retiring from competitive sport. These articles have been portrayed in the media, and studied in the literature, as the 'warrior' or 'hero' narrative has been heavily debated, especially within contact sport (Anderson & Kian, 2012; Furness, 2016; McGannon et al., 2013, Murray et al., 2015).

As an example of the above, and to show the usefulness of studying the media in relation to risk culture in sport, and the pressures that athletes face concerning concussion, Padaki, Cole, and Ahmad (2016) researched how an athletes' injury was portrayed and return-to-play times in accordance with the media. They hypothesized that the public, and the media, monitor and scrutinize the health of the athlete and their return-to-sport time after a concussion injury, regardless of whether complete healing has occurred. In a longitudinal study of the National Basketball Association (NBA), players were observed during the pre-season, regular season, playoff season, and post-season, to determine the number of concussions the athletes had, as well as the number of previous concussions they had incurred. Only the concussions that were publicly reported were counted in regards to the return-to-play results. Over the nine seasons

included in the study, on average, 14.9 concussions occurred during a single season of NBA level sport, yet only 12 were reported publicly through the media. Interestingly, the NBA has established a protocol in which the athlete must be benched for a certain number of games post concussion, thereby slowing the athletes return to sport. Further, concussions in the NBA are less publicly exhibited in the media than concussions in other, high contact sports. These results demonstrate that NBA athletes who suffer concussion are being withdrawn from play and required to follow guidelines as pertaining to their return, however, they face public and the media scrutiny, and are not necessarily following a prescribed individualized treatment plan.

Hull and Schmittel (2015) explored the possibility of concussion awareness trending in Twitter conversation during Super Bowl XLVII. The study investigated all sport and health professionals who were hoping to get media attention during the event. Statistical analysis from these Twitter interactions revealed a total of 24.1 million tweets about the Super Bowl while the game was being played (not including tweeted advertisements). The authors suggested this forum may be an excellent opportunity for sport and health professionals to improve exposure of the issues surrounding concussions, in particular, focusing on how media can be used to support social change.

In sports like figure skating and gymnastics, 'men's events' are not typically in the media as they break the "masculine standard" an audience is accustomed to viewing. The audience is able to watch these events, but they are often not televised on major media channels, nor are they often discussed in the media. These sports are not viewed, or deemed 'of interest' to most viewers, thereby, leaving them to broadcast at off-peak hours, or not at all. To make a change to an audience's perception of the seriousness of concussion in sport, it may take a highly publicized sport personality to evoke change. Given the marginalization of women athletes in

general, and in sport injury and concussion media research in particular, research has pointed to a 'highly publicized sport personality' perhaps being a male athlete. Given that women are also at risk for concussion in sport, and as will be shown in the present study, also concur career changing concussions, the focus onto male athletes to raise awareness is both important and problematic. As an example of one such athlete, Aaron Rodgers has initiated a change in the conversation around concussion. As a Green Bay Packers player, he withdrew himself from the sport after a head injury occurred during an important game for the team. As a result of Rodgers' exhibition of personal care, cultural awareness surrounding concussion has increased, and the media has commenced taking a health over masculinity approach. As previously discussed, in male sport, the ideal of the heroic disposition has been a constant - the athlete will risk injury or death to play. With athletes like Rodgers having the bravery to step out of the game after receiving a concussion, the conversation is beginning to change with athletic health being given a priority over the 'play through the pain' ideal (Anderson & Kian, 2012).

Weiland and Schmude (2014) examined the effect media have had on athletes, principally sport concussion media. Within contact sports, it is estimated that 19% of players will receive a concussion during their sporting activities and approximately 300,000 diagnosed concussions occur each year. The purpose of their recent study was to determine if a relationship exists between the media portrayal of sport related concussion injuries within college level athletes. They showed that in general, male and female athletes, and the media are becoming more educated and aware of the long-term effects possible after sustaining a concussion, especially the hazards of improper management and treatment.

Although sport-related concussions are becoming more prevalent in news media representations, as noted, sport sociology and sport psychology scholars have focused on the

study of these less, and even less so on women athletes. Additionally although there are a number of organizations trying to raise awareness surrounding concussion (i.e., Centre for Disease Control, Pink Concussions), there is a lack of critical focus and/or awareness of the politics of the organizations themselves, with some research drawing attention to the importance of these organizations (e.g., NFL) being complicit in the concussion crisis and return to play issues (see Furness, 2016; Ventresca, 2019). Some research shows that the exposure of these issues, in and through media studies and/or media narratives, may be having an impact on practices and participation in sport. For example, Weiland and Schmude (2014) showed that 57% of parents are less likely to let their child play youth football due to worries about the concussion risk. This statistic is not upheld by viewership during football games, one of the most popular watched events. Consequently, the NFL paid \$765 million dollars to settle a concussion lawsuit from former players. This literature supports the idea that football players often have a “men of steel” mentality and the media prescribes a similar stereotype. Nevertheless, like any other athlete who has suffered a concussion, NFL players require the same rest and return-to-play time, yet, some players return to the same game after taking a short break on the sidelines, continuing to foster the propaganda.

By not seeking medical attention, or taking an appropriate time to rest, these athletes are at risk for severe brain damage, or potentially second impact syndrome. Second impact syndrome occurs when an athlete with a concussion incurs an additional one before the first has had a chance to heal. A second trauma to the brain can cause more extensive damage and can be fatal. As discussed by McGannon et al. (2013) and others (e.g., Ventresca, 2019; Young, 2019), socio-cultural influences such as the media may impact the meanings and values attached to injuries, and more specifically, concussion. In sport, injuries are typically viewed as a weakness,

which can be overcome by being “tough” and continuing to play. However, in the case of concussion, this attitude can result in long term adverse effects, or potential death.

The notion of what constitutes ‘media’ takes many different forms: such as mainstream forms (e.g., television, news papers, magazines), or social media (e.g., YouTube, blogs, Instagram, Twitter) (Millington & Wilson, 2016). Ahmed, Lee and Struik (2016) established the multitude of media platforms where concussions are discussed, constructed and communicated. Image-sharing media has become a popular form for health-related pictures to be shared on social media platforms for example. The study by Ahmed et al. is the first of its kind to examine images surrounding concussion on social media (i.e., Pinterest, Instagram, and Flickr). Using these image sharing sites, they studied only pictures, of which 300 were viewed. The results of this study determined that over half of all concussion pictures on image-sharing sites are of the athlete themselves and the scene of their concussion related incident, only some were used for concussion education. As images, and image-sharing is a popular media dispersing choice, Ahmed et al. recommends that public health legislature use this pathway to promote healthy sport and sport policy, like concussion reporting.

Similarly, Williams et al. (2014) evaluated the value of YouTube as a media site for concussion education. YouTube is a large social networking site used for entertainment and information. The purpose of this study was to classify concussion related videos appearing on YouTube. Of the 434 videos included in the study, 100 were chosen based on their popularity as they had the largest number of views (approximately 26,000) and likes. The content of these videos most commonly included picture footage of the concussion as it happened, as well as the supporting news and media footage. From this study, Williams et al. realised that a large number of concussion-related videos are watched on YouTube, and suggested this site could more

effectively be used for health care or educational videos surrounding the concussion epidemic.

Weiland and Schmude (2014) focused specifically on two theoretical frameworks, Framing Theory and Two-Step Flow, to understand the public engagement when the media portrays concussion. In sport, Framing Theory discusses how news events help to shape or frame an opinion for their audience. The media outlet has control over the story as it creates a frame of what it wants the public to see and consume. Two-Step Flow theory is typically used by leaders whose opinion the public highly respects. It is a horizontal theory which portrays the same media across a variety of opinion leaders, for the consumption of the public. The study focused on media use by collegiate level athletes in specific sports from three colleges in the United States. These athletes reported they received their media from the Internet, television, radio, newspaper, social media, email, and blogs. The results showed that the collegiate level athletes most often used the Internet to seek out sport concussion information. This confirms the argument that concussion awareness should be most prominent and available to athletes on the modes of communication they prefer. With the increased use of Twitter and Facebook by news and sports media, having more concussion awareness education on these popular media would encourage athletes in head injury prevention, and the importance of concussion management by a trained professional. Further, the literature recommends the practice of a pre-season mandatory information night to discuss sport related concussion complete with an information letter, modules, videos, and a short educational quiz. With a mandate of annual attendance, regular information exchange could ensure athletes are aware of and understand the resources available to them, complete with proper concussion management and return-to-play guidelines

### **Gaps in the Literature and Contentious Issues**

After exploring the literature related to concussion in relation to gender and the media as

a socio-cultural context, the following gaps remain. The majority of published research on concussion focuses on males who participate in high contact sports; little information is available on females or on a comparison between the genders, and women athlete's stories as covered and represented within the media, virtually non-existent. To date, few (if any) studies in sport sociology and sport psychology have explored the media as a cultural site which circulates and frames certain meaning concerning women, sport injury, and in particular, concussion. Given the media's potential role in the circulation of gendered meanings in sport, and its potential for impacting athletic identity and portrayal of injuries in the process, attending to sport media representations of women who have suffered concussion would be an informative avenue to explore to learn more about the intersection of concussion and gender. Where the mediation of sport injury has been explored, there is also less literature on non-contact sports which is problematic as concussions are known in those sports as well. Studying a high-profile woman who played a non-contact sport, and whose life was dramatically altered by a head injury, would be a useful research avenue to expand understanding of concussion.

Given these contentious issues, the purpose of the present research is to extend the understanding of the media's portrayal of one high profile women athlete's performance decline (i.e., Canadian tennis player Eugenie Bouchard) – and the news media's representation of her injury outside of the sport (i.e., in the locker room) to learn more about the meanings of these in relation women and sport concussion. The research questions that guided the study were; (1) how is the concussion of a high profile professional athlete (i.e., Eugenie Bouchard) developed and/or contested within sport media (i.e., daily news) narratives? and (2) what specific meanings can be identified within sport media narratives concerning Eugenie Bouchard's performance decline prior to and/or after the concussion incident? and (3) what are the implications for sport

psychology in relation to the study's findings?

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, the methods used and the central components of the methodology used (i.e., ethnographic content analysis, ECA) to answer the research questions of interest, will be outlined. What follows is a detailed discussion of these methods and methodology as related to the present study's overarching purpose and line of inquiry.

#### **Key Media Incident**

Eugenie Bouchard is a professional Canadian tennis player born on February 25, 1994 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Bouchard played her first World Tennis Association (WTA) tournament in 2008, then hit the spotlight in 2012. In that year, she was part of a doubles team in Wimbledon, and made a top 50 ranking. Since then, she has competed in multiple events playing singles and doubles. In 2014 she had a historic season as she made a Grand Slam final, and was the first Canadian ever to reach that goal. On September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015, during the US Open Bouchard suffered a concussion that changed her entire training year, and forced her from her singles ranking of 25<sup>th</sup> internationally. The concussion occurred after practice at the US Open while walking through a poorly-lit changeroom, and slipping on an unknown substance. Social media and mainstream news reports were extensive while she recovered from her concussion over the coming months and year that followed. Due to the location, timing, and lack of witnesses, the tone of the media ranged from being supportive to accusatory as Bouchard did not provide a statement to the media after the injury occurred. The initial media reaction assumed that Bouchard had faked her concussion, adding a layer of interest to studying media's construction of concussion for one high profile female athlete.

Bouchard's accident occurred in early September 2015 at the U.S. Open, and she was

officially diagnosed with concussion shortly thereafter. In Bouchard's version of the incident, she described that she had entered a darkened physiotherapy room attached to the locker room after a practice, and slipped and fell due to a substance on the floor. Although this was technically her off-season, as she was not playing, her rankings fell with the missed matches. In October 2015, she attempted to return to tennis for the Asia tour, but when she started to play, she experienced symptoms of dizziness and had to withdraw. She made her return to sport in January of 2016 after taking months off to recover. In July of that year, it was announced she would be representing Canada at the 2016 Rio Olympics in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. The summer Olympics started in early August, and Bouchard was ready to play.

Bouchard subsequently launched a lawsuit against the WTA which also unfolded in the media, as the physiotherapy room floor in the women's locker room was slippery and not properly maintained, and has been fighting the organization since October 2015, only being resolved in February of 2018. When she attempted to return to tennis in October, her lawsuit against the WTA became a media focus, which is not the focus on the present thesis given the scope of the research questions. Although there has been no official response regarding her lawsuit, the media speculated it would be rejected based on the WTA statement that she should not have been in the room at that time of night, unsupervised. Since the lawsuit in 2015, with a resolution in early 2018, and scope of the present media incident and data collection, Bouchard continues to play competitive tennis and is currently ranked 119<sup>th</sup> in singles (as of September 2019).

### **Data Collection**

To collect data, specific timelines were set to cover four major areas of relevancy prior to and after the concussion incident. The four time lines were as follows: 60 days prior to the

concussion incident (i.e., July-August 2015 – yielding 25 articles), 30 days prior to the incident the month of the concussion incident (i.e., September 2015 – yielding 29 articles), and the return to play period (i.e., October 2015-January 2016 – yielding 37 articles). The rationale behind choosing these timelines was so the focus is on the performance by Eugenie Bouchard, pre- and post-concussion. It was necessary to determine if Bouchard's performance was at a high or low competitively before the concussion in order to contextualize how long it took her to return to play following the concussion, and when to return the following year, the level of her performance baseline. The articles were read and kept in their original form. Once the articles were reviewed, notes were made outlining preliminary themes, reactions, and facts, which helped to divide the articles into specific concepts for consolidation. Coding was done inductively, and organized into groups based on the emerging narratives and themes. Throughout the reviewing and organizing of the news articles for each time period, a section was made for reflective comments and to discuss differences in the narratives being identified and linked with specific textual examples within the news stories.

Google News software was searched covering the selected range of dates from July 1, 2015 to January 31, 2016. A total of 91 articles were collected, focused primarily on North American news media, omitting any repeated articles, or those not relating to her performance or the injury. This media focus was used, as Bouchard is a Canadian athlete, who trains in the United States. Non- North American articles were considered if they offered a unique viewpoint. The keywords used prior to the concussion incident were “Eugenie Bouchard”, and during the concussion and return to play timeline, “Eugenie Bouchard concussion”. The data was collected into a Microsoft Word document, copied and pasted in full (including pictures), and organized chronologically. The document information was then transferred into a Microsoft Excel file

where the date, source, article title, and URL were listed.

To answer the first research question – (*how is the concussion of a high-profile professional athlete developed and/or contested within sport media narratives?*), an in-depth search of the media portrayal of Eugenie Bouchard’s September 4<sup>th</sup> 2015 concussion, was examined. Based on data collection surrounding the key media incident, themes or narratives were identified. A total of 91 news articles were collected from leading North American news outlets (i.e. CBC Sports, The Globe and Mail, Toronto Sun). This number excluded duplicate articles, as well as followed the collection criteria of focusing on North American media only. Within the news media collected, commonalities were coded and consolidated (outlined in the analysis section) to create a better understanding of how Bouchard and the injury was portrayed.

To answer the second research question – (*what specific meanings are identified within sport media narratives concerning Eugenie Bouchard’s performance decline prior to and/or after the concussion incident?*), the news articles used spanned her performance pre- and post-concussion. This time frame allowed for a mapping and contextualization of Bouchard’s performance, including good/poor performances both before the injury and during the first month of her return. As her world rankings had dropped the year prior to her concussion, understanding what happened before the concussion provided deeper meaning to how her performance was altered as a result of the concussion incident.

To answer the third research question -- (*what are the implications for athletes’ and sports scholars’ understanding of concussion in sport culture?*), the methodology described above was used to determine the specific nuances that emerged from the sport media collected on Eugenie Bouchard. Additionally, these narratives worked towards closing gaps in the literature related to women and concussion, as well as helped to shape implications for future

practice. These meanings gave way to a broader understanding of women and concussion, and their inference on sporting culture.

