

“It’s always going to be a part of who you are”: Exploring the Identities of Competitive Male Ice
Hockey Players

by

Kirsten Morrison

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts (MA) in Interdisciplinary Health

The Faculty of Graduate Studies
Laurentian University
Sudbury, Ontario, Canada

Kirsten Morrison, 2021

THESIS DEFENCE COMMITTEE/COMITÉ DE SOUTENANCE DE THÈSE
Laurentian University/Université Laurentienne
Office of Graduate Studies/Bureau des études supérieures

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Title of Thesis Titre de la thèse | “It’s always going to be a part of who you are”: Exploring the Identities of Competitive Male Ice Hockey Players | |
| Name of Candidate Nom du candidat | Morrison, Kirsten | |
| Degree Diplôme | Master of Arts | |
| Department/Program Département/Programme | Interdisciplinary Health | Date of Defence Date de la soutenance May 17, 2021 |

APPROVED/APPROUVÉ

Thesis Examiners/Examineurs de thèse:

Dr. Kelly Harding
(Co-supervisor/Co-directeur(trice) de thèse)

Dr. Jennifer Johnson
(Co-supervisor/Co-directeur(trice) de thèse)

Dr. Amanda Schweinbenz
(Committee member/Membre du comité)

Dr. Cheryl A. MacDonald
(External Examiner/Examineur(trice) externe)

Approved for the Office of Graduate Studies
Approuvé pour le Bureau des études supérieures
Dr. Tammy Eger
Madame Tammy Eger
VP Research (Office of Graduate Studies)
Vice-rectrice à la recherche (Office of Graduate Studies)

ACCESSIBILITY CLAUSE AND PERMISSION TO USE

I, **Kirsten Morrison**, hereby grant to Laurentian University and/or its agents the non-exclusive license to archive and make accessible my thesis, dissertation, or project report in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or for the duration of my copyright ownership. I retain all other ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis, dissertation or project report. I also reserve the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis, dissertation, or project report. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that this copy is being made available in this form by the authority of the copyright owner solely for the purpose of private study and research and may not be copied or reproduced except as permitted by the copyright laws without written authority from the copyright owner.

Abstract

In this thesis I explore how competitive male ice hockey players living in Northeastern Ontario construct their identities through sport participation with an emphasis on masculinity. The purpose of the thesis is to provide insight into the way identities are formed and the examination of myself in relation to my biases and the participants. The study was guided by narrative theory using a social constructionism paradigm. Participants consisted of five current players (age 19-22) from hockey teams in Northeastern Ontario and one retired professional hockey player who acted as a key informant. I used thematic analysis to identify common themes from a total of six semi-structured, conversational interviews. The thesis is a paper-based document consisting of two stand-alone manuscripts and complementing bookend chapters. The first manuscript presents the results from the analysis of the interviews while the second manuscript presents a discussion around reflexive materials written throughout the research process.

Keywords:

The following could be used to describe a thesis entitled “Constructions of Identities by Competitive Canadian Male Ice Hockey Players,” which studies the relationship between sport participation and identity construction: Identities, Identity Development, Hockey, Masculinity, Reflexivity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my supervisory committee. First, I want to thank Dr. Schweinbenz for giving her unparalleled insight and expertise on navigating the world of sport. Next, I want to thank Dr. Johnson for her knowledge in the field of gender studies and all of the feedback that pushed me to dig deeper and become a better researcher. Third, I want to thank Dr. Harding. I am so happy to have found you as my supervisor and my friend. You have been the perfect balance of toughness and encouragement. You gave me the space I needed to learn who I was as a researcher while supporting and leading me to become the best version I could be. You are as good of a supervisor as you are a person and I am so grateful I had you as my guide on this journey.

I also want to thank my friends and family who supported and encouraged me to pursue my goals and gave me the much needed study breaks when things were hard. Finally, I want to thank my partner, Matt, who constantly pushed me to reach my full potential and was always there to provide breaks from writing. I could not have gotten through these last couple of years without you by my side.

| | |
|--|------|
| Contents | |
| Abstract | iii |
| Keywords: | iii |
| Acknowledgements | iv |
| List of Figures | viii |
| List of Appendices | ix |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Literature Review | 2 |
| 1.1.1 Understanding Identities | 2 |
| 1.1.2 Masculinities | 5 |
| 1.1.3 Masculinities and Sport | 7 |
| 1.1.4 Intersecting Identities | 14 |
| 1.2 Rationale | 16 |
| 1.3 Research Questions | 17 |
| 1.4 Theoretical Positioning | 17 |
| 1.4.1 Social Constructionism | 17 |
| 1.4.2 Narrative Theory | 18 |
| 1.5 Methods | 21 |
| 1.5.1 Setting | 21 |
| 1.5.2 Participants | 21 |
| 1.5.3 Recruitment | 22 |
| 1.5.4 Ethical Considerations | 23 |
| 1.5.5 Data Collection | 23 |
| 1.5.6 Data Management | 26 |
| 1.5.7 Data Analysis | 26 |
| 1.6 Overview of Document | 29 |
| Beyond the Blue Line: Construction of Identities by Male Competitive Ice Hockey Players in Northeastern Ontario | 30 |
| Abstract | 31 |
| Introduction | 32 |
| Literature Review | 33 |
| Theoretical Framework | 35 |
| Methods | 36 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Results | 39 |
| Influence of Others | 39 |
| What it Means to be a Hockey Player | 45 |
| Building a New Identity | 50 |
| Discussion | 52 |
| Influence | 52 |
| Stereotypes..... | 54 |
| Identities | 57 |
| Future Research and Implications | 58 |
| Conclusion..... | 60 |
| References | 61 |
| Studying Male Ice Hockey Players: Reflexive Thoughts From a Master’s Student | 67 |
| Abstract | 68 |
| Introduction | 69 |
| Background | 71 |
| Understanding My Role as a Researcher | 74 |
| A Deeper Self Analysis | 77 |
| Finding the Right Path..... | 77 |
| What a Hockey Player Looks Like to Me | 79 |
| The Research Process..... | 82 |
| Recruitment | 82 |
| The Interview Process | 86 |
| Conclusion..... | 94 |
| References | 96 |
| Chapter 4: Conclusion..... | 101 |
| 4.1 Summary of Chapter 2 | 102 |
| 4.2 Summary of Chapter 3 | 103 |
| 4.3 Discussion in Relation to Research Questions | 104 |
| 4.3.1 Discussion in Relation to Sub-Questions | 106 |
| 4.4 Study Considerations and Strengths..... | 109 |
| 4.4.1 Validation of Findings | 111 |
| 4.5 Implications for Practice | 112 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 4.6 Implications for Future Research | 114 |
| 4.7 Overall Conclusion..... | 116 |
| References | 118 |
| Appendices..... | 127 |