### **Reflexivity: Positioning Myself in the Research**

In line with Patton (2002), as a “way of emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political and cultural consciousness and ownership of one’s perspective” (p.64), I acknowledge my position as well as my potential viewpoints and values within the context of the current study (McGannon & Smith, 2015; Schinke, McGannon, Parham & Lane, 2012). I have been a figure skater, and figure skating coach for a large part of my life; an active member of the sporting community. While attending a three-day coaching seminar, I chanced to meet a colleague and former skater (a competitor at the national level). Tragically, she had suffered a concussion at a young age, and was unable to realize her dream and passion of being a national and international contender. At the time of her injury (approximately 15 years ago), there was no known information regarding the signs and symptoms of concussions given to coaches. With only an initial indication of a headache, my colleague did not seek medical attention, and eventually had to withdraw from the sport. As a consequence of her injury, she fell behind in school, as she was not able to focus and be attentive, and in constant pain.

Throughout the final year of my undergraduate degree (BA Sport Psychology), I completed an internship with a group of young figure skaters from the Greater Sudbury area. In particular, I had the privilege of working with an athlete who had a suffered a concussion at the age of eight. Fortunately for this child, there was a spectator present at the time of the accident who was also a nurse, and they were able to effectively manage the athlete until medical attention could be sought. Generally during practice sessions, or indeed at competitions, the presence of trained health care professionals (i.e., nurses and doctors) is not a mandatory

requirement for amateur level sport. Clubs or organizations must pay for medical staff services as well as any additional incurrences. In figure skating, the athletes skate three to four times per week for approximately 35 weeks of the year. While some go an entire season without injury, others, depending on the type of practice, may be injured several times a session. Unfortunately, it is not feasible to have a medical professional present at all times. One requirement of benefit to relieving this situation, is that skaters are not allowed on the ice without a skating coach present. It makes sense then that the CDC Heads Up program offers the opportunity for coaches to receive general concussion prevention training. In the event of an accident, this program also includes how to manage an injured athlete, and next steps for recovery. Although this is a valuable program, in my opinion, it could be fine-tuned with the development of sport-specific modules. In this way, coaches would be more aware of what they need to do to be cognizant of head injury in their particular sport.

Personally, this research topic is significant as even within my experiences, I have watched many athletes leave their career, or put their competitive life on hold, due to an undiagnosed or improperly treated concussion. As a figure skating coach, I am currently working with skaters ranging in age from 5 to 37, helping to create meaningful and trusting relationships. The athlete described above who had received proper concussion treatment and management at the age of eight, represented Northern Ontario in the All Ontario Championships held in Sault Ste. Marie, ON, last season. To their credit, they were able to bring back a medal represented a well-deserved spot on the podium. Unfortunately, this past fall, the same athlete received a second concussion which ended their skating career. Regrettably, they are unable to return to the arena for a variety of health and safety concerns, however, the most important aspect is that the athlete is healed effectively. At this time, this 13-year-old has yet to return to school, and is

constantly feeling unfocused. This first hand experience has fashioned my concerns regarding concussion treatment and management. This young athlete, with all the luck in place - the presence of a nurse, medical treatment, vigilant parents – is still unable to function at a normal level, let alone, pursue here dreams of Olympic and World competition.

As a former competitive figure skating athlete, I too had a variety of injuries, risks that come with participating in sport. As a young athlete, I admittedly have hit my head off the ice, but immediately bounced back and continued with the practice. At the time, (approximately 18 years ago), an awareness surrounding concussion was non-existent; the coaches, other skaters, nor even myself, questioned my working ethic. Little publicised information was available, the topic of concussion was not overly mediated, meaning that without awareness, head injuries went undiagnosed. Although it has never been confirmed, the chances I have potentially sustained a concussion, are significant. Fortunately, current coaches, athletes, and parents are more aware of the potential risks and dangers in sport, especially in those like figure skating where no protective equipment is worn, and impacts can occur not only with the ice, but also with the boards, or from falling from a partner. Other factors to be considered in this sport in particular, is the impact force and severity of landing on cold, hard ice. This study reawakens my desire to eventually develop sport-specific concussion recognition guidelines for coaches and parents, as each sport is subject to different recognizable forces. Although this is beyond the scope of the present study, the results have led to my further awareness and thinking in this regard, particularly at this relates to female athlete. Having participated in a female dominated sport that has incurred recognizable gender stereotypes, and now coaching a vulnerable population of young athletes, the impact of the changing media around concussions, is a lifelong interest.

### **Data Analysis: Ethnographic Content Analysis**

The proposed methodology used to answer the above research questions was ethnographic content analysis (ECA). The purpose of doing an ethnographic content analysis is to discover how meanings are created and communicated through the media (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). A wide cultural context is often taken in this approach to deeply explore meaning (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2001). Additionally, conceptualizing the objects, and meanings that contribute to the surroundings are included to ensure that meanings are culturally constructed within news media explored (Davie, 2012). Further, ECA is used to find meaningful relationships in communication forms of media, and to identify similarities and differences. ECA can be used to look for the deeper meaning of the message (i.e., interpretive meanings). An important aspect of ECA is for the researcher to be reflexive which requires data collection of relevant information to be organized in a precise manner to allow for an openness of themes identified and being developed (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). For example, in terms of reflexivity, I kept a journal making note of my own reactions to the portrayal of women in sport, plus made notes linked to specific lines of text gathered from the news stories.

Altheide and Schneider (2013) outlined stages when completing a qualitative document analysis. The stages that were used in this proposed project were: 1. identifying the problem, 2. protocol construction, 3. coding and analyzing the data, and 4. creating a report that provides links to the literature to help interpret the findings. In step one, the problem identified was specific and the researcher was required to be concise, and review the relevant literature. The media was collected in a specified time constraint from the time of the concussion, to leading up to the 2016 Summer Olympics. The articles were delimited to North American media only, as noted earlier. According to Altheide and Schneider (2013), constructing a protocol is

accomplished by creating categories that will guide the data collection. The following steps were used for analyzing the collected data. First, the news articles were reviewed, and notes were made outlining preliminary themes, initial reactions, and facts that were included (i.e., what was considered fact). Initially the data were divided into specific concepts, which were re-organized in effort to combine common themes together. Second, the data were coded inductively, as all titles came from the analysis (Wheeler, 2005). The codes were organized into categories once themes or narratives started to emerge (i.e., returning to play, psychosocial factors of the injury, questioning Bouchard's validity, returning to sport too soon). Additionally, as noted, a reflective section allowed for comments about the categorizations of the news media documents, as well as discussing the differences between the categories once they had emerged (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; McGannon et al., 2013). Although the categories that were identified were divided specifically based on their meaning, there was an 'other' section to allow for newly identified themes, where a new narrative was created (McGannon et al., 2013; McGannon, Curtain et al., 2012).

Once the data had been organized, the categories were evaluated and potentially synthesized together into meaningful categories aligned with the research questions of interest. As the timeline for data collection spanned across seven distinct months, the keywords changed appropriately. For example, for the months of July and August 2015, the keyword was "Eugenie Bouchard". September 2015 and January 2016 were searched using "Eugenie Bouchard Concussion" as the injury occurred in September. The original documents were copied and organized as Word Documents and Excel Spreadsheet files, as Altheide and Schneider (2013) noted the importance of keeping the original documents throughout to check and re-check if needed. Altheide and Schneider (2013) discussed the goal of qualitative research as

understanding meaning, and process. The goal of the proposed project was to answer the research questions using the media, and supporting literature. The process was important, as a goal of ECA was to be reflexive, and as a researcher, to see the bigger picture, and understand the meaning of the information. The final step of creating a report is shown in the two results and discussion chapter that follow. In agreement with Altheide and Schneider (2013), summarizing the findings, answering the research questions, and demonstrating the researcher's familiarity with the topic, led to the creation of the final report.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION PART I: PRIOR TO CONCUSSION

This chapter outlines phase I results in order to contextualize Bouchard's performance prior to the concussion, which as shown in the findings below, was already positioned by the media as on the decline. An overarching theme that famed Bouchard's performance in this regard will first be outlined, followed by three sub-themes that impacted the meaning of her declining performance.

#### **Performance Decline Beyond Tennis**

Bouchard's performance decline prior to her concussion on September 4, 2015 was portrayed within a central/overarching narrative theme of a 'performance decline beyond tennis'. This theme meant that Bouchard's athletic performances in key tournaments during this time (i.e., Wimbledon, Rogers Cup, Connecticut Open, US Open) were ascribed largely to a 'cluster' of three distinct influences drawn upon within the news stories which had little to do with Bouchard's technical abilities and largely due to psychosocial issues. These psychosocial issues were positioned at times insurmountable or difficult to overcome for the athlete which included:

- 1) being at a cross-roads/lacking clear direction,
- 2) inability to overcome injury, and
- 3) coaching influences.

Each of these three distinct sub-themes will be outlined in relation to how they fed into Bouchard's poor performances being attributed to influences beyond the technicalities of tennis. For now, it can be noted that the overarching narrative of 'performance decline beyond tennis' ultimately portrayed Bouchard's career and athletic performance as contentious and/or spiraling downward compared to her previous results and performances, despite her struggles and largely

ineffective strategies used to overcome them. Such portrayals do not promote an optimistic outcome for an athlete experiencing a slump or performance decline, but instead rather the performance issue as something permanent and/or extremely difficult to overcome.

The notion of a ‘poor performance’ within this narrative was further tied to an outcome of winning, or maintaining an above top 10 ranking in tennis, rendering Bouchard as having performance success only when these outcome goals were attained. Such portrayals are problematic because literature in sport psychology has shown that when solely outcome goals are the focus, the issue of perfectionism results for the athlete. Appleton, Hall and Hill (2009) suggested that perfectionism can be an advantageous tool when used effectively for motivation, however, it can also lead to negative feelings when the athlete falls short of a performance. Further, burnout was discussed as a common issue with a perfectionist attitude as the athlete is unable to recognize when they are being overly self-critical. Self-criticism is typically harsh, the athlete holds themselves to the highest of standards, especially at the elite level (Appleton et al., 2009). In de Bruin, Bakker and Oudejans (2008), athletes with an ego-oriented motivational climate (also called ‘performance climate’) tended to have more pressure put on them, not only from themselves to win, but also from external factors such as coaches, trainers, friends, and family. These typically unhealthy behaviours led to a feeling of greater discouragement if the athlete is not successful (de Bruin et al., 2008).

The following story entitled ‘Tennis star Eugenie Bouchard trying to ignore the critics’ demonstrates a perspective that Bouchard’s performances are attributed to factors beyond her control (i.e., peaking too soon, distractions off the court, lack of support on the tour due to personality flaws).

This season has been a remarkable disaster for Bouchard — and new coach Sam Sumyk

— and the losing ways have been incredibly convincing. Her first-round defeat to qualifier Ying-Ying Duan at Wimbledon a few weeks ago serves as a bookend to just how brutal things have become for the former junior Wimbledon champ, Bouchard herself musing that the loss — her 11th defeat in a 13-match span — may have indeed been the “rock bottom” of her young career. Naturally, throughout her epic tailspin Bouchard’s critics have been quick, swift and fierce, with some suggesting the struggling star puts too much focus on her extracurricular activities and not enough effort into her day job. Others have called her a brat, pointing to her refusal to shake hands with Fed Cup opponents and a perceived lack of friends on the women’s tour. Others simply say she’s finished — a flash-in-the-pan Anna Kournikova of the North. (Tennis star ... ignore the critics. Toronto Sun. 2015, July 22)

Bouchard’s contentious performance was reinforced and rendered by the media as related to her ‘extracurricular activities’, indeed, it even went so far as to denigrate the public behaviour she used when confronted with a loss. In Hunt, Reitschel, Hatfield and Iso-Ahola (2013), athletes who had winning performances tended to be more confident psychologically than those who did not. Confidence is also linked to an athlete’s competitive success as winning typically makes the athlete more engaged in their sport, with better task attention (Hunt et al., 2013).

Within the media stories, Bouchard was portrayed as attempting to counterattack the critical media opinion by using the sport psychology technique of positive self-talk to help to build her confidence. Unfortunately, her resistance was futile when juxtaposed with her inability to block the media out, thus failing to produce high level performances and/or win tournaments. Bouchard spoke out about the accolades and the criticism she had received by the media, both when an event was successful and when it was not, in ‘tennis star Eugenie Bouchard trying to

ignore the critics.’

Bouchard, who on Wednesday participated in a tennis clinic on a barge in downtown Toronto alongside fellow Canuck, world No. 8 Milos Raonic, to promote next month’s Rogers Cup in Toronto and Montreal, is well-aware the vultures are swirling and aren’t likely to stop until she starts winning again. “It’s been interesting for me to see, you know, when I started doing well, how everyone jumped on the bandwagon or whatever and saying, you know, building me up so much. And then, to see how they’d break you down so much as well,” Bouchard told the Toronto Sun. “It’s just how the media is. I just separate myself from that. I know what I do and I know what I believe in. “It’s hard not to hear it or see it, but (I try) to just give it some distance and not really worry about it,” added Bouchard, who fell from 12th to 26th in the rankings following her most recent loss. “I’m definitely hard on myself, so if I do have a bad loss, I’m like, you know, I deserve this. There definitely are some harsher critics than others and so-called haters and things like that, but I think it’s all part of the job.” (Tennis star ... ignore the critics. Toronto Sun. 2015, July 22)

When Bouchard had a poor performance, the media’s depiction of her athletic career and ‘brand’ was portrayed as a tragic, a missed opportunity, owing to her marketability as an attractive, female athlete. Literature in sport studies has problematized the representation of female athletes as solely linked to their attractiveness (Bruce, 2016; Fink, 2015). In Bowman (2014), the sexualization of female athletes on image sharing sites was typically based on the attractiveness of the female, and their ability to render ‘erotic pleasure’ to the audience. Additionally, remarks in the media are often framed around the physical characteristics of the female, with a greater description of the individual’s appearance, indeed, athletes are often

described more like one would a model, rather than an Olympian. In pictures, the sexualization of females was significantly more popular than that of males, taking away from the athleticism of the competitor, and the significance of their training and endurance (Cranmer, Brann, & Bowman, 2014). Das and Sil (2015) found that gender disparity and inequality were present in popular media sites such as *The Globe and Mail* and *The New York Times* as an analysis following the 1988 Olympic summer games determined that men were portrayed significantly more often than females. In broadcasting, sports that were all-male were shown more frequently, and during better viewing times than female sports. Regardless of the popularity of the sport, men's sports were shown over women's, including peak newsworthy events. This significance was not only exposed in broadcasting, but in print medias as well before, during, and after the event (Das & Sil, 2015). Everett and Martino (2014) studied women and media to further investigate why magazine exposure focused solely on female beauty, using headlines and sexualized images. Within their study, body shaming was a common finding, as young women felt they needed to look the same as the athlete on the cover, thereby promoting an unattainable or negative self-image.

By studying the media's representation of Eugenie Bouchard, allowed the researcher to demonstrate how the media continue to focus on the sexualization of female athletes. Like men, women should be solely focused on for their athletic ability, with an emphasis on their elite level sporting performance, not on their marketability as a model (Everett & Martino, 2014). For Bouchard, these same arguments can be exemplified in the following news story titled, 'Canadian tennis star Bouchard hopeful she can turn dismal season around'. Within the following example, Bouchard's previous year's wins, which made her a marketable rising star, are juxtaposed with declining performance and mounting losses, which are attributable to issues

beyond her control (i.e., new coach, pressure/expectations, injury).