List of Figures

Figure 1. A collage of nine headshots of hockey players. 81

List of Appendices

| | |
|---|-----|
| Appendix A: Ethics Certificate | 127 |
| Appendix B: Interview Guide | 129 |
| Appendix C: Sample recruitment script..... | 130 |
| Appendix D: Online recruitment poster..... | 131 |
| Appendix E: Sample information/consent form | 132 |
| Appendix F: List of mental health services | 135 |

Chapter 1: Introduction

Sporting activities have been around for hundreds of years, offering men and women alike many positive benefits such as improving health, promoting societal values, character building, developing friendships, and expanding life experience (Blinde et al., 1993; Coakley, 2008; Eitzen & Sage, 2008). The list of positives that sport provides a person is endless; however, some of the values currently celebrated within sport, specifically sports played predominately by males, can have a negative impact on the players and athletes (Greig & Pollard, 2017). Values, such as win-at-all-costs mentality, violence, and toughness, can have an influence on the identities of the athletes including their athletic identity, gender identity, and other aspects of their identities (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Messner, 1990). Furthermore, their identities may also impact their role as an athlete and how they behave and make decisions (Messner, 1990).

The purpose of this study was to better understand how male hockey players construct their identities through sport participation while also focusing on the intersection of masculinity, aggression within sport, and injury. The topic of this paper is not only important in terms of understanding the positive and negative effects hockey participation can have on athletes but is also timely in terms of media attention surrounding the sometimes problematic culture of hockey. Participants included five male competitive hockey players within Northeastern Ontario, as well as one key informant who is an LGBTQ+ advocate and former professional hockey player. A social constructionist paradigm was used along with narrative theory to guide the study. Scholars of social constructionism postulate that meanings and knowledge are created through social processes and that identities are shaped through social and cultural narrative

(Crotty, 1998). Narrative theorists describe identities as being influenced by the stories that we tell and feel a part of, and that identities are ever changing (McAdams, 1993; McLeod, 1997; Smith, 2007). From these theoretical perspectives, conversational interviews were chosen as the form of data collection so that participants were able to speak about their experiences and tell their stories on their own terms with little input and control from the interviewer. Keeping in-line with narrative theory and conversational interviews, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) was used to search for themes within the participants' stories.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Understanding Identities

According to Erikson (1968), producing a sense of identity is a developmental challenge, while defining identity is an ever-changing sense of who one is, both as an individual and as a member of society. He also postulated that identity could not be removed from culture, as it was intertwined in the core of the individual, as well as the culture of the individual (Erikson, 1968). A major component of identity is salience, which refers to the prominence or importance of an identity in a particular context. The more salient identities are to an individual, the greater the chance they have of being demonstrated across a variety of contexts (Stryker, 1968). For example, a college student who has a high athletic identity may bring the characteristics of that identity to not only their sport but also to the classroom, the workplace, or even the home. One of the ways an individual's level of athletic identity is measured is through the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Culver et al., 2012). It has been suggested that there is a high correlation between behaviour and identity (Miller, 2009). An individual may construct an identity which reflects the activities they participate in and choose activities that are congruent with their identity. Within the sports literature, certain identities are associated with specific

behaviours, such as a jock identity being associated with problem drinking, sexual risk taking, interpersonal violence, and other risk-taking behaviours (Miller, 2009).

Athletic identity can also be defined as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 237). Brewer et al. (1993) were some of the first researchers to study athletic identity and suggested that it is both a cognitive structure, as well as a social role, which is predominantly derived from the feedback of others (e.g., parents, coaches, teammates, spectators). Although athletic identity was first thought of as a unidimensional construct, further research has shown that it is a multidimensional self-concept that encompasses three factors: social identity (i.e., the strength of the identification with the athlete role); negative affectivity (i.e., emotional response to failure to fill athlete role); and exclusivity (i.e., the lack of other social roles; Brewer et al., 1993).

These three factors are usually measured quantitatively using the AIMS. Much of the research looking at athletic identity used this scale until the earlier 2000s when qualitative research in sport psychology increased and new perspectives on identity emerged (Culver et al., 2012). Research into athletic identity only emerged during the 1990s with most of the earlier research focused on personality rather than identity (Ronkainen et al., 2016). Current literature on identity in sport supported an understanding that identities were multiple and active, constructed within cultural narratives which the individual was involved in (Ronkainen et al., 2016). Although the benefits of having an athletic identity have been discussed (e.g., Carless & Douglas, 2013), the authors of other studies have shown that a strong athletic identity can be associated with severe psychological problems during times of poor form, injury, and/or career retirement (Brewer et al., 1993).

Although the risks of an exclusive athletic identity are generally recognized in the literature, researchers have not yet fully explored how an athlete may develop this kind of identity and the studies that are out there are usually done with elite athletes (Carless & Douglas, 2013). There are however studies that have looked at various identities and the influence that sport has on these identities. Carless and Douglas (2013) conducted a narrative inquiry study where they interviewed twenty-one elite athletes (male and female) in the United Kingdom. They explored how elite sport culture shapes psychological processes of identity development, as well as athletic identity, and how identity is formed through early sport experiences. Edwards and Jones (2009) found that gender identity in football players was developed through the constant interaction with society's expectations of them as men, as well as men spending their lives "wearing a mask" and performing in ways they felt society wanted them to which may not reflect their true selves. The performance of the participants had consequences for women, other men, and the participants themselves such as leading to the degradation of women and the mental well-being of men who were ultimately having an identity crisis due to the pressure of sport culture.

Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2018) examined whether identity predicted sport conduct directly and indirectly through achievement goals in NCAA Division I student-athletes. They found that athletic identity negatively predicted sportpersonship (e.g., acts such as honest effort, adherence to rules, and self-control) and positively predicted instrumental aggression (e.g., controlled and intentional acts of doing harm). Task goal orientation enhanced the magnitude of the negative relationship between athletic identity and sportpersonship. Finally, academic identity positively predicted sportpersonship and negatively predicted gamesmanship (e.g., deliberately performing unsportsmanlike acts). All of the studies mentioned above describe

either how an athlete's behaviour and characteristics are impacted by certain aspects of sport participation or how their identity impacts how the athlete plays their sport. These studies are integral in understanding the importance of the influence of sport on a person but each one explores a specific phenomenon and does not address multiple identities within sport.

Within the cultural sport psychology literature, the term cultural spillover is used to explain how different cultures may transfer into other contexts of an individual's life (Scholes-Balog et al., 2016). For example, in sports such as ice hockey, the violent and hypermasculine culture of the sport may influence how athletes act in their personal relationships (i.e., domestic violence), work life, and social life. There are many aspects of identity that contributes to its construction including gender identity, specifically masculinities, which are described in more detail below.