Everything seemed to be lining up nicely for the 21-year-old from Westmount, Que. In addition to her on-court success, she signed with sports management powerhouse WME-IMG to help maximize the value of her brand and expand her presence in the fashion industry. Bouchard appeared primed to take things to the next level on and off the court. Instead, her 2015 season has simply been a disaster. It's hard to pinpoint the reason why she has managed only a handful of victories this year. She may still be adjusting to new coach Sam Sumyk. Expectations have been much higher and Bouchard has battled an abdominal injury in recent weeks. (Eugenie Bouchard ... eyeing Rogers Cup. CBC Sports. 2015, July 22)

By drawing on these psychosocial and/or influences which were positioned within the media stories as out of Bouchard's control (such as injury), her poor performances continued to be rendered within the news stories as difficult to overcome. As noted, such interpretations are problematic as they add to a larger narrative that attributes an athlete's issues with injury as detrimental and insurmountable, not leaving much room to see optimism of coming back from an injury or overcoming performance setbacks. In Bele, Hafsteinsson Ostenberg, Sjostrom, and Alricsson (2015), female volleyball players were studied related to their injury recovery ability, specifically after a shoulder injury. The literature showed that athletes who are higher in self-efficacy often return to play earlier. The authors also discussed the mental toughness of an athlete by stating that adding mental skills practice during rehabilitation allowed for more preparedness in future injuries. Additionally, having a support system during rehabilitation made the participants feel the recovery time went by faster as they had a positive backing throughout (Bele et al., 2015). In Ivarsson, Johnson, and Podlog (2013), injury was discussed as a risk factor

not only physically for the athlete, but also psychologically. Using principles from sport psychology such as Williams and Andersen's stress-injury model, the research showed that an athlete's supports (i.e., coaches, parents, teammates, etc.) need to effectively aid in reducing stress on the athlete, to promote faster healing after an injury. These stressors included daily stress, such as state and trait anxiety, negative life events, and personal thoughts and emotions. If the athlete was able to decrease those stressors, recovery time was shortened, allowing them to return to sport sooner (Ivarsson et al., 2013).

Overall Bouchard's performances during the months of July and August (i.e., prior to the concussion) were repeatedly described in a negative light within media stories, using terms such as 'dismal', 'mediocre' and 'below ordinary'. This contrasted with her past success and (now missed) star potential owing to her poor athletic performance, as shown in the National Post story example title 'Why Eugenie Bouchard will need to do more than just fire her coach to get her career back on track';

For seven or eight weeks in 2014, Bouchard was a top-10 player; for the remainder of the year, she was below ordinary. That trend has continued into 2015. As Bouchard heads into the Rogers Cup next week in Toronto, she has lost 12 of her last 14 matches. The mental toughness that marked her early career is missing. She appears to have lost weight and muscle tone — good for an aspiring model, but not for an elite athlete... Bouchard expanded her endorsement base, signing deals with Coca-Cola and Cover Girl. She began talking about her "brand", losing sight of the fact her brand is being a tennis player. All of Bouchard's success flows from her ability to play tennis, and that part of her life is in shambles. (Why Eugenie Bouchard will need to do more ... career back on track, National Post. 2015, August 7)

In summary, the sport psychology literature exemplifies the position that in order to maintain an elite level ability in any sport, an individual must demonstrate extreme confidence, mental focus, and positive attitude, in addition to their athletic rigour. Prior to Bouchard's concussion, the media maligned her poor performances, not based on her tennis ability, but related to her distractions outside of tennis and her marketability based on her attractiveness. Although she attempted to counterattack this negative promotion, it obviously weighed on her self-esteem and her ability to prevent self-criticism.

The media analysis (described previously) revealed three distinct sub-themes: 1) being at a cross-roads/lacking clear direction, 2) inability to overcome injury, and 3) coaching influences. Each sub-theme will be outlined in relation to how each fed into constructing Bouchard's poor performances as being attributed to influences beyond tennis, along with the psychological and performance implications.

**Sub-theme one: Being at a cross-roads/lacking clear direction.**

The sub-theme of being at a cross-roads/lacking clear direction meant that Bouchard was portrayed as having lost the passion, drive, and intrinsic value for her sport, as well as lacking a clear focus toward athletics and winning, due to being distracted by outside forces (i.e., career outside of sport, critics) and the lacking of psychological/mental toughness. In turn, she was at a cross-road which meant her future in tennis, career outside of sport, and what she would do after sport was all unknown. In Keegan, Harwood, Spray and Lavalley (2013), elite athletes' motivational climate was investigated looking at how the athlete internalizes support and motivation. Within this study, motivation was defined as the internal (intrinsic) or external (extrinsic) forces on an athlete to persevere or behave in a certain manner; the rationale as to why we do something, a driving force. In Keegan et al., the focus was on the external factors an elite

athlete may be focused on within the realm of their sport. The categories included coach, parent and peer commonalities, coach-specific themes, and parent-specific themes. Specifically, coaches and peers tended to be the athlete's focus for motivation, whereas parents were typically used for emotional and moral support. External factors influence motivation, as coaches and peers are required to keep the athlete highly motivated to endure the rigorous training and competition (Keegan et al., 2013). According to Gillet, Vallerand, Amoura, and Baldes (2010), intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation can be divided into three subcategories; global, situational and contextual. In sport, the athlete would want to engage in situational motivation, when all of their focus is on one activity (Gillet et al., 2010). Sport psychology research has shown that it is problematic when an athlete does not have intrinsic motivation for their sport as they become solely focused on winning, or receiving reward for their performance. Related to Bouchard, her endorsement of product demands she have a winning performance and a high motivation. As she has been shown in a number of modelling campaigns and advertisements for clothing and consumer items, she needs wins, which is counteracted by the media questioning whether her heart is truly in playing tennis. In Banack, Sabiston, and Bloom (2011), athletes that are intrinsically motivated are more autonomous and self-directed.

An example of the meanings within this sub-theme comes from a news story regarding Bouchard's downward spiral after her previous successes. Various reasons for this were described, including coaching issues (discussed under a separate theme), and a lack of sport commitment and mental focus, written in 'What a difference a year can make for Eugenie Bouchard.'

Whoever she settles on to take over for Sumyk, who guided Bouchard to a 4-13 record

after being hired in February but may be the scapegoat for her struggles this year, will have their work cut out for them. The biggest challenge will be to get Bouchard focused on tennis again. That lack of singular focus could be the main reason for her slide. She seems to have forgotten that tennis brought her fame, not vice versa. She hasn't displayed enough mental maturity to be able to push aside the distractions, of which there are many for an attractive, successful female athlete, and other perceived obligations. Until she again puts tennis above everything else around the clock, expectations — hers and ours — should be downgraded significantly. A top 10 world ranking? Not now. Winning the Rogers Cup? Not this time. (What a difference ... Eugenie Bouchard. Toronto Sun. 2015, August 8)

This represents another example of the media discussing Bouchard's lack of focus and attention, while at the same time exemplifying her age and maturity, as her stardom rise occurred in her youth. The media portrayed Bouchard as being young, and more focused on the external aspects of tennis (i.e., the fame), and less on her court performance, which manifested in poor performance over several months. Specifically, the media questioned her ability to focus on her sport, as well as her decision-making aptitude, due to being such a 'young' athlete. Such portrayals are difficult as the athlete (in particular the female athlete) was publicised in a paternalistic manner, reinforcing the notion that females are less capable to perform athletically due to youth, beauty, and fame. For Bouchard, this will require a coach who can give greater guidance and instruction, and most importantly, keep her head in the game. From Cranmer et al. (2014), gender portrayals in sporting media identified as female were often discussed in ways that detract from their sporting ability, and focused on sexuality and beauty. Male dominated sports and their athletes were typically labelled as competitive, aggressive, and active; common

words used which allude the reader to assume a male athlete was being discussed. The media's tendency has been to de-value and de-emphasize women's athleticism, and increase their sexuality (Cranmer et al., 2014).

In Eagleman, Rodenberg, and Lee (2014), the media was discussed as a powerful viewpoint for its consumers meaning that not only is the intention to convey reports and events, but also, how to think and feel about the reports. This study showed that women were more likely to be photographed in a stereotypical manner. Women were often shown in their non-athletic or non-active positions, while men were depicted in active and sporting positions (Eagleman et al., 2014). In 'Eugenie Bouchard hits early career crossroads at Wimbledon 2015', Bouchard is discussed as being too young, and influential – although she was at the top of her career. Further, the media mentions that Bouchard's age has had a consequential impact on her performance, leading into her decline as shown in 'Eugenie Bouchard hits early career crossroads at Wimbledon 2015' that appeared in Bleacher Report.

Her brash personality on the court and instant fame likely rubbed fellow competitors the wrong way. It certainly seems as though Bouchard has a bullseye on her back right now, and she's been target practice for the rest of the WTA Tour. Whereas her game befuddled opponents last year, they're now reading her with extreme clarity. All this losing is wearing on Bouchard, who told Yahoo Sports Canada's Stephanie Myles: "Its actually not been a fun kind of routine...kind of a vicious cycle. It's not been fun. I'm not sure I've ever experienced anything as tough as this." Vowing not to "panic" or "freak out," even the headstrong Bouchard has to be questioning where to go from here. At least she's kept her sense of humor despite this rut. But any smiles were quickly turned into frowns when she bowed out in the first round at Wimbledon. Yet another early exit from an event, this

time to Chinese qualifier Ying-Ying Duan. How the mighty have fallen. Citing an abdominal injury, relayed by the *National Post*, Bouchard's loss means she will sink to at least No. 25 in the rankings. Short on confidence and now dealing with this physical ailment makes her forecast even more gloomy heading into the summer hard-court season. Athletes seem to age before our eyes faster than most people because of the glare of the spotlight. It's easy to forget that Bouchard is still only 21. Even by tennis standards, she's remarkably young. But she's undeniably hit an early crossroads in her career.

(Eugenie Bouchard ... crossroads at Wimbledon 2015. Bleacher Report. 2015, July 9)

The media also used words such as 'stagnant' to describe Bouchard's performance and decline, from her quick rise to the top at the beginning of her career. Such words further reinforced that Bouchard was not developing as an athlete unless she was winning – thus linking who she was primarily to external goals and a commodity. As noted, the sport psychology literature has shown this to be problematic for athletes, because the athlete only focuses on the outcome of their sport, rather than the process, or the smaller achievements along the way (Lochbaum and Gottardy, 2015). An athlete who is task (mastery) oriented is motivated by improvement or reaching their personal best, while athletes who are outcome (ego) oriented are motivated by winning and struggle with the concept of failure (Lochbaum & Gottardy, 2015). Although sport psychology interventions such as imagery and goal setting can be advantageous, an approach or avoidance tendency may prevail for the athlete, depending on the outcome of an event or competition. Athletes who are mastery oriented can learn from failure, mistakes, and let-downs, and are often able to turn those into positive learning experiences (Lochbaum & Gottardy, 2015). Bouchard tended to be more ego or outcome oriented; with her focus on winning, losing was not an acceptable option, nor could it become a learning experience. Prior to

her declining performance in 2015, Bouchard was named the Most Improved Player by the World Tennis Association, but her fame was short, as the media began critiquing her ‘dismal’ performance, and repeated loss of momentum.

Furthermore, the media described Bouchard as being a ‘poor sport’ as she did not act professionally on the court, which fed into the critique of her being too young and immature. The following example from The Bleacher Report titled ‘Eugenie Bouchard hits early career crossroads at Wimbledon 2015’, illustrates these arguments.

Named the WTA Most Improved Player because of her torrid start to 2014, Bouchard's summer and fall results left something to be desired. She had stagnated. Her response? Parting with long-time coach Nick Saviano. A renowned tennis instructor and figure, Saviano had been a steadying force in the Bouchard camp for years. Her rise coincided with his increased involvement. So far, the early returns on a Saviano-less reality for Bouchard have been downright dismal. Some nightmares don't require you to be asleep in order to experience their terror—just ask Bouchard. After piecing together a few promising wins to begin the 2015 Australian Open, she was blitzed in the quarterfinals by Maria Sharapova. Her record since leaving Melbourne? A grisly 4-12. There's no other way to describe Bouchard's performance the past few months than off the rails. At Antwerp, Miami, Charleston, Madrid, Roland Garros, 's-Hertogenbosch and Birmingham, she suffered losses in the first round. That's not even counting her 0-2 mark in Fed Cup play against Romania, at which she infamously refused to shake her opponents' hands. (Eugenie Bouchard ... crossroads at Wimbledon 2015. Bleacher Report. 2015, July 9)

Although focusing on the external aspects of sport is sometimes inevitable, the media

speculates on an athlete's life outside of their sport, and shares those perceived details with the reader. Speculating on Bouchard's life outside of her sport took the focus off of her tennis performance and continued to probe the athlete's personal life. The literature has demonstrated this type of reporting is devastating; the media takes over the life of the athlete, both inside and outside of their sport. According to Fink (2015), the media becomes a part of the athletes' life, regardless of whether they are wanted. In Bouchard's case, the media showed her as being unfocused on her tennis career and not having a clear direction; spending her time absorbed by the external aspects of fame, such as modelling. Such portrayals reinforce the idea that female athletes are less focused, and thus less worthy of being true sport competitors. This, along with gender differences in amount of sports media coverage, lack of screen time, the sport media discrimination, and a focus on the external aspects (which may be personal and not meant for live broadcasting), enhance this negative portrayal of females in sport (Fink, 2015). The following example from a story about Bouchard's lack of sport career direction gives credence to these findings.

Cox said there is a clear difference in the 21-year-old Bouchard's demeanour these days compared to how she acted last year. "Even the way she talks – it used to be about getting to No. 1 in the world and winning Grand Slams, and now it's 'Well, I won't be playing by the time I'm 30,' and then after another loss, 'It's not the biggest thing in the world, what's the big deal?' "I think part of that is defensive," Cox added. "And I just think something – and I don't pretend to know the intimate details of her life – something major has gone wrong." If Bouchard continues to lose and her ranking falls, Cox said she will begin to run into stiffer competition in the earlier rounds of tournaments, something that struggling star Rafael Nadal is currently experiencing. "People never talk about it but

when your ranking is up you get a lot of early puffballs that you can work through in the tournament,” Cox said. “When your ranking starts to fall you get harder and harder matches, which means more and more tournaments you lose early – although she’s losing to everybody.” Following Wimbledon, Bouchard will likely fall out of the top 20 rankings. “She is just awful out there now,” said Cox. “I feel terrible for her because even whether you like her or dislike her, it’s hard to see a professional athlete with this promise take such a downward turn. “It’s shocking.” (Cox: Eugenie ... ‘beyond tennis’. Sportsnet. 2015, July 3)

This speculation by the media further raised questions about Bouchard, and her intention to continue as a professional tennis player. Was her steep performance decline a combination of hitting a ‘crossroads’ between tennis and the external aspect of sport? Once more, this portrayal can be read as subtly gendered, as it reinforced stereotypes like female athletes are not serious about their sport or sport related ‘duties’ (Geurin, 2017), or are only worthy of attention and time if they are attractive and winning in their sport (Lynn, Hardin, & Walsdorf 2004; Fink, 2015). Further Bouchard was portrayed as making comments about her career lifetime, in that she does not plan to remain in sport, with a subtle implication that she is not taking her sport seriously. As the media can form popular opinion about an athlete’s abilities, duration in sport, and perseverance, her career may be hindered by their implications regarding her intention to continue in elite level sport.

In conclusion, Bouchard’s poor performance prior to her concussion can be seen in the news stories as related to the first sub-theme of her lack of clear direction and being at crossroads. The media focused on her drive being related to external motivation, by emphasizing factors such as her need to have winning performances and her play being distracted by a

modeling campaign. In addition, several alluded to her age and maturity as being a detraction to her abilities. These psychosocial influences are beyond the limits of the technicalities of tennis, and thus enforce a performance decline beyond tennis.

**Sub-theme two: Inability to overcome injury.**

This subtheme related to Bouchard being portrayed as unable to overcome injury when she had to withdraw from several tournaments, due to recurrent injury. When an athlete is battling injuries throughout their career, the sport psychology literature has shown that intervention can decrease the time spent away from the sport. Heaney, Walker, Green and Rostron (2015) discussed sport psychology education when dealing with an athlete's injury rehabilitation process. The literature suggested that one consequence of an improper education program for trainers was a less impactful return to sport plan for the athlete. Additionally, program content that was not relevant to the interests, beliefs, or understanding of the athlete was not beneficial for recovery. The most popular education topics discussed for injury recovery within sport psychology are interpersonal communication, positive-self talk, imagery, and goal setting, which are all effective tools when used in conjunction with the athlete's expectations. Having the proper support team, delivering proper content, and ensuring the sport psychology intervention and tools are understood and accepted by the athlete, can help them to recover faster and with more confidence (Heaney et al., 2015).

As Bouchard was unable to effectively recover from her injury, this subtheme of inability to overcome injury will shed light on the overarching theme of performance decline beyond tennis. Due to her nagging injury, which afforded difficulty during training, she was unable to compete in the tournaments, thereby affecting her overall ranking. Bouchard's ranking, which had been on a steady decline since she had her career high in 2014, continued to plummet. Prior

to her concussion, Bouchard suffered from an abdominal injury which caused her to twice withdraw from tournaments such as the Citi Open. The following article from CBC Sports entitled 'Eugenie Bouchard forced out of Citi Open due to injury' discussed the decision to withdraw from an event for the second year in a row, further demonstrating her inability to return to sport healthy, injury-free, and ready to compete.

Canadian Eugenie Bouchard withdrew from the Citi Open on Friday due to an abdominal injury. It's the second straight year that Bouchard has withdrawn from the event. The 21-year-old from Westmount, Que., has been dealing with the injury for the last several weeks. "I am very disappointed to have to pull out of the Citi Open in Washington, DC," Bouchard said. "I have been working hard to return from an abdominal injury, unfortunately I am not ready to compete." The Citi Open, which officially begins on Monday, was meant to be a tune-up event for Bouchard, who is set to compete in the Rogers Cup in Toronto from Aug. 8-16. Ranked No. 26, Bouchard has struggled this season, including losses in five of her last seven events. Bouchard was the talk of the tennis world in 2014 after reaching the semifinals at the first three Grand Slam events, including a trip to the Wimbledon final. (Eugenie Bouchard ... eyeing Rogers Cup. CBC Sports. 2015, July 31)

Being injured occasionally happens when participating in sport, however, Bouchard's inability to overcome her injury and her withdrawal from more than one tournament was portrayed by the media in multiple disparaging ways. In Ivarsson et al. (2013), the ability of an athlete to overcome injury was studied at the professional level. For Bouchard, the media conversation surrounded her performance; her top ten ranking in 2014, then her downward slide to number 26 as a result of injury, and its impact on requiring her to withdraw from tournaments.

With sparing wins, the media began to speculate, mostly on her prolonged healing time, but eventually on her intention to continue playing. Her abdominal injury affected her for months, requiring her to withdraw from major tournaments like the Citi Open, as shown in a story from Sportsnet entitled ‘Eugenie Bouchard cuts ties with Coach Sumyk.’

An abdominal injury forced the 21-year-old to withdraw from the Citi Open last Friday for a second straight year. Bouchard is set to compete in the Rogers Cup in Toronto. She plays her first match Tuesday. A trip to the Wimbledon final last year and semifinal berths at her first three 2014 Grand Slam events put Bouchard solidly on the tennis map, but she hasn't been able to live up to those expectations, losing 12 of her last 14 matches over WTA Tour and Fed Cup play.’ (Eugenie Bouchard cuts ties with coach Sumyk. Sportsnet. 2015, August 6)

Research on injury in sport psychology has suggested that an injury does not necessarily only affect the athlete’s performance physically, but indeed mentally, as well. In this regard, studies have indicated the following specific mental impacts of an injury are commonly seen: depression, anxiety, emotional detachment, and anger (McGannon et al., 2013; Manwaring et al., 2012, Kerr et al., 2012). To this end, the media portrayed Bouchard as frequently expressing her disappointment with being unable to play during the Citi Open, especially as it was the second time. This could indicate her injury was affecting her mental state as well, in particular her feelings of a dis-attachment from her sport, and potential identity loss, being that she was unable to do her job as an athlete. The article entitled “Eugenie Bouchard hits early career crossroads at Wimbledon 2015’ alluded to the idea that Bouchard’s problem is not her inability to overcome injury, but an overall confidence issue. The notion of athletes needing self-confidence to perform well is supported by an abundance of literature from sport

psychology (Martin, Fogarty, & Albion, 2014; Gucciardi, Gordon, & Dimmock, 2009). The media identified that Bouchard was unable to perform well because she lacked self-confidence, the reason why she withdrew from the tournaments. This links back to the overarching theme of exploring Bouchard's performance beyond tennis; a portrayal of lacking in self-confidence meant her practice and competition performance continued to decline, as she was unable to be confident in her own ability and her ability within her sport. The following example from Bleacher Report exemplifies these ideas:

‘But any smiles were quickly turned into frowns when she bowed out in the first round at Wimbledon. Yet another early exit from an event, this time to Chinese qualifier Ying-Ying Duan. How the mighty have fallen. Citing an abdominal injury, relayed by the *National Post*, Bouchard's loss means she will sink to at least No. 25 in the rankings. Short on confidence and now dealing with this physical ailment makes her forecast even more gloomy heading into the summer hard-court season. Athletes seem to age before our eyes faster than most people because of the glare of the spotlight. It's easy to forget that Bouchard is still only 21. Even by tennis standards, she's remarkably young. But she's undeniably hit an early crossroads in her career.’ (Eugenie Bouchard ... crossroads at Wimbledon 2015. Bleacher Report. 2015, July 9)

The sub-theme of inability to overcome injury is linked also to the theme of Bouchard's career being called ‘at a crossroads’, questioning whether it is worth her continuing to play, with her current record, or not. As Bouchard was struggling with both abdominal and ankle issues, the media speculated that she might be unable to continue with her career and should decide whether or not to continue playing. This speculation regarding Bouchard's career, and issues with recovering from injury, are directly related to the overarching theme of performance decline

outside of tennis; her recovery from injury was not necessarily under her control. The following example from The Toronto Sun confirms these facts.

So what, exactly, has changed in Bouchard's world to impact so strongly a career that many was certain would result in stardom? And is this just a glitch, a temporary setback for the 21-year-old from Westmount, Que., or have we seen her best performances on the court? It's tough to say one way or the other at this point. Bouchard is still young enough to get things turned around — bet Rogers Cup organizers would love for that to happen next week — but it remains to be seen if she takes her standing as a tennis player, rather than a celebrity/model, seriously enough to fight for it. Regardless of what outsiders believe, though, Bouchard seems to think she will eventually get out of her funk, which could at least partly be blamed on an abdominal injury that has forced her to take a hiatus since an early exit from Wimbledon. Her game hasn't, she says, disappeared entirely. "I just feel like I haven't quite been myself," Bouchard admitted during the Rogers Cup draw earlier this week. "My confident, aggressive game (hasn't been there) lately and that's something I've been working on very hard in practice. I have the belief and I know my skills are still there and nothing can just vanish. It's just about working hard to get back on track." The number suggest Bouchard has a long way back. She has lost 12 of her past 14 matches on tour, some that make her upset to Rogers in Montreal pale in comparison. At Wimbledon, where she made it to the final in 2014 before losing to Petra Kvitova, Bouchard fell to Chinese qualifier Ying-Ying Duan in the first round. (What a difference ... make for Eugenie Bouchard. Toronto Sun. 2015, August 8)

The media speculated that Bouchard was unfocused on her tennis career, and 'forgets' that her sport and athleticism brought her to fame, downplaying these points and/or not

mentioning them at all. However, her abdominal injury kept her from performing at her potential, thus the media focused on the external aspects of her life - her modelling career, her intention to continue in sport, as well as her inability to heal from injury. Although the injury happened in April 2015, Bouchard was still feeling the pain from the injury until September, when the concussion occurred. Under the sub-headline, 'Abdominal injury still hindering Bouchard' released in August, one story discussed her inability to continue playing at Wimbledon, as she had to leave the court because of pain. She was resilient in this instance and continued to play while injured, in particular due to the status of tournament itself. Literature from sport psychology has shown that resilience means that the athlete needs to utilize their mental skills to ensure the psychological and physical aspects of sport, while continuing to work towards their sport goal (Sakar & Fletcher, 2014). In elite sport, it is obligatory for an athlete to have resilience; though the physical aspect of sport is significant for performance, their mental toughness and ability to persevere, pushes them ahead of their physical competitors. The following story illustrates these points.

Back in March during Indian Wells, Bouchard's year was still looking to get going. She had a quarterfinals appearance at the Australian Open but followed that up with an opening round loss in Antwerp. At Indian Wells, the Canadian looked to get to the quarterfinals of the event taking on Lesia Tsurenko. She was heavily favored but 74 unforced errors and what was later stated as a strained abdominal hindered her in the final set and a half. In her Wimbledon tune-up in Eastbourne, the Canadian finally won a match after crashing out early in multiple clay court events with the lowlight being her first round loss to Kristina Mladenovic at the French Open. She would begin to notice significant pain in her abdominal in the 10th game of the opening set in her match

against Belinda Bencic. She retired 4-6, 0-3 down. At Wimbledon, it all came crashing down for “the most marketable athlete in the world”. She was defending over a thousand points after making the finals last year in which she lost to Petra Kvitova and would end up losing in the opening round. In her opening round match, she took on China’s Ying-Ying Duan in what looked to be a match where the Canadian would cruise. It would be anything but for her. The three-time Grand Slam semi-finalist found herself up early in the set with a break but the Chinese woman would end up getting a break back and the best of her in the opening set to take it in a tiebreaker. Duan once again capitalized on the Bouchard errors in the second set as she was closing in on the biggest victory of her career. It was fitting that two Bouchard errors gave Duan the break for 5-4 then the match as the season took a turn for the worse for Bouchard. After that result, she moved to 4-3 at Grand Slams this year with all four wins coming in Australia. Last year, she was 19-4 in majors. After the match, the Canadian revealed she was thinking of pulling out of the tournament due to an injury. However, she wanted to play in it and fight through it. She also noted that if the event was not Wimbledon, that she would have withdrawn from the event. (WTA Citi Open: Eugenie Bouchard ... due to an Abdominal Injury. Vavel INT. 2015, August 1)

Ultimately, the above story shows that Bouchard was portrayed as using her resilience reserves, and “stayed and fought through it”, due to the seriousness of the match. Yet the media hypothesis about her intention focused heavily on the detail that she had previously withdrawn from other tournaments, not that she continued to play even though suffering. Throughout Bouchard’s career, she has had to pull out of a few major tournaments due to injury, yet the media stories continue to be directed towards the amount of time required for her to return to

play. The issue of return to play is a complex one because it means the athlete needs to build their practice to the level of their regular schedule, with perhaps only slight modification consequential from their injury. In Tjong, Murnaghan, Nyhof-Young, & Ogilvie-Harris (2014), several athletes who had suffered an ACL injury, were unable to return to their pre-injury level of play. An injury severely effects an athlete as they are unable to perform at their previous ability, which can also cause serious confidence and mental toughness repercussions.

In the case of Bouchard, the media linked her issues to an inability to overcome injury, a lack of self-confidence and ultimately, less resilience in play. These psychological resources have been shown to be important for athletic well-being, performance, and persistence in sport during times of adversity (Martin et al., 2014; Gucciardi et al., 2009). Although the original injury occurred in April 2015, Bouchard was still feeling its impact while attempting to play in August, and had to withdraw from a variety of tournaments, thereby, further hindering her performance, and her rankings. Her inability to overcome injury, a performance decline outside of tennis, was linked by the media as related to her poor performances, and resulted in a downward spiral in tennis standings.

### **Sub-theme three: Coaching influences**

This final subtheme in the time frame of prior to her concussion, related to Bouchard being viewed by the media as having challenges with her coaches (in particular, being unable to stay with a coach for a prolonged period of time), and being unfocused or poorly driven. Again, this subtheme exemplifies the overarching theme of performance decline beyond tennis, as none of these negative aspects deal with the technicalities of the sport. Within this sub-theme, the media positioned the coach as being the problem linked to Bouchard's poor showings, and as firing the coach the answer to fixing her performance related issues. During the selected

timeframe, Bouchard worked with two coaches, Sam Sumyk and Marko Dragic, as well as an interim coach, former professional tennis player, Jimmy Connors. In general, the media constructed the coach as a ‘scapegoat’ for Bouchard’s poor performance which was displayed in a variety of sources.

Bouchard, who is mired in a season-long slump that has seen her drop out of the top 10 to No. 25 in the WTA Tour rankings, has parted ways with coach Sam Sumyk. There were no reasons given for the split, but it’s obvious Sumyk is the fall guy for Bouchard’s shortcomings this year. But it will take more than a new coach to sort out Bouchard’s career. The 21-year-old from Westmount has multiple problems, and most of them stem from the fact she has forgotten about why she emerged as an international celebrity last year. Success in the Grand Slam events last year — she reached the semifinals of the Australian and French Opens and the final at Wimbledon — landed her on the cover of the New York Times Magazine with a cover that gushed “BIG SHOT: Eugenie Bouchard could be the future of women’s tennis. All she has to do is win.” It’s that last part of the equation that has been lost on Bouchard. When she fired coach Nick Saviano last November, Bouchard also switched agents. She signed with the high-powered IMG/WME, which has connections not only in sports but in the world of fashion and entertainment. (Why Eugenie Bouchard will need to do more than just fire her coach to get her career back on track. National Post. 2015, August 7)

Even the headline exemplifies the overarching theme of performance decline outside of tennis. The media speculated Bouchard firing her coach was an ‘easy way out’, and how ‘obvious’ it was that Sam Sumyk was the reason behind Bouchard’s declining performance. Unfortunately, Bouchard was unable to attain the previous success she had found with former

coach Nick Saviano. In sport, it is common for athletes to part-ways with their coach if their relationship is not constructive for developing the best potential of the athlete. Nevertheless, describing the coach as the only reason for the negative performance, or using them as a scapegoat, does not conclusively demonstrate the reason why Bouchard was unable to perform at her best, as described below.

Firing Sumyk won't work if Bouchard is using him as an excuse for her own failings.

I've heard numerous suggestions that hiring Sumyk was a mistake because he's left-handed. Of course, that ignores the fact Saviano — who guided Bouchard's career from age 12 — is also left-handed. Another coaching change won't work unless Bouchard dedicates herself to be better. The great athletes will tell you the secret to greatness is to constantly strive for a higher level. Bouchard and the people around her have to buy into that idea. It would be easy to be complacent after the breakthrough season Bouchard had in 2014, but as good as her results were she lost her first match in 10 tournaments. (Why Eugenie Bouchard will need to do more ... career back on track. National Post. 2015, August 7)

After Bouchard ended her coaching time with Sumyk, she started working with Marko Dragic to prepare for the Rogers Cup. Although Dragic was a temporary solution, the blame from her disappointing performance at Wimbledon rested directly with Sumyk. The media suggested there were problems between the two (i.e., with coaching styles, relationship) although reasons, or hard facts, were not specified. Literature has verified that when an athlete experiences a lack of continuity with coaching, the following issues can result: lack of communication, conflicts, player and coach differing expectations, power struggles, and so on (Wachsmuth, Jowett, & Harwood, 2017). Additionally, when coaches and athletes are shown to be in conflict,

the following can result especially when both are under immense stress and dealing with altered emotions. In Mueller, Ruiz and Chroni (2018), performance related stress was taken into account and instruction given to help coaches aide athletes, while they were in certain altered states.