1.1.2 Masculinities

Within the academic world, masculinity was rarely studied up until the 1970s where we saw a rise in research questioning the "problem" of masculinity (Greig & Pollard, 2017). Feminist scholars saw masculinity as socially constructed and not something that boys were just born with. One of these scholars was Connell, who proposed a theory wherein she rejected the idea that there was one fixed version of masculinity and instead postulated that all types of masculinities are formed by the social locations of men separated by factors such as race, ethnicity, social class, and bodily abilities (Connell, 1995). Connell (1995) goes on to argue that one masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, is valued above all other versions of masculinity. The theory of hegemonic masculinity has been challenged in sports literature with critics expressing hegemonic masculinity considers all male athletes to be problematic and hegemonic masculinity is used to describe all negative characteristics of men. These critiques have led to a varied use of

theories and concepts when studying masculinities and the amended version of hegemonic masculinity by Connell (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is used as a concept in this paper because it relates to the sport of hockey and identity formation but it does not describe all hockey players or their ideals. Hegemonic masculinity should only be viewed in relation to other forms of masculinity in a particular social population (Hirose & Pih, 2010). For the purpose of this paper, hegemonic masculinity will be viewed within the Western sport population.

Hegemonic masculinity is associated with cis-gender, white, heterosexual, non-para men who are also athletic and physically tough; therefore, this term will appear multiple times throughout this paper as it often describes men who play physical sports such as hockey which may include some of the participants in this study. Hegemonic masculinity is almost unachievable in real life but has associated ideals that men try to live up to such as being a strong, dominant figure who is powerful in their job and their relationships. Hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily need to be embodied by a large percentage of men in a given population but the idealization to the point where men compare themselves in relation to it that makes this type of masculinity hegemonic (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Additionally, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) warn that thinking of hegemonic masculinity as a set of specific traits can be harmful as it assumes hegemonic masculinity is a fixed type which is not true. Multiplicity and heterogeneity are core components of the construction processes of masculinity. According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity is created in relation to other forms of masculinity. These categories are: marginalized (often men of colour, men with disabilities, and/or working class men); subordinate (often men who are gay or perceived to be gay); and men who are deemed to be complicit (men who reproduce patriarchal relations but are

not at the top of the gender order). Because of the pressure of society to conform to an idealized version of masculinity, men often perform their gender differently in public and private spaces and sometime enact it in ways which are not in line with their internal values, usually because their performance is evaluated by others in relation to what is socially accepted as a man. As mentioned earlier, hegemonic masculinity and other types of masculinity should be considered in relation to the population they are discussed and reinforced in. A dominant form of masculinity such as hegemonic masculinity can be viewed differently in other regions and cultures. For example, in East Asian regions, hegemonic masculinity may include different characteristics than Western hegemonic masculinity wherein more refined and gentle characteristics are valued over physical force and power (Hirose & Pih, 2010). It is important to provide context on studied populations to fully understand the production of masculinities.

1.1.3 Masculinities and Sport

The idea of dominance, masculinity, and power have been an integral part of sport since they were first discussed and constructed as part of sport culture (Coakley, 2008). Today in North American culture, sports and masculinity are synonymous (Benedict, 1998; Clayton & Humberstone, 2006; Crosset et al., 1996; Frinter & Rubinson, 1993). Male sports teams have been widely studied as a place for the reproduction of problematic masculinities (Crocket, 2013). Not only is sport related to masculinity, there is also a deep-rooted culture of whiteness, social class, and sexuality within sport (Greig & Pollard, 2017). For example, there is a large body of work that speaks of the use of ice hockey as a symbol of Canadian national identity and reiterates the white, heterosexual, middle-class male (Watson, 2017). The importance of hockey as a part of Canadian national identity can be attributed to the social construction of sport and the meaning that we as Canadians put on it. As someone who has never played hockey, I have

always felt I was a little less “Canadian” than those who grew up in the sport. Hockey, like all other sports, has been socially constructed within the society it exists and for Canadians that means the characteristics of hockey, such as hyper-masculinity, are valued in this particular society. Social constructionists suggest that a major component of why there is a relationship between sport and masculinity is that many sports have been envisioned as the domain of male identified people, especially aggressive sports like football and ice hockey, that help to produce hegemonic masculine ideals by way of closely connecting aggression, strength, and skill to sport achievement (Anderson, 2005; Bryson, 1987; Connell, 1995). It is regularly discussed that male athletes in combative sports, such as ice hockey, exhibit the same ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Even without the description of hegemonic masculinity, sports are still a site where an aggressive and competitive masculinity is (re)produced (MacDonald, 2014).

Sport has also been analyzed as an arena where boys and men learn certain masculine values, relations, and rituals (Tjønndal, 2016). In relation to masculinity, violence is a large part of sport, but few studies have considered the relationship between sport participation and violence (Scholes-Balog et al., 2016). Gender, type of sport, level of competitiveness, and how much an athlete identifies with the athlete role all influence violence. For example, being a male, playing a sport such as ice hockey, and playing at a higher level all increase the level of violence. Within hockey, there is a player called the ‘enforcer’ who is used specifically for their aggression and is more of a fighter than an actual ice hockey player. It is unofficial positions such as these within ice hockey and other physical sports that cause violence to be such an integral part of the sport and therefore part of the athlete role (Tjønndal, 2016).

As mentioned earlier in the paper, hegemonic masculinity is a common term used in the literature pertaining to sports and masculinity. Although some scholars disagree that hegemonic

masculinity is structurally maintained, it has highly influenced the way that many scholars understand how men express themselves, especially within sport (Allain, 2014; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity tends to encompass many of the ways that male athletes express themselves both in and out of sport and is often encouraged by not only the sport institutions but by other players, coaches, and fans. More often than not, it has been argued that male athletes in more aggressive sports such as football and ice hockey show the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and thus it is important to consider this type of masculinity when researching gender and sport (MacDonald, 2012, 2014). In a 2014 study, Allain found that the Canadian Hockey League (CHL) and its players privileged a type of masculinity that is quite aggressive, often leading to violence which she calls dominant Canadian hockey-style masculinity. It should be noted that not all players portray this type of masculinity; however, it does act as an aspirational style for players to achieve. Allain (2014) studied how these certain styles of masculinity are produced through interviews with elite-level male hockey players in the CHL. Participants in this study tried to show their masculinity in the interviews by coming from a place of dominance and power. Consequently, it was difficult for Allain (2014) to gain access to participants because she was considered an outsider, partly because of her gender.

Additionally, MacDonald (2012) conducted a survey and interview based study with Junior hockey players to explore the relationship between ice hockey and masculinity. She found that there was little gender awareness among participants and they did not openly discuss masculinity unless asked directly. Much like Allain (2014), MacDonald (2012) also found results to be contradictory whereas some participants exemplified more characteristics of hegemonic masculinity over others. Furthermore, MacDonald (2012) found participants felt they had to behave differently in certain contexts such as acting more “manly” with their teammates.

Masculinity can also be related to injury within sport. Injuries in sport are somewhat inevitable, but there are certain circumstances that are associated with a higher incidence of injuries. Sports such as ice hockey, football, and combat sports are among those with the highest injury rates (Belley-Ranger et al., 2016). While men incur more sports injuries compared to women, there is also a correlation between male social norms and risk-taking behaviours in sport (Belley-Ranger et al., 2016). Within contact sports, concussions are one of the most common injuries, with ice hockey having one of the highest rates of concussions (Todd et al., 2017). The authors of one report found that 25% of junior ice hockey players suffered from at least one concussion per season resulting in prolonged physical and mental health consequences (Echlin et al., 2010). However, there is a believed discrepancy between concussions and the actual number thought to have been sustained meaning there are more athletes suffering from concussions than we think. A possible reason for underreporting of concussions and for the severity of other injuries could be because of the pain principle which is closely related to masculinity (Messner, 1990).

Starting at a young age, boys are taught to ignore their pain in sport, referred to as the pain principle, which is highly correlated with a hegemonic masculinity ideal. Although athletes are seen to be in great physical health, the pain principle can cause athletes to have a higher incidence of permanent injuries, disabilities, drug use, and other health problems (Messner, 1990). Additionally, not reporting concussions may seem dangerous to those on the outside of sport, but to the players it has a functional value as those who have a high athletic identity are less likely to report concussions because they believe that it is part of their athlete role (Kroshus et al., 2014). However, concussions can lead to major physical and mental health issues and thus underreporting may lead to more serious consequences. Concussion reporting is not the only

problem with having a high athletic identity; psychological problems can also accompany a high athletic identity, such as depression and suicidal thoughts, which are a major health risk for athletes (Brewer et al., 1993).

Masculinity has been addressed by those working in the field, but also by retired athletes in ways of biographies. For example, Tjønnedal (2016) conducted a narrative analysis of biographies of two former professional ice hockey enforcers in the National Hockey League (NHL) to explore how narratives of masculinity and violence among ice hockey players have been described and the interplay between them in modern sport. Stories, and narratives, of the studied athletes demonstrated the personal risks and implications they faced playing a highly masculine sport. Tjønnedal (2016) revealed that the common acceptance and encouragement of player violence and ‘violence against the self’ in ice hockey has led to many broken bodies, lives, and careers among professional male athletes. Although the study was conducted using two older athletes, where some rules and regulations surrounding violence and injuries may have changed, the study contributed to new knowledge about how sport, and ice hockey in particular, should work to integrate groups with different sexual orientations and other, more inclusive forms, of masculinities that deviate from the norms of most modern sports.

While on the topic of sexual orientation, research surrounding homosexuality in relation to masculinity in hockey is still a novel area. Few studies have fully focused on attitudes of homosexuality and the relation to forms of masculinity. Many researchers that have studied masculinity within hockey (Allain, 2008, Robidoux, 2001) have included information on heterosexuality and homophobia as a defining feature of hypermasculinity but the topic is still one that needs to be further explored. One reason this could be the case is hockey players are uncomfortable speaking about homosexuality especially in the hockey arena. There are currently

no openly gay hockey players in the NHL and only one openly gay former professional player in North America (MacDonald and McGillis, in press). One prominent study that has addressed heteronormative issues within hockey is MacDonald (2018) who conducted a mixed methods study with male Midget AAA hockey players. She found that homosexuality is still a taboo subject among hockey players and the locker room is not yet a fully inclusive space. However, lack of experience with an openly gay player may have been a factor in the participant's opinions and their lack of knowledge on LGBTQ issues. Additionally, MacDonald (2019) also spoke with former NHL players about the lack of openly gay players in the league and found acceptance, although improving, is still hard to come by as a gay hockey player especially at a high level where more is at stake. While players agree hockey has become more inclusive over the years, there is still a barrier especially in regards to gay hockey players and how they are perceived as a player and as a man.

Hockey and football remain two of the more highly researched sports in terms of masculinity. Steinfeldt and Steinfeldt (2012) found that football players' conformity to traditional masculine norms was influenced by their years in school, on-field position played, and athletic identity. Those who played defensive positions reported a higher conformity to traditional masculine norms that normalize violence while higher levels of athletic identity were also related to higher levels of conformity to traditional masculine norms. Pappas et al. (2004) used in-depth interviews with five former college/professional hockey players in the United States to explore the nature of aggression and violence within their sport and its relationship to violent behaviours, both inside and outside of the sport. All the participants were able to identify multiple times where either themselves or other athletes participated in violence and spoke of ways in which violence and aggression was considered normal in this population. Interpersonal

aggression and violence were common within the lives of the participants both on and off the ice. Additionally, violent behaviours were viewed as a demonstration of already formed tendencies, as well as a product of sport socialization. Kroshus et al. (2014) determined whether concussion symptom reporting norms prior to the start of the athletic season predicted reporting symptoms of a possible concussion during the season and whether athletic identity played a role in the association. The researchers found that participants who were most likely to report symptoms of a concussion during the season were the same participants who at pre-season perceived that “most athletes” were likely to report concussion symptoms. Also, athletic identity had a small impact on the above association.

In a more recent study, the cultural reasons that prevent hockey being made safer for youth and adolescents were explored (Todd et al., 2017). Participants were twenty key stakeholders involved in Canadian-organized hockey including three women and seventeen men from a diversity of roles such as players, parents of players, coaches, media personnel, and doctors. The authors found that participants described body checking as an important part of the game but that it should be taught at a young age in order ensure proper technique and thus avoid injury. The authors also found that many participants expressed the culture of hockey to be both dynamic and unchanging meaning that hockey has evolved to be faster and more dangerous, but the mentality of the game has stayed the same. The aggressive style of play is part of the Canadian way of playing hockey and although it can lead to injuries, there is a recognized need to maintain this style of play. The authors of this study demonstrated why hockey, in part, has been slow to improve safety precautions mostly due to the culture of the sport which continues to perpetuate violence and masculinity as top characteristics to being a hockey player and influences athletes from a very young age. Throughout the studies described above it is

important to note that the influence of athletic identity was a major focus. However, an athlete can have more than just an athletic identity while still being heavily influenced through sport. Below is a brief example of how some identities intersect within the world of sport.