Knowing how the competitor will react, and how to diffuse stressful and emotional situations, is paramount to a successful relationship between athlete and coach. In the following news article, Bouchard's coaching struggles were discussed after her first-round loss.

Bouchard's struggles began a year ago when the Rogers Cup was in Montreal and she lost to qualifier Shelby Rogers when ranked fifth. While that was a stunning defeat on the heels of her finals appearance at Wimbledon, this loss followed a year-long trend. "I think the losses are completely different," Bouchard said. "I was in a completely different situation last year compared to this year. I feel like I handled myself really well tonight, and you know, better than I did last year coming into that Montreal tournament. So I'm proud of that." Amid her struggles, Bouchard has fired two coaches — Nick Saviano in November and Sam Sumyk last week. Bouchard said she was working with Marko Dragic on a short-term basis for the Rogers Cup. Bouchard on Tuesday night said there were "big problems" between her and Sumyk, who split after she was eliminated from Wimbledon. "It definitely wasn't working," Bouchard said. "I just felt like I had to make a change. I think that was necessary for me." She said Dragic will continue coaching her for the time being but added that wasn't a permanent arrangement. On the same night Milos Raonic lost to Ivo Karlovic on the men's side in Montreal, Bouchard's exit meant there are no Canadians left in women's singles play. (Rogers Cup tennis: Eugenie Bouchard ... 1<sup>st</sup> round loss. CBC Sports. 2015. August 11)

Bouchard had been working with Nick Saviano, her former coach, since she was twelve

years old. There was no concrete rationale given for the split, but the media speculated that both coaches (Sumyk and Saviano) were left-handed, which was given as a possible reason. Although Dragic was only a temporary alliance, Bouchard also received help from friend, and tennis legend, Jimmy Connors. The media noted that Connors was not a forever choice, but enlisted to help Bouchard prepare for the US Open. Both Connors and Dragic were not formal coaches, but did help her along the way, especially in high calibre tournaments such as Wimbledon, and the US Open. From the literature, a lack of continuity within coaching can create disruption for an athlete and impact mental well-being, as described in the following ways. In Banack et al. (2011) an autonomous coach-athlete relationship aids to boost an athletes' intrinsic motivation and self-determination. This positive relationship can have an effect on psychological needs in a positive way: the athlete is given choice, initiative taking opportunities, and the coach shows concern for the athlete, especially by creating a task-oriented environment in which they can flourish (Banack et al., 2011). The following from CBC Sports, 'Eugenie Bouchard working with tennis legend Jimmy Connors before U.S. Open' discusses her transition into working with a legendary tennis player.

Canadian Eugenie Bouchard is working with tennis legend Jimmy Connors on a temporary basis in preparation for the U.S. Open. Bouchard said in a statement through her agent Mary Jane Orman that she has been friends with Connors for a few years and that the two are working together this week while Connors is in New York City. There are no long-term plans for Connors to continue coaching Bouchard, the 21-year-old said in the statement. Connors won eight Grand Slams from 1974-1983, including five U.S. Opens. He was the top-ranked player in the world for 160 straight weeks at one point. Connors previously coached Andy Roddick from 2006-2008 and Maria Sharapova,

though that lasted only one match. Bouchard has been trying to rediscover her game since going to the 2014 Wimbledon final. She recently parted ways with coach Sam Sumyk after Wimbledon and worked with Marko Dragic before the Rogers Cup. Bouchard said there were "big problems" with Sumyk and that the arrangement wasn't working. The Westmount, Que., native has lost 14 of her past 17 matches, including a first-round loss in Toronto to eventual Rogers Cup champion Belinda Bencic. Bouchard also dealt with an abdominal injury during that stretch. She lost in the first round of the Connecticut Open on Monday, 6-0, 6-1 to Italy's Roberta Vinci. Bouchard will face American Alison Riske in the first round of the U.S. Open, which starts Aug. 31. Riske in the first round of the U.S. Open. (Eugenie Bouchard working with tennis legend Jimmy Connors before U.S. Open. CBC Sports. 2015, August 6)

Coaching changes happen frequently in professional sport, especially after a major loss, or series of loses, which can be a highly emotional transition for the athlete, as a close and trusting relationship has been broken (Mueller et al, 2018). In a media article, sport psychologist Dr. Gordan Bloom added his opinion related to Bouchard's new, and frequent coaching changes. To review, since November of 2014, she has worked with two coaches formally, and with Connors and Dragic on a temporary basis.

Bouchard and her "brand" — a word she has used — have taken a beating this year. Diet Coke — one of Bouchard's major sponsors — has been trying to push its #GenieForTheWin campaign, but there haven't been too many #wins to promote.

Bouchard is also on her third coach after dropping Nick Saviano — who had worked with her since she was 12 — at the end of last year and replacing him with Sam Sumyk, who was let go before the Rogers Cup and replaced, at least temporarily, by Marko Dragic.

Evert said she thought Bouchard made a mistake when she got rid of Saviano, saying he “was really good for her and I think he was a very positive influence.” And Dr. Gordon Bloom, an associate professor of sport psychology at McGill University, thinks the coaching changes are a sign of a bigger problem. “Individual-sports athletes can go through protracted slumps, it’s not uncommon,” Bloom said Wednesday. “The thing that I always say as someone who works in sports psychology is: ‘Is this technical, tactical, physical or mental?’ The one thing that sort of sends up alarm systems to me is changing coaches. There doesn’t seem to be synchronicity in the team. I don’t know the situation, so I don’t want to go too far, but when an athlete is, let’s say, uncomfortable with their support team, it will carry over to the court.” (What a difference a year makes for Eugenie Bouchard. Montreal Gazette. 2015, August 12)

Bloom alludes to other issues outside of sport, in addition to those Bouchard had with coaching, given that frequent switches can impact the intrinsic motivation of the athlete, which can be carried onto the court. Yet, his mention of extrinsic sources (i.e., modelling, sponsors, fans), all related to her ability to win, could be impacting her performance.

The inconsistency caused by all of the coaching changes, the potential that the management plan does not meet with the needs of the athlete, and the possible inability of a coach to diffuse stressful and emotional situations may account for Bouchard’s decline in performance. Thus, a theme of coaching influences is linked to the overarching theme of technicalities that are outside of the sport of tennis has been demonstrated. In McGee and DeFreese (2019), the coach-athlete relationship was discussed in terms of the athletes’ perception of their relationship. Their prominent result showed that increasing athlete engagement (closeness emotionally), and achieving personal goals, can counter-balance burnout

and prevent a spiralling into loss. The impact of the media was to exemplify these difficult associations, and in particular, blame Bouchard for being unable to maintain a consistent, long-standing, coaching relationship.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION PART II: POST-CONCUSSION

Within this chapter, the discussion focuses on the media's portrayal of Bouchard's concussion. Within the context of the overarching theme of 'performance decline beyond tennis', Bouchard's career was portrayed as taking a turn for the worst after her concussion. At this point in her career, the meaning of Bouchard's performance decline outside of tennis now took on a new form – attributable to an injury – and with that, who she was as an athlete was portrayed differently. As noted, Bouchard's injury took place on September 4, 2015 outside of tennis/sport play, and continued to affect her throughout her recovery, and into her return to play stage in January 2016. After a mercurial rise to fame in 2014, as noted previously, Bouchard's placement seemed to be destined for a slippery decline, and she was portrayed as such, though this was complex within the context of concussion meanings. In this regard, within the overarching 'performance decline beyond tennis narrative', multiple influences were outlined by the media as having impacted her performance decline, including her issues with confidence, inability to recover from injury, and her difficulties regarding her coaching staff. Then in the summer of 2015, she seemed to be on a come-back, with an inspiring coaching system, a final respite from injury, and a new level of confidence.

The media also portrayed Bouchard's career as having been tragically derailed near the beginning of September of that year, after slipping in a locker room during the US Open tournament, and suffering a concussion. The media called Bouchard's concussion injury "a dismal turn" for the worst, yet it substantiates the general theme of speculation for an overarching narrative theme of a 'performance decline beyond tennis'. In contrast to the first section of results and discussion, the three themes that will be discussed within this section are

placed on the post-concussion timeline. These themes show how stories centred on this media incident contributed toward particular meanings of concussion, which reinforced that concussion for women athletes are less common, but when they do occur, remain less understood:

1. Concussions as an anomaly, a senseless accident,
2. Concussion as debilitating nebulous and ambiguous,
3. A promising career, derailed, and cut short.

The three sub-themes will be illustrated with excerpts from the news media articles and discussed in relation to how each distinct sub-theme fed into constructing Bouchard's poor performances as attributed to influences beyond tennis, along with the psychological and performance implications of each.

**Sub-theme one: Concussions as an anomaly, a senseless accident.**

This subtheme related to the meaning of Bouchard's concussions as something that was not 'typical' as it happened outside of the sport, an anomaly, a completely senseless accident. The meaning of concussion as an anomaly and something less common is further reinforced by Bouchard, who is playing in the sport of tennis, where concussions occur relatively infrequently. After playing some of the best tennis of her year, the innocent act of going into the locker room resulted in a debilitating injury, a tragedy for this young professional, who was plagued with a further performance decline. The following CBC story entitled "Eugenie Bouchard, teary-eyed, retires from 1<sup>st</sup> match since concussion' portrays this perspective.

In a difficult year during which she at one point lost six matches in a row, Bouchard was playing some of her best tennis of the year when she slipped in the locker room at the U.S. Open last month. She was diagnosed with a concussion and forced to withdraw ahead of her fourth-round singles match and the doubles competitions she was entered in.

She also pulled out of the Tokyo Open as the tour moved to Asia. (Eugenie Bouchard, teary-eyed, retires from 1<sup>st</sup> match since concussion, 2015, October 5)

A ‘simple slip’ in the locker room resulted in Bouchard having to put her competitive life on hold and withdraw from tournaments internationally. As the concussion did not occur while she was playing tennis, practicing, or in a match, the anomaly of her injury was that she was merely walking in the locker room during the U.S. Open. Contrary to the literature on sport concussion, tennis is one that does not characteristically portray head injuries. The portrayal of Bouchard’s injury as anomaly reinforced and/or downplayed the possibility of head injuries in non-contact sports such as tennis. Rowe (2004) demonstrated there was an increased number of concussions in contact sports, the same is true in sports where the athlete is not required to wear protective head gear. Injuries can occur in any sporting environment, nevertheless, the circumstance of Bouchard’s concussion makes it an anomaly as she was not actively playing tennis.

In ‘concussions are rare in tennis, but when considering Eugenie Bouchard’s case, remember Sarah Borwell’, Bouchard’s circumstance of injury was compared to other female tennis players, Sarah Borwell and Victoria Azarenka. Azarenka fell during warm-up after she tripped on her own pant leg, while Borwell experienced a tennis ball impact to her head almost immediately following her return to play, following a concussion.

Concussions in tennis are rare, so there aren’t many comparable with which to gauge her expectations of recovery. Victoria Azarenka suffered what was termed as a “mild concussion” nearly five years prior to the day, at the 2010 US Open – another freak accident during which she caught her foot in the bottom of her sweatpants as she did footwork drills warming up for a match against Gisela Dulko of Argentina. She played

her match shortly afterward, but collapsed on the court within a half hour and had to be ushered off court in a wheelchair. And just a month before that, there was British player Sarah Borwell. Borwell, now retired and running a service called Tennis Smart to help young tennis players get college scholarships, broke into the top 200 in singles but was mainly a doubles player. She and partner Raquel Kops-Jones had just upset the No 1 seeds, multiple Grand Slam champions Rennae Stubbs and Lisa Raymond, when they met Americans Lilia Osterloh and Riza Zalameda in the quarterfinals of the WTA tournament in Stanford, California in late July 2010. The British player on the practice court at the 2011 Australian Open, where she was still feeling the effects of a concussion suffered in late July the previous year. (Stephanie Myles/Openecourt.ca). Osterloh put away a high ball at the net – and drilled Borwell right in the head. “Girls aren’t like boys where they go around you. She kind of went at me. I turned, and it hit the back of my skull, bottom left,” Borwell said in an interview with Eh Game. (Concussions are rare in tennis, but when considering ... remember Sarah Borwell. Yahoo! Sports. 2015, October 13)

Regarding the sport of tennis, both examples in the above article depict the sub-theme of concussion as an anomaly, a senseless act. Similar to Bouchard, these injuries were not necessarily obtained while playing tennis; Borwell’s occurred while she was healing from an earlier concussion, while Azarenka’s took place during warm-up, off court drills. Their severity was not diminished by the fact that the injuries did not occur on the court as Borwell continued to recover for an entire year and Azarenka had to be taken from the court in a wheelchair. Covassin and Elbin (2011) discuss the second impact syndrome, which is when an additional concussion or trauma to the brain occurs, similar to the event Borwell suffered. Second impact

syndrome can be more extreme than a first concussion, potentially causing death, and long-term, life-altering effects, yet a second brain trauma may present with different symptoms.

Reviewing the media regarding the legalities of Bouchard's fall, the serendipitous agent was a cleaning compound that had been applied to the floor. She filed a lawsuit one month later, as described in 'USTA sued by Eugenie Bouchard over concussion 'caused by slippery substance' in locker room at US Open.'

Bouchard, who reached the Wimbledon final last year, suffered the injury after entering a physiotherapy room inside a locker room at Flushing Meadows at around 10 pm, having played in a mixed doubles match earlier in the evening. She slipped and fell on the tiled floor and hit her head, causing concussion. "Ms Bouchard entered the physiotherapy room of the women's locker room when she was caused to slip and fall by a slippery, foreign and dangerous substance on the floor," the lawsuit says. Bouchard's lawyer, Benedict Morelli, told The New York Times that the substance was a cleaning agent. He was quoted as saying it was supposed to have been left on the floor overnight while the room was out of use. "They should have closed the door and locked it off," Morelli told the newspaper. "They didn't do that." Bouchard, a former World No 5, claims her injuries "were caused solely by the reason of carelessness, negligence, wanton and willful disregard" on the part of the USTA. She alleges that the organisation did not keep the locker room in a "safe and suitable condition" because it had failed to maintain, clean and repair the floor. (USTA sued by Eugenie Bouchard over concussion ... in locker room at US Open. Independent. 2015, October 15)

The lawsuit revolved around the detail that although the cleaning agent was meant to be left on the floor, the locker room should have been secured to prevent entry. All athletes had

access to the locker room, so this incongruity risked the safety of all, however, in the case of Bouchard, this simple mistake was responsible for her concussion.

Another article discussing the legal implications, 'Eugenie Bouchard files suit against the US Tennis Association, after the concussion incident at the US Open', describes the carelessness, senselessness, and neglect that occurred, leading to Bouchard's injury.

The suit claims Bouchard "was caused to slip and fall by a slippery, foreign and dangerous substance on the floor, and the defendants either "caused or created it", or "knew or should have known" that the substance was on the floor. Morelli told the New York Times it was "a cleaning agent that was intended to be left on the floor overnight when the room would no longer be used," and that in that case, they should have locked the door for safety. Among the other factual allegations brought forth by the filing:

18. The Defendants "failed to provide any warnings whatsoever about the substance".

19. Bouchard sustained a "severe injury to her head including, but not limited to, a concussion." 22. As a result of Bouchard withdrawing from the US Open and subsequent tournaments, her world ranking has dropped 13 spots, and is likely to continue to drop.

The suit claims "the aforesaid described incident and the resulting injuries to Ms.