1.1.4 Intersecting Identities

Many of the identities mentioned throughout are not single categories and actually intersect with each other to build an athlete's character as well as others' perceptions of them. Intersectionality was first conceptualized by Crenshaw (1989) and used to describe the oppression and subordination of Black women on a multi-categorical axis. Crenshaw (1989) describes how the intersection of racism and sexism in the lives of Black women is often ignored and understood through a single-axis framework of *either race or gender*. Crenshaw argues for the importance of looking at the interaction of race and gender, or racism and sexism, to avoid further marginalizing Black women. For the purpose of this paper, intersectionality is an important concept because it emphasizes the interaction between categories of experience (e.g., gender, race, sexuality, class, and more) in terms of constructing identities and marginalization in hockey, as well as interactions between systems of oppression (e.g. sexism, racism, classism, and more). Masculinity does not only relate to dominance, athleticism, or the willingness to ignore pain, but can also be related to racial hierarchies and actual or perceived sexual orientation.

Within sport, white hockey players are usually referred to as physically, intellectually, and morally superior in the media compared to their teammates of colour (Poniatowski & Whiteside, 2012). Athletes of colour have been historically excluded from North American sports such as hockey but this issue has been overlooked because of the high media coverage of Black athletes in sports such as football and basketball (Coakley, 2008). Commentators speaking

of white hockey players often refer to the athlete's lineage and how they were born into hockey families with fathers who played hockey hinting that those who are not born into the sport, mainly non-White players, are intruders within the sport further reinforcing the idea of White hegemonic masculinity (Poniatowski & Whiteside, 2012). Hockey commentators also usually speak about white athletes in regards to their hard work making a comparison to the blue-collar work ethic usually celebrated as part of the Canadian identity (Poniatowski & Whiteside, 2012). The focus and praise of white hegemonic masculinity within hockey only encourages that type of identity to form in hockey players while continuously excluding those of colour or those who may be deemed as not masculine enough. In addition to race, hockey is seen as a sport for those of a middle-higher class because of the cost of playing (Wilson, 2002). Personally, that was a reason I never played hockey as other sports like soccer were much cheaper. However, I had the privilege of looking at hockey teams and seeing people who looked like me. Indigenous and racialized people and those with fewer economic resources then, are greatly disadvantaged when it comes to participating in a sport such as hockey because of the sheer cost of the sport and overt hostility to people of colour in some hockey clubs. In Canada alone, we see the intersection of income inequality and race further challenging racialized people when it comes to participating in sports such as hockey (Smith, 2019). A female person of colour without significant economic means has additional and significant challenges succeeding in the sport of hockey than some of her counterparts. The intersection of race, gender, and class within sport is an important concept when discussing identities because those same attitudes, perceptions, and rules that are marginalizing people of colour or those from a lower socioeconomic standing are the same ones shaping the athletes in the sport today.

1.2 Rationale

While an individual may seek out certain activities that are congruent with their formed identity, they may also construct an identity that reflects the activities they take part in. For example, an athlete may develop their identity based on the sport they play, or they may seek out the sport based on their identity. Additionally, the various ways athletes of different skill levels develop their identities has not been highly researched (Carless & Douglas, 2013). Although athletic identity has been researched quantitatively, little qualitative research has been conducted, while even less research has been done that encompasses multiple identities especially with athletes that are not at an elite level (Miller, 2009). The study population used in the current study is quite unique as no identity research has previously been conducted with Northern Ontario male hockey players, to the researcher's knowledge. Much of the research that has been conducted focusing on identity and sport participation has studied either elite athletes or student-athletes within the United States (e.g., Carless & Douglas, 2013; Edwards & Jones, 2009). However, there are many aspects of sport and of an individual's life that impacts their identity, such as level of sport, geographic region, student status, and age, so it is important to research populations that have not been examined before to get a full picture of athletes and to better understand their experiences of identity formation. Based on what I identified in my literature review, including toxic masculinity in hockey, the pain principle, identity foreclosure, and athletic identity I generated one main research question with three sub-questions that addressed the identified areas for further knowledge.

1.3 Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis was to answer the following primary research question: How do competitive male ice hockey players in Northeastern Ontario construct their identities through sport participation? Sub-questions included:

1. To what extent do forms of masculinity, as they relate to sport, play a part in identity construction?
2. What aspects of being a hockey athlete impact identity construction and how does it transfer into other facets of everyday life?
3. To what degree are expressions of masculinity and injury reporting, prevention, and recovery related?

1.4 Theoretical Positioning

1.4.1 Social Constructionism

According to the social constructionist perspective, meanings are made instead of discovered and everything consequential in society is socially constructed through our interactions and dealing with the world (Crotty, 1998). Culture shapes the way humans perceive the world and it is through social interaction that we can gain knowledge. It is also from this perspective that identities are constructed through social and cultural narratives (Crotty, 1998). Based in a post-modernist school of thought, and primarily used in qualitative research, social constructionism places emphasis on how people use language and interaction to form attitudes and ideas surrounding forms of reality. From this stance, identities of athletes can be seen as being constructed through narratives involved in sport participation. Using a social constructionist perspective allows the researcher to create research questions which guide the study in a way that allows for information to come about naturally. There are no preconceived

notions of what the study may find, meaning a hypothesis is not made by the researcher. In this research, it was important to employ a theory that aligned well with the assumptions of social constructionism and so narrative theory was chosen.

1.4.2 Narrative Theory

According to Lendermann (2001) and Schechtman (1996), identity is composed of a cluster of stories and narrative fragments rather than one story. The narrative theory of identity can be seen as sharing similarities with traditional theories of identity, such as social identity theory, however, they can also be seen as having many differences. Narrative theory differs from traditional identity theories in conceptualizing identity as a cultural construction rather than a trait lying within the individual (Carless & Douglas, 2013).

Narrative theorists postulate several assumptions about narrative theory: 1) identity can be constant but also has the potential for change (McAdams, 1993); 2) identity is shaped partially by social processes, such as playing on a sports team (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000); 3) identity is a reflexive process (Gergen, 1999); and 4) identity is influenced by social categories (McLeod, 1997). From the perspective of narrative theory, identity is therefore constructed through storytelling processes including not only an individual's own stories but also the stories that they feel a part of (Smith, 2007). From these assumptions, narrative theory challenges the notion of self and society being separate (McGannon & Spence, 2012).

According to Frank (2010), stories are understood not only as a portrayal of lives but also as a construction of lives. Stories work with people, for people, and on people (Frank, 2010). Of most importance are the stories that are culturally dominant and are told repeatedly. For example, an athlete may keep referring to the same scenario from their time as a little league player. It is stories such as the one from their childhood that keeps getting brought up that will have the most

influence on them. It is these stories that are the most influential in constructing an individual's identity, almost to the point of constricting it (Neimeyer et al., 2006). A dominant story can have a disproportionate influence on an individual's life and constrict their identity options such as the focus on one sport blocking out further exploring identities outside of the sport like career opportunities. A solution to this challenge is the 're-storying' of self and identity by resisting the dominant narrative (Carless & Douglas, 2008; Frank, 2010; McLeod, 1997; Sparkes & Smith, 2003).

In addition to the four basic assumptions of identity theory (Gergen, 1999; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; McAdams, 1993; McLeod, 1997), identity theory can also be seen to shed light on the way in which personal, social, and cultural influences interact to shape the construction of identity (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). The assumption that identity has the potential to change over time (McAdams, 1993) is an important one as it demonstrates that there are multiple factors that influence identity development and that as these factors change, so does identity. Two other major assumptions of narrative theory are that identity is influenced by social categories and social processes (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; McLeod, 1997). Social categories may involve being a student, being part of a sports team or being part of university athletics, or even being part of a certain friend group. This assumption is of particular importance when it comes to expressions of masculinity as those within the sport system may influence the idea that to be an accepted hockey player one must conform with hypermasculine ideals. All of these categories may have an impact on identity development. Social processes are more of how groups interact and how an individual interacts within social groups. These interactions could involve how the athlete interacts within the social groups they belong to or how their group interacts with other groups.

When outlining why a researcher may want to use narrative theory, Smith and Sparkes (2008) suggest that the theory can show the intricacy and unpredictability of human life while also providing insights into how individuals construct and reconstruct their identities. Recent research in the cultural sport psychology field has revealed how cultural narratives of athletes shape psychological processes of athletic identity development by putting an emphasis on the ways of being, feeling, and behaving as athletes (Ronkainen et al., 2016). In a study conducted by McAdams and McLean (2013), narrative identity was understood as “a person’s internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose” (p. 233). Regarding athletic identity, narrative theory has acted as a framework for looking at how sport culture may impact identity construction and changing from a unified construct to a set of storylines of the athlete (Ronkainen et al., 2016)

First person narratives provide a great deal of material for qualitative research. Narrative research refers to any research that uses or analyzes story-like material. Narrating helps people make sense of their experience. People remember certain events and experiences where they then choose from their memory and interpret what happened to them (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). Methods of narrative inquiry involve a form of interviewing that is conversational in nature. Narrative interviews do not break a story into pieces like other methods in qualitative research, but rather they use only a few key questions to prompt stories of the participants (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). The initial question of the interview is usually broad enough to trigger a long story from the participant, giving the researcher the opportunity to give control of the interview over to the participant. Finally, in narrative inquiry, the final story is constructed by the participant, researcher, and reader (Holloway & Galvin, 2016).

Some of the benefits of narrative inquiry specific to the current research project include it being well aligned with the research question, as well as the guiding theoretical framework (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). Overall, narrative inquiry was chosen because it aligned best with the research question. Narratives are often related to identity and make sense of an individual's life experiences. Using narrative inquiry offered the participants opportunities to tell the stories they wanted to tell and allowed the researcher to gain insight into participant's perspectives and how they affect their identities.

1.5 Methods

1.5.1 Setting

The setting of the current study was Northeastern Ontario, Canada, involving competitive male ice hockey players. The population was chosen because of the competitive nature of the teams, and based on literature (Carless & Douglas, 2013), a higher level of competition can have a larger effect on identities and behaviours. The region of Northeastern Ontario was chosen as the setting because as a Masters student it was a convenient place to conduct in-person interviews but more importantly it was chosen because of the lack of research done in the Northern Ontario region on athletes with regard to their identities. Most studies surrounding athlete identities are conducted using elite athletes and athletes in the United States. By using participants on Northern Ontario teams, I am broadening the research getting a better picture of athletes playing in different regions.

1.5.2 Participants

The current study included a total of six white cis-gender participants, five of whom were competitive male hockey players between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. The sixth participant was an openly gay former professional hockey player in his thirties who acted as a

key informant in the study. A key informant was chosen to give perspective from a person whose identity has been shaped by the sport of hockey in both positive and negative ways. It was the hope that using the key informant would help give more context for the readers of this paper and the analysis of the data by sharing his own experiences both with playing hockey and his later life as an advocate for the LGBTQ2+ community especially within the sports world. It is important to note that although the key informant's experiences were very useful, they do not represent the experiences of all former professional hockey players. As mentioned in the literature review, hockey is a sport where heterosexuality is celebrated and homophobic language is often used (MacDonald, 2018) making gay hockey players feel uncomfortable and unaccepted. Because of the key informant's sexual orientation, his experiences had a crucial role in the study and filled in a gap often left from hockey research.

Participants were recruited from three teams: one from the Junior A level, one from the Ontario Hockey League (OHL) level, and one from the Ontario University Athletic (OUA) level. The key informant was directly recruited as suggested by my committee. To be included in the study, participants had to be over the age of 16 for individual consent purposes and either currently be playing on one of the recruited teams or had just finished playing with one of the recruited teams.

1.5.3 Recruitment

The recruitment process for the study involved first contacting the coaches of each team to share the details of the study and to ask for their cooperation in setting up a meeting with their team so that in-person recruitment could take place. A recruitment poster and script with my contact information and the main details of the study was also sent to the coaches in the event that a team meeting was not possible. Coaches were asked to circulate the poster with the team.

After not receiving any responses from the coaches, I turned to using social media as a way of recruiting participants. The recruitment poster was shared on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The poster was also sent to the Facebook pages of each of the intended teams and a response was received from two of the three teams contacted. The use of contacts was the last recruitment strategy used, which involved speaking to people that I knew who were either involved with the teams or had connections with the teams. In order to recruit the key informant, I contacted him directly through social media.

1.5.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethics was submitted and approved by the Laurentian University Ethics Review Board (Protocol #6019400). Careful consideration was taken to minimize any power imbalances between the researcher and participant (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Participants were informed of the general purpose of the study and made known that their participation was voluntary. Potential participants were provided with a consent form and information form to sign if they chose to participate while it was made known that they could withdraw at any time. Additionally, participants were provided with the results of the study in the form of a one-page summary report.

1.5.5 Data Collection

Semi-structured conversational interviews were conducted with each participant with each interview lasting between thirty and ninety minutes. Three of the six interviews were done in-person between November and December 2019, two interviews were conducted over Zoom in March and April 2020, and the last interview was conducted over the phone in April 2020. Changes to the conducting of interviews was due to the COVID-19 outbreak and social distancing rules that required that the last three interviews be conducted via other means than in-

person interviews. Interviews were chosen as the singular data collection method as opposed to multiple methods because of the confines of completing the study within a certain time frame.