Bouchard were caused solely "by the reason of the carelessness, negligence, wanton and willful disregard on the part of Defendant USTA ... without any negligence on the part of Ms. Bouchard contributing hereto." It also claims the USTA had "actual and/or

constructive prior notice" of the dangerous conditions and that Bouchard has "been damaged and endured and continues to endure severe pain and suffering, and incurred and continues to incur significant economic loss, medical expenses and loss of enjoyment of life. (Eugenie Bouchard files suit against the US Tennis Association ... incident at US

Open. Yahoo! Sports. 2015, October 14)

Highlighted in this article are the potential long-term affects, including financial, medical and emotional, of Bouchard's slip in the changeroom. Concussions can have lasting life-altering effects as seen in Murray et al. (2015), which, similar to the injury being individualized to the athlete, the consequences can be different person to person. Complicating this, the symptoms of this "invisible injury" are not always easy to discern (Bloom et al., 2014), and may not be immediately noticeable. Anomaly incidences, analogous to Bouchard's fall, can affect the athlete for months or years to come, not only physically, but mentally and emotionally as well. Therefore, it is important that athletes are supported long after their injury has occurred. Some injuries may result in major lawsuits like the \$765 million-dollar settlement from the National Football League (NFL) as many athlete's experience career ending concussions.

Media portrayal of an incident which occurs as an anomaly, and outside of regular sport activities, is often peppered with a much skepticism. In 'Eugenie Bouchard files suit against the US Tennis Association, after the concussion incident at the US Open', Bouchard's actions are scrutinized by speculating media.

There are a couple of interesting twists to this. Firstly, the original description of events had it that Bouchard was alone in the locker room when the incident occurred – or, at the very least, that all the staff that might normally be in the locker room had departed given the late hour. There is no mention of this in the documents. There also was no mention of the original contention that the room in which the incident occurred was pitch-black. As well, the suit incorrectly states that Bouchard returned to the locker room after her first-round mixed doubles victory. As far as we know, the incident occurred *after* Bouchard fulfilled her media obligations, around 11 p.m. Given she

appeared to have taken a shower before coming into the press-conference room (or at least, one would hope), this appeared to be her second trip into the women's locker room late that night. (Eugenie Bouchard files suit against the US Tennis Association ... incident at the US Open. Yahoo! Sports. 2015, October 14)

The role of the media was significant in how the public may have viewed and discussed Bouchard's concussion. The simple act of walking through the locker room after her match resulted in an injury causing Bouchard to be out of her sport for months, losing sponsors, and money. Instead of expressing compassion regarding the incident, and discussing its life-altering affect for both the athlete and a Canadian potential contender, some media sources portrayed Bouchard's injury it as an "apparent" injury and the room where she slipped as "not dark enough" to warrant the injury to occur. This skeptical perspective was also demonstrated in 'USTA responds to Eugenie Bouchard lawsuit over locker room fall' where the USTA's response to Bouchard's concussion lawsuit are the focus.

In the response, the USTA also claimed that the physiotherapy room "is never dark; even when the lights are turned off 'twilight' lighting remains and partially illuminates the room" and that the conditions alleged by Bouchard were "open and obvious." The USTA also mentioned Bouchard's social media presence, stating that her claims of "on-going and permanent physical injuries and sequelae to date" are inconsistent with her "own admissions in various forms of social media and public commentary." Before withdrawing from the tournament, Bouchard was slated to play Roberta Vinci in the fourth round of the women's draw. Vinci automatically advanced to the quarterfinals and ultimately made the tournament's final after a stunning upset of No. 1 Serena Williams. Bouchard, 21, is currently ranked No. 48 in the world. (USTA responds to Eugenie

Bouchard lawsuit over locker room fall, 2015, November 16)

Bouchard's injury and recovery were plagued with media speculation on how the injury happened, and why. Depending on the media outlet, the accident has been described in full range, from a more supportive perspective that it was painful, emotional, and career ending, to a more negative implication with comments such as 'apparent', 'no one saw it happen', or 'she was on Instagram and seemed fine'. For public consumption, the portrayal of her injury was only viewed through a lens chosen by the media (McGannon et al., 2013), which was often skeptical as Bouchard had not made a public statement, which led the media to create their portrayal of the incident and her recovery. This type of media representation is often not the case when the accident or injury occurs in regular practice or during sport, hence making the aspect that it was an anomaly, more prevalent. Further, Bouchard only made a few personal statements in her defence within the press, leaving the media to form their judgements and/or speculate based on information given from the UTSA. Part of this may have been due to the lawsuit that eventually became ongoing.

The portrayal of Bouchard's injury by the media ranged from a senseless accident, to alluding to a potentially 'intentional' injury to lessen her performance decline in the months building up to her competitive season. In '2015 Season Review: Canada's Disappointing Year', Bouchard's concussion story is dissected by a member of the media, commenting on her future performances and confidence in the sport.

But at the US Open, she started working with Jimmy Connors and finally seemed to be finding her form. She won consecutive matches for the first time since March, reaching the fourth round. And she was playing really good tennis. Just when it seemed like Bouchard had finally gotten her mojo back, it was all taken away. After her mixed

doubles match, she slipped and fell in the changeroom and sustained a concussion, which effectively ended her season (she played half a match in Beijing from which she retired) and has put her 2016 at risk. Poor Bouchard. She had finally found her confidence again, only for a wet floor to ruin everything. It left the tennis world, and particularly Canadians, in disbelief. Concussion aside, Bouchard's season was a total disaster. She appeared to collapse under the pressure. It was just tragic that when she finally seemed to have sorted out her issues, a fluke fall would undo all her hard work. With her 2016 season in jeopardy, who knows when she will get back to the level that she is capable of, that she was so close to in New York.” (2015 Season Review: Canada's Disappointing Year. Vavel.com. 2015, November 27)

This article supported the idea that Bouchard seemed to be on track towards reclaiming her previous ability and confidence, only to have a 'fluke fall', reinforcing the idea that the injury was an anomaly, outside of the sport. Support from the literature occurs in McGannon et al. (2013) discussing elite level hockey player, Sidney Crosby. Like Bouchard, Crosby's concussion was interpreted by the media, and both were unable to control the speculation. In the case of Crosby, his concussion was substance for a political platform, and used as grounds for policy and rule changes.

In Bouchard's case, an accident outside of the typical constraints of her sport caused a potentially life-altering concussion, and similar to Crosby, the impacts of the concussion were downplayed and/or positioned as something that does not regularly occur in tennis. Although there was evidence of this kind of so-called anomaly happening to other elite level tennis players, Bouchard's was portrayed with skepticism and negativity by some media sources. The impact of the media in formulating public opinion regarding an accident that caused a performance decline

beyond tennis, was, on the whole, negative. A few articles demonstrated compassion, yet most scrutinized and inspected every detail of the accident, with little regard to the well-being of the athlete. Further, as Bouchard was receiving treatment, little of the reporting was actually verified or confirmed by the injured party. An anomalous action, the simple act of walking through a locker room, had the potential to irrevocably change a promising future for this young athlete.

### **Sub-theme two: Concussions as debilitating nebulous and ambiguous**

This subtheme did not feed directly into Bouchard's poor performance being portrayed by the news media as credited to impacts unrelated to tennis, as she was spending her time in recovery during this period. However, the media continued to report on Bouchard's decline, portraying her recovery period as clouded by speculation and conjecture as to how she 'should be behaving' during her recuperation. As traumatic brain injuries are individualized, the treatment and recovery process for one person can be quite different from the next. This causes ambiguity around a potentially debilitating injury, and in the eyes of the media the perspective of empathic supporter and blame assigning critic can shift easily. The audience did not know how deeply the concussion may have impacted Bouchard's health, performance, and career, as she did not make overt statements to the media. With the rise of social media channels by elite athletes, the media has further material on which to speculate.

Fan engagement and support can be positive for many athletes when injured (Pegoraro, 2010). Social media has had an immense effect on the sporting world, with athletes sharing personal parts of themselves, showing their life outside sport, as well as using it for advertising. This exposure has brought the elite level athletes closer to their fans, allowing the spectators to feel a part of their lives, breaking through the barriers presented when watched on screen, or at a live event (Pegoraro, 2010). Specific for Eugenie Bouchard, she called her fans her

'#geniearmy', giving them a sense of belonging to someone who for some, was an idol. Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016) studied Olympic level athletes, and how they presented themselves on their personal accounts. They found the use of social media as a platform to connect with fans has increased rapidly, especially with elite level athletes. Specific to Instagram, since its inception in 2010, there are 55 million photos posted and shared daily. This affords athletes the opportunity to connect with their fans quickly and easily, and perhaps more importantly, share a personal perspective outside typical media coverage. Geurin-Eagleman and Burch's (2016) work demonstrated that the audience members or followers were most engaged when viewing pictures of the athlete competing in their sport, as well as images of the specific sport. As to media preference, athletes seemed to prefer Instagram, as it gives them control of what is posted as their image (Geruin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016).

During Bouchard's recovery from concussion, her Instagram account (@geniebouchard) was not flooded with images discussing the injury. While the focus of this thesis was not on social media and Bouchard's self-representation, the only image she shared post-concussion was of a dark room, captioned "Glad I don't have to sit in this anymore #concussionnofun #onestepatatime" on September 21 2015. Bouchard's image of the dark room had millions of likes, with thousands of supportive 'get well' comments to cheer her. Although her Instagram post was not included in the news stories, it is important as she did not make many statements directly to the media. Instead, she would post more often on her personal social media account to keep her fans apprised of her injury. This type of one-on-one connection makes the fans feel as if their sport heroes are significantly closer, a part of their lives (Pegoraro, 2010). Bouchard rarely made posts regarding her incident on her personal accounts, which again may have had something at least in part, to do with the impending and/or eventual lawsuit that would she

would pursue. Instead, she focused on her life outside of her sport, with images of her personal daily life and modelling. Eventually when she was able to return to play, she posted pictures of herself practicing. Unfortunately for Bouchard, posting to these social media platforms gave an additional route for criticism during her recovery, especially due to the ambiguity surrounding how recovery from a concussion 'should' look. In 'Eugenie Bouchard Does It Again: Posts Another Sexy Bikini Pic', the media negatively discussed her use of Instagram to post a picture of herself, and promoted the impression that during her recovery period, she should not be enjoying herself using a sexy (or sexist) image:

After a lackluster 2015 and a horrendous end to the season with a concussion suffered at the US Open, Canada's rising star, Eugenie Bouchard seems to be enjoying her off season. Earlier, the Canadian had posted a picture of herself in a bikini – on Instagram which went viral. However, the 21 year old is at it again as she posts a second picture some time later. There had been reports a few days of the Canadian being stalked but nothing serious seems to have occurred at the moment. (Eugenie Bouchard Doe It Again: Posts Another Sexy Bikini Pic. Tennis World. 2015, December 8)

Fink, Kane, and LaVoi (2014) studied women athlete endorsements at the elite level and found historically, women athletes are judged based on their appearance. This was the case in a media campaign where women golfers wore bikinis and ballgowns to show that although they were athletes, they were also feminine (Fink et al., 2014). As a woman, instead of focusing on Bouchard's recovery, the media consistently highlighted her appearance, and in the above article, contrasted it to her 'horrendous' season. In Lynn et al. (2004), women were studied via their advertising and modelling projects throughout their sports careers. Their work gave credence to the claim that general interest media (i.e., live broadcast sport of women) was not garnering

much attention; the exact opposite occurred when those same athletes modelled for the sports apparel industry. It is well known that creating a partnership with a brand, product, or company is the most common way an athlete can receive funding. For Bouchard's recovery, the media consistently discussed her modelling career, alongside her declining rankings in tennis. This is demonstrated in 'Eugenie Bouchard escapes for some winter sun ahead of launching 2016 comeback.'

Tennis star Eugenie Bouchard appears to be leaving her frustrating 2015 campaign behind by hitting the beach in a break from pre-season training. The Canadian has posted a series of pictures from her travels in the off-season in a series of exotic locations and has even found time to hang out with actor Dwayne Johnson on the set of American show *Ballers*. However, the 21-year-old will need to hit the practice courts hard to rise back up the rankings in 2016 having slumped to world No 49. Bouchard posted a picture alongside a friend in matching bikinis with the caption: '#twinning (sorry for 2 bikini pics in a row).' The 2014 Wimbledon finalist had also posted on Instagram 'running from the storm' with a shot of her on the beach. Currently without a coach, Bouchard endured a torrid 2015 season. Previously fifth in the world rankings, Bouchard struggled with first-round exits at the French Open and Wimbledon. (Eugenie Bouchard escapes winter ... launching 2016 comeback. Mail online. 2015, December 8)

At three months post-concussion, the media again put Bouchard's career on the backburner by discussing her 'torrid' 2015 season, and used the fact that she does not have a coach to imply she must not be practicing. The reference in the above article was of two pictures of Bouchard, one with a friend, both dressed in bathing suits while on a beach holiday. Recovery from a concussion is individualized process, resting both mentally and physically is the proscribed method for

recovery, thus there is no way to evaluate how someone should behave while they go through this process. The article above clearly implies the view that if Bouchard was able to run on the beach, then she must be recovered, and she should be ‘hit[ting] the practice courts.’

After eight million likes, and over 200 comments, Bouchard’s next few Instagram posts showed her working on her modelling career, with photos from Flare magazine. In ‘US Open: Tennis star can’t be too hurt if her Instagram looks like this’, the media speculated about Bouchard’s impairment in relation to her posts on her personal Instagram account.

“US Open authorities have addressed a lawsuit by tennis star Eugenie Bouchard over her slip-and-fall concussion in the tennis tournament’s locker room with an unflinching return. And part of their latest volley cuts right to the 21-year-old’s social media presence: you’re not that hurt, we see you posting on Instagram. Bouchard sued the United States Tennis Association and the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center last month in United States District Court seeking damages for the effects of her Sept. 4 fall —caused, she stated, by “a slippery, foreign and dangerous substance on the floor” — that forced her to withdraw from the US Open and multiple subsequent tournaments this fall. In a 16-page rebuttal filed Friday in the New York court, as outlined by the New York Times, the USTA ripped off the following returns: The room where she fell was partly lit, so the risks of a slip “were open and obvious.” She was violating protocol by being in the physiotherapy room in the first place, without “authorized personnel.” Bouchard refused medical attention on the night of her fall. Bouchard’s claims of lost earnings stemming from the injury are “entirely speculative and uncertain.” Bouchard’s recent social media activity undermines her claims of continuing impairment. Recent Instagram posts for the young blonde show her celebrating Halloween with friends,

attending sporting events, making a handful of promotional appearances and getting her driver's license." ('US Open: Tennis star can't be too hurt if her Instagram looks like this. New York Post. 2015, November 17)

As there is no specific timeline, or protocol when convalescing from a concussion (McCrory et al. 2013) the media takes the opportunity to portray Bouchard as "You're not that hurt, we see you posting on Instagram". The ambiguity of concussion recovery is such that elite athletes will recover based on their medical treatment plan, input from both the coach and athlete, as well as sports psychology professionals. Her behaviour is being monitored by experts, yet the media claims to better understand her recovery process, and drive public opinion to question why she has not been practicing. As a matter of fact, she is recuperating with friends, getting her driver's licence – all common activities of a person of her age. For female athletes like Bouchard these portrayals may further mean that their injury/concussion is trivialized, not to be believed and/or that she may be better spent in more passive pursuits (e.g., lifestyle, modeling), as shown in previous work that has problematized portrayals of female athletes in general (Bruce, 2016).

Bouchard's career responsibilities did not end on the court, as her endorsement career required her to engage with fans throughout her recovery. Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016) described the work-life balance necessary for an athlete to maintain their brand on social media. Between athletics, appearance, and marketability, all three must work together to engage the audience with the image. Bouchard had a contract with Sports Illustrated (as seen on her personal profile @geniebouchard), which throughout her recovery, had a number of likes and comments. However, as demonstrated in the following article, the media used a USTA quote to contrast her claims of impairment against her posts on social sites.