Conversational interviews were chosen because they are an impactful way of gaining access to a participant's interpretations of their own experiences (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). A more conversational form of interviewing is in line with a narrative theoretical approach because of the opportunity it gives for the telling of stories and experiences from the participants perspective. Conversational interviews are typically unstructured in nature as they are designed to allow the most communication from the participants with little input or interruption from the interviewer. However, because I am a first-time interviewer, the interviews followed a semi-structured approach which included an interview guide for me to follow when needed. Questions were open-ended and used to evoke story like answers. Some questions were based off of previous literature regarding identities in sport such as "Tell me about the earliest sporting experience that you can remember" (Carless & Douglas, 2013). Other questions were created to address the specific circumstances of participants such as being a student and playing in Northern Ontario: "How has playing hockey in Northeastern Ontario impacted how you view or play the game?" and "Do you think being a student-athlete has impacted your participation in sport? How?". Other prompting or probing questions were used throughout the interview based on what the participant said to either probe the participant to provide more stories or to provide more clarity. Topics were also used to guide the prompting questions to help me stay on track and ask questions that would help answer the research questions. Topics included masculinity, violence/aggression, athlete role, injury and whiteness. The same interview guide was used for all participants including the key informant for ease of data analysis.

Conversational interviews use a recursive process where interview questions build on responses to previous questions and stories told by other participants (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Thus, some questions varied from participant to participant but the core questions from the interview guide stayed the same. Asking follow-up questions directly related to each participant's stories kept the data collection in line with narrative identity theory. Some demographic information was also collected and in order to stay aligned with the underpinnings of conversational interviews, the demographic questions were asked at the end of the interview with hopes the information would come up naturally during the interview. The demographic information included questions such as what position they played, how many years they have played for, and current level of play. All participants were male, over the age of 18, and all had played hockey for the majority of their lives, usually starting between the ages of six and eight.

Conversational, semi-structured interviews were also chosen because they are very participant focused and because the purpose of the current study was to understand identities as constructed by the participants. Participants were able to interpret the questions how they wanted and to respond in the way that they wanted. Conversational interviews challenge the conventional interview process and see the researcher and participant as partners and co-constructors of knowledge with the researcher being an active and reflexive learner who listens and reconstructs the stories told to them and then conveys them to others (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). I attempted to co-construct knowledge with the participants by giving them opportunities throughout the interview to lead the conversation in the direction they wanted and allowing them the chance to bring up any additional stories at the end of the interview. Quality control of data was ensured using a digital audio-recorder as well as note taking by the

interviewer so that non-verbal communication could be recorded and notes could be referred to for further questions during the interview. I also followed up with some participants over email to further clarify any questions I had after transcribing the interviews.

1.5.6 Data Management

Interviews were digitally recorded and manually transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Audio files and interview transcriptions were kept on a password protected laptop and stored remotely within the Laurentian Google Drive Suite secured by a password. Consent forms are kept in the locked office of one of the supervisors on the university campus. ID numbers were assigned to each participant and used when naming the transcriptions to ensure participants' confidentiality. Pseudonyms and anonymization of the transcripts have also been done to ensure confidentiality. Anonymization includes the changing of names, cities, and any other potentially identifying information.

1.5.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) and was done by hand by the researcher. Thematic analysis is a way of conducting research in a way that can be both vague and complex and helps to analyze qualitative data in a systematic way. Thematic analysis was chosen because it is an approach that is flexible, accessible, and can be used with multiple theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis is aligned with the theoretical approach because it allowed for the observation of the integrity of the stories told by the participants through conversational interviews.

By using a combination of inductive and deductive analyses, I looked for themes within the data with my research questions in mind while also looking at what is in the data in terms of content and generating themes not previously considered. In the context of this paper, deductive

analysis involved looking at the data for answers to the research questions, while inductive analysis involved looking at the data for any patterns even if not directly related to the research questions. Narrative theory posits that identities are constructed through the stories that people tell and with thematic analysis I was able to examine each participant's stories as a whole and compare them to the other participants for both semantic and latent meanings. Because of its flexibility, I was able to mold thematic analysis to suit my theoretical framework in terms of using the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012) and presenting the data in a way that keeps the integrity of the participants' stories which is important in narrative theory. Thematic analysis helped to identify common themes between the participants as well as the differences in experiences between participants.

Data analysis followed the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012). It is important to note that although the steps are outlined in an order, much of the time while doing thematic analysis researchers will go back to previous steps as qualitative analysis is an ongoing process. I also took this approach and would sometimes double-back to previous steps. The six steps of thematic analysis are: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing potential themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. The first step involved reading and re-reading the text (i.e., interview transcripts). Although this was the first step I continued to go back and read over the interview transcripts right until I wrote the final report. Especially with the time difference between my first and last three interviews it was important to go back and re-read the first interviews after I completed the last one. The second step consisted of analyzing the data through coding which provided preliminary labels for data. After I read the data the first time, I would go over it again to identify areas of interest. I would then go over the data again and write notes about the data

and start to label the data. It was at this point that I sent the first three interviews to my supervisors to ensure the appropriateness of my initial interpretations. The third step of thematic analysis involved turning the codes that shared a similar pattern into themes, bringing together the data that was considered to be related to the guiding research question. At this step a thematic map was used (Braun & Clarke, 2012) where similar codes were grouped together to develop a theme and themes that were too general or too large were broken down into sub-themes. Each transcript was reviewed separately and then was considered as part of a whole data set. Codes of one transcript were compared to codes of another to see what fit together and what did not. In order to be a part of a theme, codes did not have to say the same thing but had to be about the same topic. For example, when speaking about hockey in Northern Ontario in comparison to other places in Ontario, some participants felt it was different while others did not. Although the coding of these excerpts would be different it was important to include all perspectives into one theme. It was at this point where a table was sent to my committee showing the potential themes, sub-themes, and sample quotes for each theme. The fourth step of thematic analysis involved reviewing the themes determined in the last step whereas the fifth step involved coming up with clear definitions and names for the themes. These steps included going back to the data to look for the best quotes to use to help discuss and name the themes. Finally, the last step of thematic analysis consisted of writing up the report of the themes (i.e., this thesis document and included manuscripts). Although this step is the last step it does not happen only at the end, as it is a continuous process throughout the research study. Throughout the analysis stage and write up of the thesis, I was also conscious of my theoretical perspective and considered participants' narratives as a whole, ensuring that I was keeping the integrity of the participants' story.