The USTA also mentioned Bouchard's social media presence, stating that her claims of

"on-going and permanent physical injuries and sequelae to date" are inconsistent with her "own admissions in various forms of social media and public commentary." (USTA responds to Eugenie Bouchard lawsuit over locker room fall. Sports Illustrated.2015, November 16)

After September 2015, due to her concussion, Bouchard was required to withdraw from tournaments to undergo the recovery process, which also slowed her modelling career. As an athlete, relationships with brands and companies is an important underpinning to create a venue for fans to participate. Bouchard's injury was an anomaly in that it occurred in a locker room after practice, yet it resulted in a loss of income and financial backing. Her recovery could be described as ambiguous, as neither she, nor her agent made any formal statements regarding her injury, as her dispute raged with the USTA. This gave way for the media to create their own version, or to elaborate on the limited details they had. The media took sides in the debate, some with suspicion, referring to Bouchard as 'not looking injured' or 'faking'. As discussed previously, concussions are known as a silent injury because they are not as obvious, but the effects can be long-term, and for Bouchard, put her career on hold for a number of months due to recovery.

To summarize, the perspective of a media article is heavily influenced by the lens and views of its author. Additionally, the lawsuit (that continued for months after the injury), presented a conflict between an athlete and her organization. Further, Bouchard's recovery time represented a loss of income from being unable to compete and endorse her brand, as well as a loss of practice time her ability to maintain her game. The question of who takes responsibility for the injury was contentious, and was present throughout her recovery time. In November of 2015, the case disclosed that Bouchard should not have been in the locker room after hours. With

a pending lawsuit, neither Bouchard nor her agents, formulated a rebuttal, thereby leaving her audience to determine their own opinions, and perhaps leave her fan base. With an only source for information the USTA, media authors had a great deal of time and leeway to speculate about the injury, its occurrence, and its aftermath, impressing their audience with their limited knowledge.

In the article ‘Eugenie Bouchard, teary-eyed retires from 1<sup>st</sup> match since concussion’, an attempt by Bouchard to return to play is discussed.

According to New York Times tennis writer Ben Rothenberg, Bouchard complained of dizziness. In a difficult year during which she at one point lost six matches in a row, Bouchard was playing some of her best tennis of the year when she slipped in the locker room at the U.S. Open last month. She was diagnosed with a concussion and forced to withdraw ahead of her fourth-round singles match and the doubles competitions she was entered in. She also pulled out of the Tokyo Open as the tour moved to Asia. Bouchard came into Monday's match ranked 38th in the world. Almost exactly one year ago, she reached a career high fifth in a season that included an appearance in the final of Wimbledon, plus semifinal showings at the Australian Open and French Open.” (Eugenie Bouchard, teary-eyed, retires from 1<sup>st</sup> match since concussion. CBC Sports. 2015, October 5)

As this was a first attempt to bring her game back to competitive level, it was interesting that the article did not focus on any of Bouchard’s strengths like resolve or determination to retake her crown, instead only on her historical performance. Bouchard was still suffering, as she complained of dizziness, yet through the media’s portrayals of her, the health of the athlete was not the priority, and there was a gendered layer which may have come into play in which the

impact of the injury incurred was downplayed and trivialized. In terms of return to play issues, this example may further show the pressures that athletes may navigate with respect to concussions and athletic careers (McGannon et al., 2013).

In summary, concussion as debilitating nebulous and ambiguous was exemplified by Bouchard's recovery process; her career was put on hold by an anomaly that occurred unrelated to the technicalities of tennis. As recovery from a brain injury is ambiguous, each athlete recovers in their own individualized way, with no right or wrong approach to the required rest and relaxation. For this finding, the media represents a debilitating nebula, as based on the amount of speculation and conjecture that the news stories presented, they tried to shape public opinion, with advice that Bouchard stop wasting her time and get back to practice. The current use of social media by elite athletes to personally connect with their fan base also comes under media scrutiny, as modelling or taking a beach holiday becomes fodder for further disclaim and decree. Thus, this finding that the use of social media for the best of intentions by athletes, can be misconstrued and maligned, makes personalization of competitors a further debilitating nebula. The fact that the mainstream news media can use it to work against an athlete, as in Bouchard's case where they noted that she should not be posing in a bikini if she is ill, implies the ambiguity of her concussion. Finally, during Bouchard's recovery, the ambiguous question of the lawsuit and the ensuing debilitating nebula surrounding the shadowing media hype, bring to the forefront the debatable question of who was responsible for the accident. Downplaying the severity of the concussion and portraying it as ambiguous may have further contributed toward rendering Bouchard's injury as questionable and/or less severe, and that female athletes may be 'faking' an injury or be exaggerating the impact and symptoms of the injury. Regardless of the conflicting discussion, media source, or outcome of the legal obligations, this debilitating

nebulous and ambiguous theme illustrates the overarching narrative of ‘performance beyond tennis’ and had little to do with the technicalities of tennis as a sport and fully blaming Bouchard. When interpreted within the context of her performance prior to the concussion, this meant that the trajectory of her declining career was negatively foreshadowed by the media.

**Sub-theme three: A promising career, derailed, and cut short**

Canadian tennis player Eugenie Bouchard was on the top of her tennis game in the years prior to the injury which incurred in September 2015. Bouchard was ranked in the top 50 in 2012, which some may call the ‘peak’ of her career. As the first Canadian to ever reach the Grand Slam final, Bouchard had made a name for herself not only on the court, but off as well. As a sponsored athlete and model, she was highly successful. All of this changed in the year prior to her concussion, as due to abdominal issues and a difficult recovery, her rankings started to fall. In time, she was able to return for the US Open in 2015, where she was playing exceedingly well. Unfortunately, while walking through a locker room late in the evening (after a press conference), she slipped, fell, and hit her head. This specific incident derailed both Bouchard’s athletic career by preventing her from participating in tournaments, and her modelling and sponsorship career, since her engagements were based on her tennis reputation, a lasting financial impact.

The media continued to play a role in the conjecture as to whether Bouchard would be able to move past her concussion and have a successful career. This is shown and portrayed in ‘Eugenie Bouchard to play in Hobart International’.

‘Eugenie Bouchard is to play in next year's Hobart International in Tasmania, which will form part of her build-up towards the season's first Grand Slam of 2016 in Melbourne.

The Canadian has experienced a dreadful 2015 which has seen her ranking

plummet, having failed to reach the quarter-finals of any WTA Tour event since January. After reaching No 7 in the world during 2014, the 21-year-old has slipped to 48 and she will be hoping to resurrect her career in the new year. The low point arrived at the US Open in September when she was forced to withdraw at Flushing Meadows after suffering concussion when she fell in the locker room. She later filed a lawsuit against the United States Tennis Association claiming negligence following the incident. Since then, she has contested just a single match during which she was forced to withdraw against Andrea Petkovic in Beijing because of dizziness. Bouchard, the Wimbledon runner-up last year, said in a statement: "I want to start my 2016 season strongly and am hoping to get high quality matches in Hobart. "The tournament is played on the same surface as the Australian Open and will help me prepare for Melbourne. "I've had great success in Australia in the past and can't wait to experience a new city." The tournament starts on January 10. However, before she arrives in Australia, she is expected to contest the Shenzhen Open in China which begins on January 3.' (Eugenie Bouchard to play in Hobart International. SkySports. 2015, December 2)

Within the above story we see the media using phraseology such as ‘declining’, or “dismal” related to her performance. This relates to the theme of a promising career cut short in her inability to return-to-play or complete a match leaves little hope for her fans to see her return to full potential.

After the accident, the media continued to speculate on Bouchard’s concussion, and depending on the article, the perspective of the message incident changed. Some sources defended Bouchard’s title hoping that she would return to her career glory, discussing the severity of the injury and her recovery, while other’s lead the reader to believe that the injury

was not severe nor career-altering. Much can be learned from media sources which hardly mention the importance of her return to career after an ‘apparent concussion’, as concussions are not visible injuries, the media and fans are unable to understand the severity of the impact of injury. Unlike in the findings of McGannon et al., (2013), Bouchard was not held to the same treatment by the media that another high-profile athlete (i.e. Sidney Crosby) was after a concussion. Crosby’s concussion occurred during play with the world as its witness, whereas Bouchard’s took place outside of sport, after practice, alone. Due to the occurrence of her concussion, Bouchard was subjected to media scrutiny of the validity of the injury. When attempting a comeback, due to her limited public statements, the media created its own story with regard to her ability to return to prior glory. These points are further illustrated in “Eugenie Bouchard plans to play tourney ahead of Australian Open”, which hardly mentions her return to career.

Eugenie Bouchard is ready to put the wreckage of 2015 behind her, starting with a January tournament in Australia. Bouchard has recovered from an apparent concussion from a fall during the U.S. Open, although she continues to pursue legal action against tournament officials. Bouchard, 21, will play her first 2016 competition in the Hobart International, a preparatory tournament for the Australian Open. She also is a confirmed participant for the year's first major tennis tourney. "I want to start my 2016 season strongly and am hoping to get high-quality matches in Hobart," she said in a statement. "The tournament is played on the same surface as the Australian Open and will help me prepare for Melbourne." The Open begins Jan. 18. Bouchard became an international tennis star, a rarity for a woman from Canada, in 2014. She reached the semifinals at Melbourne and at the French Open and the finals at Wimbledon. In the

process, she became a marketable player with star qualities. However, she couldn't duplicate that success last year. She appeared to be playing well at the U.S. Open but was injured in a locker-room fall. She tried to play in China but was forced to quit that October competition because of effects from her concussion. From a world ranking of No. 7 in 2014, Bouchard has fallen to No. 49. (Eugenie Bouchard plans to play tourney ahead of Australian Open. Sporting News. 2015, December 3).

It can be noted that the media paints a picture of this Canadian star tennis player, (a rarity) in a downward spiral who was 'once marketable' but now no longer viable due to lack of 'results' who was hoping to return to her career in a promising way. The severity of Bouchard's injury, the psychology behind the intensity of her recovery, the preparation required to build her skill back to competitive level, all components of a return to play strategy, were not mentioned. Return to play is a complex issue, and varies depending on the athlete. The athlete is unable to return to their full competitive and practice schedule, and typically needs a modified approach during their recuperation. These modifications can be difficult stressful, and emotionally difficult as the athlete wants to re-establish themselves, and their ranking priority (Tjong et al., 2014) This is problematic because the athlete needs to focus on themselves and their healing, without attempting play before fully recovered. Additionally, the media can create an expectation for the athletes return which they may not be able to live up to.

Leading into 2016, Bouchard appeared to be heading in a positive direction with regards to her finding a new coach. This links with the theme of a promising career, derailed and cut short, and is important because the level of play that she had previously achieved was impacted, and continued to be an issue throughout her recovery. Additionally, with the continuation of her inability to find a new coach, the instability of that support system can be a major detriment to her

career future. In 'Exclusive: As she prepares for a comeback in 2016, Eugenie Bouchard looks in good form in Florida', Bouchard's career was discussed as potentially on the 'up-swing'.

She was striking the ball cleanly, powerfully. Her serve motion seemed simplified; it often looked that way during practice sessions in 2015 before getting hitchy and a little complicated during crunch time in matches, though, so it's too soon to determine whether those issues have been straightened out. She certainly was looking for opportunities to take the net and finish off points, a tactic she lost sight of for much of 2014 and 2015. In 2014, she didn't need it; everything was going her way. In 2015, she had all kinds of trouble getting into positions during rallies where she could even create those opportunities, so it was a moot point. Despite the potential ongoing effects of the concussion, suffered during a fall in the women's locker room at the US Open and currently the subject of litigation with the U.S. Tennis Association that could loom as a shadow over her entire 2016 season, Bouchard is already way ahead of where she was a year ago – at least from a tennis perspective. Bouchard has settled on the experienced Thomas Hogstedt as her coach going forward, and has been able to spend the entire off-season with him planning her return in 2016. At this time last year, having stumbled to the end of the season after the high point at Wimbledon, where she reached the final, Bouchard was without a coach. (Exclusive: As she prepared for a comeback in 2016, Eugenie Bouchard looks in good form in Florida. Yahoo! Sports. 2015, December 23).

In the interest of fair reporting, it is important to note that not all articles were negative. This article expressed Bouchard's come-back in a mostly positive light. In particular, the reference to her form and play are heartening, as this discussion represents a media conversation

focussing on some of her athletic technicalities. This is important because an analysis of the media reporting post-concussion was not entirely negative (which was a rare instance in this data collection). In Bloom et al., (2004) he discussed the psychosocial issues seen often with concussions, such as anger. If read by the athlete, media reports using negative stereotyping could generate self-doubt. Without a strong mindset, athlete's can be thrown off their game which can impact their sport performance. Media articles that show the athlete's in a positive light may help them recover quicker, and enhance their performance, as the public is with them, creating a positive support (Bele et al., 2015). It described her concussion as a fact, and related the information of her current lawsuit, to add credence. Like many other news events, it details the concern of her multiple coaching attempts, however, it is tempered by the knowledge that this new coach, Thomas Hogstedt, has a fine reputation, and may be the exact person to bring Bouchard back to her former glory.

With the relentless pressure for an athlete to return to their 'old self', those returning to their career after recovering from a concussion may experience emotional trauma and anger (Bloom et al., 2004; Caron et al., 2013). From a sport psychology standpoint, Bouchard's inability to overcome her injury may impact her mental toughness once back on the tennis court. In Gucciardi et al. (2009), the ability to maintain one's technique under emotional or physical pain requires training and specific mental toughness, especially in competition. The article, 'Eugenie Bouchard not-so-grand slam', highlights an instance when an athlete's anger, often felt after a concussion, was seen in the public eye.

“Canada's Eugenie Bouchard may now find herself sharing a highlight reel with most of the greats of her sport – for something none of them are ever proud of. After a frustrating second set in which she lost every service game in the semifinals of the Hobart

International tennis tournament Friday, Bouchard walked off the court. And as she did, she let her racquet have it. Most tennis fans can tell you their favourite moments of pros smashing their equipment. For those who can't remember, there are highlight reels online with just about every star you can imagine: McEnroe (obviously), Djokovic, Federer, and Roddick among them. Serena Williams has absolutely murdered racquets. Looking back on these incidents, very few players are proud of being a raging suck. Bouchard certainly wasn't. (Eugenie Bouchard's not-so-grand slam. The Globe and Mail. 2016, January 15)

Emotional disturbances can occur after a concussion, in particular for an athlete who is trying to return to their career, and regain their past competition level (Bloom et al., 2004). Mainwaring et al. (2012) discussed the emotional consequences common after sustaining a concussion, and recommended seeking professional advice for dealing with these feelings. Often the athlete may not want to take this route, as occasionally, return-to-play protocols may be lengthened, delaying the time when they can return to their career (Mainwaring et al., 2012). Attempting competition too early, without full recovery, can be dangerous for athletes. In Bouchard's case, she may have attempted to return to sport too quickly, an error which could have potentially cut her career short. This is important for athlete well-being because it is imperative that the athlete is fully recovered for a safe return to sport, and to limit the risk of second impact syndrome (Weiland and Schmude, 2014). Specifically, to female athletes, the research demonstrated that they are more likely to have difficulties post-concussion with cognitive tasks, and experience a greater severity of symptoms (Benedict et al., 2015; Brooks et al., 2014). This means that the recovery time, and the proper return to play guidelines need to be followed. An example of these points is shown in the story 'Eugenie Bouchard knows she has a

long way to go', Bouchard comments on her recovery and potential to play in tournaments.

"I wasn't sure if I'd be ready, tennis-wise. Maybe symptom-wise I'd be ready, but not tennis-wise," she added. "I worked hard to get back into it, and I feel great now."

The 21-year-old from Montreal won more matches than any other player during the two weeks of tournaments leading up to the first Grand Slam event of the season.

That's not a mind-blowing result in itself; the ranks of the WTA Tour have been decimated by injuries and withdrawals as the stars want to dispense with the preliminaries and get to the main event ... "I definitely have moments where I feel like I remember what it's like to play matches and to fight and to play my aggressive game," Bouchard said. "And there have definitely been moments when I have felt uncomfortable and weird — almost like, 'I forget how to do this.' "It's almost like I've been relearning what I used to know and what I used to do well," she added. "It's this weird process I've never experienced before. But there have been some positive signs, especially in Hobart, and (I) just want to keep building" "I don't know if I feel like the old Genie yet. It's a work in progress. I definitely feel better day after day," she added. "The past two weeks, match after match, I've been feeling better. But I still know I have a long way to go. I feel like my level is still too up and down, a bit too inconsistent." (Eugenie Bouchard knows she has a long way to go. The Star. 2016, January 17)

The above article was the first time the reader received a direct quote from Bouchard regarding her competitive career and her return to play status. As Bouchard stated above, she knew her play was inconsistent, and with a long way to go, did not have a clear career direction. This is important because it may have impacted Bouchard's confidence as she did not have a clear sight of where, and when she would be able to move forward, and feel like the "old Genie"

again. Additionally, this article illustrates some of Bouchard's openness in speaking out about her concussion, recognizing she will have to relearn some of the techniques and abilities that were part of her muscle memory in the past. The media often fails to recognize the hard-fought battle an athlete faces when trying to return to their career after concussion. With her sights set on recovery, Bouchard's career had a glimmer of potential, until she withdrew from The Fed Cup. Her rationale was to improve her game, as she had missed so much practice time during recovery, but like the article above, her confidence was often called into question. As supported by the literature, self-confidence is the most required psychological aspect of competition (Martin et al., 2014; Gucciardi et al., 2009).

Related to gender specific issues of return to play following concussion, the literature confirms that women are at a higher risk of experiencing more concussion symptoms, with a longer lasting duration, than males (Brooks et al., 2014). After her successful start in 2016, it may have been that Bouchard needed to remove herself from competition again quickly, perhaps due to recurring symptoms. The following example from Sportsnet shows the points of her original return to play plan, which was derailed due to the recovery time of the concussion. She was unable to enter the tournament she was hoping to due to the longer off-season.

The Canadian team won't have its top player in the lineup for next week's Fed Cup World Group II first-round tie against Belarus. Eugenie Bouchard will not be available as she has decided to work on improving her game after missing the last few months of the 2015 season due to a concussion. "I am disappointed to not play Fed Cup next week in Quebec City," Bouchard said Wednesday on Twitter. "Because of my shortened off-season due to my injury, I am still working on getting back into top form and preparing for the rest of the year and to represent my country in the Olympics this summer. "I

always look forward to playing in front of my Canadian fans and wish my teammates the best of luck." Bouchard, who reached the Wimbledon final in 2014 and reached a career-high No. 5 in the world rankings later that year, suffered a head injury last September after falling in the locker-room at the U.S. Open. That ended a miserable season for the 21-year-old from Westmount, Que., who made several first-round exits last year and plummeted to No. 48 in the rankings. "Of course it's a bit of a disappointment but I totally, totally understand her situation and I have no problem with that," Canadian Fed Cup captain Sylvain Bruneau said on a conference call. (Eugenie Bouchard reveals why she's missing Fed Cup. Sportsnet.2016, January 27)

Within a month of returning to competition, after winning a few tournaments, Bouchard did not join the Fed Cup team, and decided to practice instead. One could question her rationale for attempting to return to her career only four months post-concussion. Was Bouchard still experiencing symptoms? Did she attempt to return to sport too soon after her injury? Should she have spent more time training at a slower pace? These questions support the overarching narrative of performance decline beyond tennis, as unfortunately, Bouchard was unable to continue playing at the competitive level. With her career again put on hold, her performance could not be improved, thus her ranking remained the same. Further, this led the media to another round of speculation as to whether or not Bouchard will continue to sporadically withdraw from tournaments, or if indeed, whether she will be able to return to sport at all. These points are important for athlete health and well-being because she needs to be able to play a full match without feeling symptomatic, and confident in her ability to perform, or make some drastic decisions regarding her future intentions in the sport, which are all challenging questions for a long athlete.

The additional stress of battling a lawsuit through October, 2015 to January, 2016 (which continued into February, 2018), may have led to Bouchard's slower recovery, and her withdrawal from tennis matches. Although confirmed in a New York Times article from February 2018, and beyond the scope of this research, this final media representation in The New York Times, 02/23/18, "Eugenie Bouchard and the U.S.T.A. Reach Settlement", provides a fitting conclusion to this subtheme of Bouchard's career derailment.

Eugenie Bouchard and the United States Tennis Association reached a resolution on Friday, ending Bouchard's lawsuit over the head injury she sustained from a fall at the 2015 United States Open. The terms of the settlement are sealed and confidential. "It's been a long time, but it's something I wanted to do," Bouchard said of the lawsuit. "It's been two and a half years, so I'm happy it's over.'" (Eugenie Bouchard and the U.S.T.A. Reach Settlement. The New York Times. 2018. February, 23)

The sub-theme of a 'promising career, derailed, cut short' was examined by reviewing news stories to find instances of influences that had little to do with Bouchard's technical abilities, and more to do with her performance decline unrelated to tennis. Overall, it can be said that the media representations presented here gave a slightly more detailed description and focus on Bouchard's technical abilities, in particular discussing her form, her serve, and how she was starting to be able to finish off points. This is to be expected, as with her attempt to return to career, the media would be dissecting every aspect of her play, to determine if she would be able to return to her previous level of ability. This is important because attempting to return to her athletic status and rankings prior to the concussion occurring complies with the expectation of her fans, with the hope that she is able to continue her career in tennis. Through Bouchard's personal media, and occasionally throughout the news media, she often thanked her fans for

support during her healing processes, which may have helped during her recovery (Pegoraro, 2010). With her return to play, and her off-season practice with her new coach, the media expressed some positive attitude toward Bouchard's new found confidence. It is important that she was quoted as indicating that due to the concussion, sometimes she was able to attain her competitive zone, while other times, she felt she had forgotten and needed to re-learn how to play. Of note, with these more recent articles, the concussion discussion shifted from 'apparent' to an understanding of its potential impact of this professional's career. Finally, we are left to question, did Bouchard return to her career too soon, as she was required to withdraw from the competitive circuit.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS

A culture of risk surrounds sporting activities, and athletes are prepared to accept potential hazards and injury (McGannon et al, 2013; Safai, 2003; Young & White, 1995; Young, 2019). However, the literature has demonstrated that concussion and traumatic brain injuries are on the rise (Cusimano et al., 2013), which is why the present study is important to understanding the socio-cultural differences men and women athletes experience prior to, and post-concussion. As concussion symptoms are diverse (Collins et al., 2013), the physical symptoms manifest on no set timeline and are specific to the individual, require a customised treatment procedure, and present no single symptom to indicate when the athlete is ready to return to play (Cusimano et al., 2013). Symptoms can be described as pain, fatigue, nausea, balance issues, as well as light and sound sensitivities (Bloom et al., 2004; Mainwaring et al., 2012). Emotional responses can vary from loneliness and isolation, to anxiety and depression, as well as denial, guilt, stress, confusion, and anger (Bloom et al., 2004; Caron et al., 2013; Mainwaring et al., 2012).

The purpose of the research was to explore and extend the understanding of the media's portrayal of Eugenie Bouchard's performance decline, and the skepticism surrounding her concussion injury, as it occurred in a locker room (outside of the sport). This was undertaken to evaluate these factors in relation to the media's portrayal and the associated understanding of women and sport concussion. Using an ethnographic content analysis of news articles written between July 2015 to January 2016, garnered from the Internet, provided the data for this project. Media as a data source was effective as it is the lens through which the general public is informed. An overarching narrative of 'performance decline beyond tennis' was used to guide the researcher.

To answer the first research question -- How is the concussion of a high-profile professional athlete (i.e., Eugenie Bouchard) developed and/or contested within sport media (i.e., daily news) narratives? -- three distinct subthemes were developed based on the data analysis of articles focussed prior to the concussion. The three subthemes were 1) being at a cross-roads/lacking clear direction, 2) inability to overcome injury, and 3) coaching influences.

Bouchard's stellar performance of her youth halted when due to an abdominal injury, she had to withdraw from several tournaments. In September of 2015 she then sustained a concussion, which added more recovery time and continued to keep her off the court. In the media, Bouchard was positioned as not having a clear direction and being distracted by outside influences (i.e. career off the court, modelling). This continuous negative perspective on her life outside of tennis led the audience to question her longevity within and dedication to her career.

Bouchard's inability to overcome injury was seen in a number of reports prior to her concussion. Withdrawing from several tournaments, constantly battling injury, and being unable to return after attempted recovery was consistently shown throughout the media. This is linked to the overarching narrative of performance decline beyond tennis as she was unable to play, which caused a constant downward spiral of her rankings. The negative attention Bouchard experienced from the media focused on her declining performance, along with the skepticism of her modelling career is a consistent display of how she was contested in the media.

Bouchard struggled with replacing her coach for a number of months leading into tournaments. Although she was able to seek direction from other elite level players and mentors, training and recovering without a coach and supporting team can be a negative experience for an athlete. The media made a number of comments as to why Bouchard fired her coach from the beginning, however, they often circled around her negativity, and attitude on the court. This led

the audience to believe that Bouchard was un-coachable, and did not take her sport seriously. Overall, her career at a cross-road, her inability to overcome injury, and coaching influences are all linked to the overarching theme of performance decline beyond tennis, and answers the first research question.

To answer the second question --What specific meanings emerge within sport media narratives concerning Eugenie Bouchard's performance decline prior to and/or after the concussion incident?) -- three distinct subthemes were developed based on the data analysis of articles post concussion. The three subthemes were 1) concussion as an anomaly, a senseless accident, 2) concussions as a debilitating nebulous and ambiguous and 3) a promising career, derailed, and cut short.

Concussions in tennis are not a common injury, as it is a non-contact sport. Further, the incident occurred outside the sport, while Bouchard was leaving practice, making it even more of an anomaly. The simple, regular routine of walking through the locker room caused a traumatic experience, loss, and extensive recovery time. The impact of the anomaly was lost time and monies and to counteract this effect Bouchard took legal action, resulting in a two-and-a-half-year lawsuit. Although she won the case, the time lost, and the continuous downward spiral of her rankings cannot be replaced.

Bouchard's concussion and recovery process can be described as ambiguous, as the injury is individualized and there is no standardized approach to recovery. In addition, the assigning of responsibility determined through her lawsuit, can also be described as ambiguous. The media skepticism regarding Bouchard's recovery management and return to sport caused a debilitating nebula due to the constant conjecture as to if she would be able to continue her career. This was further fueled by Bouchard's own social media taken out of context but the

sport media and implying a lack of focus as she spent time relaxing during recovery.

Finally, after recovery Bouchard was able to return to sport, only to withdraw from competition after a short time. With her newfound confidence, the sport media seemed supportive and focussed on technical aspects of her game. However, with such a quick return there was speculation of her readiness to play at her previous level. Bouchard related her tennis experiences to her audience indicating that at times she felt like she was back in the zone and at others that she had forgotten how to play.

The third research question -- What are the implications of the study's findings for sport psychology? -- made a personal impact on this sports scholar (i.e., me), as an athlete in a non-contact sport, figure skating, and a coach who predominantly works with female athletes. The implications for athletes are to understand the severity and risk of concussion in sport. Additionally, to be aware of the signs and symptoms and removing themselves from sport when a concussion is sustained. As part of sporting protocol, specific instructions to follow post-concussion needs to be implemented. As someone who is a certified figure skating coach, concussion policy is mandated through Skate Ontario (governing body). However, the protocol is not discussed during coaching courses and is an elective course to take. Implementing a mandatory policy is a future direction that needs to occur to protect the athlete's safety, and for coaches and trainers to have guidelines to follow. Further, as demonstrated in the literature, there are differences in gender in concussion protocol and management. Understanding and recognizing the variances in symptoms expressed effects the way the athlete should be treated. This is an important part of protocol that needs to be implemented for athletes, coaches, trainers, parents, and all involved in sport.

The implication for sport scholars is to address the substantial difference in women and

men, and how they are represented in the media. As seen throughout, women are grossly underrepresented. The attention that Bouchard received from the media negatively talked about her performance, as well as focused heavily on her physique and attractiveness. Society's need for men athletes to be portrayed as 'masculine', 'heroic', or 'manly', dominates media outlets print, or televised. Women in sport should be broadcasted and studied equally to men, especially since research shows that women sustain concussions easier, more frequently, and feel symptomatic longer than men. Further study is required for athletes at the elite level and sports that are non-contact. In general, this research undertaking informs sports culture of the long-term effects of concussion emotionally, physically, mentally, and financially.

Based on the above points and key findings in the present study, a number of areas for future research and knowledge development are suggested. First, how women are portrayed in sport and the media from the present study's findings, shows that women athletes continue to be portrayed in problematic, and as the present study showed, nuanced ways, concerning their health, strength and performance. Further research is needed in sport psychology to explore the specific ways in which different public and/or mainstream media portrayals of female athlete's concussion, and how this may impact the public's perception concerning female athletes. As women athletes are role models to future generations of competitors, it is important that they are exemplified as valuable and worthy contributors in sport, and that when an injury such as a concussion is incurred, it is taken seriously but also, not used to downplay a woman's value or physicality in sport. Conducting focus groups or interviews with recreational athletes concerning media portrayal of a female athlete's injury such as Bouchard's, is a potential future research avenue to learn more about the way(s) in which the public aligns with, or resists, problematic media portrayals of female athletes incurring concussion.

Studying additional sources of media beyond news media representations, would allow for the exploration of an athlete's own self-representation, and also how fans and spectators alike, engage with injury representations. For example, studying the athlete's personal social media accounts (i.e. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) might provide different and/or additional insight into an athlete's experiences and engagement with the public concerning an injury. As Bouchard could not respond to the media (due to the looming lawsuit), the engagement with her self-presentation on social media might have yielded an additional dimension of understanding of the injury and her own public portrayals. With new advances in technology (i.e. access to personal social media accounts), fans are able to have direct access, which raises a number of interesting additional research avenues. Direct access to the athletes provides two-way communication and exploration of media, and fans can engage with the media postings and/or via conversations directly through posting their own stories or paths in relation to an athlete's injury portrayal.

Secondly, studying female athletes – recreational, competitive, and elite -- and the impact of injury in their sport and lives, is a necessary future research avenue in order to learn more about sport concussion meanings and the psychosocial implications. While some of this work has been done looking at female athletes and concussion, as noted in the literature review, the gendered layer of concussion and the psychological impact remains a less understood aspect of sport concussion research. Specifically, studying concussions and the long-term impact of injury for female athletes would be a useful future direction, as the literature states that women feel symptomatic longer, and are affected anatomically differently than males. As concussion is such a nebulous and/or invisible injury, research of concussion impact in different sports (e.g., non-contact) would be useful to learn more about how women draw on, or resists, aspects of risk

culture in relation to a concussion injury.

A final future direction relates to the finding in the present study which was that Bouchard's injury occurred outside of sport, off the court, and was not in the public eye when it occurred. The media continuously speculated as to if the injury truly occurred, and were not often sympathetic to Bouchard's symptoms, and healing during recovery. Some of this speculation related to taken for granted meanings concerning women and concussion – that women may not have truly experienced the symptoms. Athletes should be taken at their word, as they are the only ones that can feel the impact of this injury, and in the case of concussion where athletes are now being shown to adapt to protocols so they can return to play sooner, it is important that athlete's stories are believed and taken seriously. Future research on the long-term effects of concussion is needed to help understand the emotional, and physiological impact of this invisible injury, and the ways in which athletes may negotiate the public and private aspects of managing their concussion symptoms, performance and athletic career. Overall, the present study has allowed me to develop significant insights into my future practice and understand the importance of education surrounding concussion. It has challenged me to increase my awareness of the impact of media on future athletes with whom I may work. I have gained new knowledge and look forward to implementing this information in my future career.

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