1.6 Overview of Document

The current study aimed to explore how male hockey players in Northeastern Ontario develop their identities through sport participation while further exploring some of the specific identities often related to being a hockey player. In order to answer the research question(s), the study has been broken down into two different papers to be submitted for publication in two different journals. The first paper uses the original data collected from the interviews to answer the primary research question ‘How do competitive male ice hockey players in Northeastern Ontario construct their identities through sport participation?’. Themes that were identified through thematic analysis of the interview transcripts are presented and discussed in relation to the research question, as well as several of the secondary research questions. This paper has been written for the *Sociology of Sport Journal* and follows the guidelines and format outlined by the journal. The second paper is a detailed reflexive discussion of what it was like to be a researcher who is a woman interviewing young male athletes. This paper is based on the reflexivity that was completed throughout the whole research process and addresses some of the themes brought up in the first paper relating back to the research questions. The second paper has also been written for submission to a journal, specifically the *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health Journal* and is formatted according to their guidelines. Following the two papers, a final discussion chapter is included which discusses and connects the two manuscripts to the overall purpose of this thesis, including suggestions for future research and a discussion of the research and practical implications of this study.

**Beyond the Blue Line: Construction of Identities by Male Competitive Ice Hockey Players
in Northeastern Ontario**

Kirsten Morrison¹, M.A. Candidate

¹School of Rural and Northern Health, Laurentian University

The current manuscript has been formatted for submission to the *Sociology of Sport Journal*.

Abstract

Development of athlete identities has been an increasingly important aspect of sport research in the last couple of decades. The purpose of this study was to contribute to said research using a previously unstudied population. Embedded in social constructionism and guided by narrative identity theory, conversational interviews were used to explore the ways hockey players in Northeastern Ontario construct their identities. Participants were from competitive amateur hockey leagues, as well as the inclusion of a key informant. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to develop themes used to describe the aspects of hockey that most impact hockey players. Themes included the influence of others, stereotypes, and time spent outside of hockey. Overall, it was identified that there are parts of hockey that have positive and negative influence on identity construction.

Keywords: hockey, identities, identity development, masculinity, stereotypes

Beyond the Blue Line: Construction of Identities by Male Competitive Ice Hockey Players in Northeastern Ontario

Introduction

Understanding a person's identities is an important aspect of recognizing who they are, the decisions they make, and their behaviours and attitudes. Specific cohorts such as athletes are of particular interest because they are part of a special community which has a specific culture. When it consumes a large portion of an individual's life, participation in sport can be very influential in the construction of identities (Carless & Douglass, 2013; Ronkainen et al., 2016).

Erikson (1968) was one of the first psychologists who wrote about identity and posited that identities are constantly changing and are intertwined with not only the individual but also the culture(s) the individual is a part of. Social psychologists continued identity research focusing on the impact of group affiliation and social roles, such as belonging on a sports team (Ronkainen et al., 2016). Additionally, early identity scholars found that the more important an identity is to an individual, the greater chance it has of influencing an individual across multiple contexts (Stryker, 1968). For example, someone who identifies with the role of an athlete may bring the characteristics from their athletic identity into other facets of their life, such as work, school, and personal relationships.

Research regarding athlete identities only started in the 1990s, focusing on both elite athletes and recreational exercisers (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Kroshus et al., 2014). While there have been numerous studies focusing on masculinity and stereotypes in hockey (Allain, 2014; MacDonald, 2014; Skuce, 2018) literature focusing on the intersection of sport participation, sport culture, hypermasculinity, and aggression in the formation of athlete identities is still an area that could benefit from further exploration. It is important to fully understand the

intersection of multiple identities and the effects sport participation has on those identities to contribute to healthier sporting experiences (Ge, 2018). The purpose of this study was to answer the research question of: how do competitive male ice hockey players in Northeastern Ontario construct their identities through sport participation? Thus, specific aspects of hockey culture, such as hypermasculinity and aggression, were taken into consideration when reviewing the literature and interviewing participants in this study. Understanding athlete identity development can aid in a deeper understanding of how to support the multiplicity of athletes and diminish forms of identity oppression which may in turn contribute to improved sport experiences (Ge, 2018). With an increase of articles and news stories (Campbell, 2020; Hernandez, 2021) over the last few years regarding the problematic nature of hockey culture, it is important to fully understand and research the inner workings of hockey participation

Literature Review

Sporting activities have been a source of entertainment and demonstration of skill for thousands of years and have offered many benefits to those who participate. Health improvement, character building, friendship development, and expanding life experience are all examples of what participation in sport can do (Blinde et al., 1993; Coakley, 2008; Eitzen & Sage, 2008). However, some aspects of sport participation can become problematic when taken to a point where the negatives outweigh the positives. Values such as competitiveness, aggression, and a win-at-all costs mentality can be damaging to an athlete and yet these values are still taught in hockey (MacDonald, 2012). These negative values are usually related to the portrayal of being a socially desired type of masculinity. Within this paper, multiple terms explaining a certain type of masculinity will be used. Hypermasculinity, hegemonic masculinity, and toxic masculinity are all terms that explain a heightened version of a traditional masculine

ideal often seen as the most socially accepted and desirable. Although the terms may have small differences in meaning, for the purpose of this paper, all three terms may be used interchangeably to describe someone who values aggression, power, and dominance (Connell, 1995). These same values are ones that can often be seen as important characteristics of being a successful hockey player (Allain, 2008). The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been heavily discussed within sport research, especially when studying sports such as ice hockey (Allain, 2008; Atkinson, 2010; Levy, 2007; MacDonald 2014); however, multiple scholars theorize that men involved in sport have complex identities and argue that not all men conform to the hypermasculine ideals portrayed in hockey culture (MacDonald, 2012; Pringle & Hickey, 2010).

Early research on masculine identity and sport saw boys as blank slates who found their identities through sport experiences (Messner, 1990). However, this work was criticized for simplifying the complexities of gender. Gender identity can be better understood from the work of feminist scholars who suggest that identity is more like a tapestry where pieces are added as individuals interact with the world and gender identity is just one part of that tapestry (Messner, 1990). Gender identity is a social construct that is not fixed as just masculine and feminine and as such masculinity is not composed of a pre-defined set of traits that every man identifies with (Messner, 1990). However, it becomes problematic when behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as dominance, aggression and heterosexuality, are celebrated in sport and young men and boys are taught other forms of masculinity are not acceptable (MacDonald, 2018; MacDonald & LaFrance, 2018).

Ice hockey is very significant in Canada, acting as a key socialization site for young boys and men where they construct and perform their identities. Some successful players achieve celebrity like status and even on a recreational level the sport has the power to dictate family

schedules and economic decision making (MacDonald & LaFrance, 2018). Canadian ice hockey is said to advertise hypermasculine traits which becomes problematic when athletes start to emulate those same traits (MacDonald, 2014). Because of the importance hockey plays in not only the lives of those who play it but also in Canadian society in general, it is important to understand how athletes develop their identities through participation in hockey. A further understanding of identities is important not only for the problematic areas mentioned above but also for the positive aspects of hockey and sport that help to influence an athlete's identity.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by social constructionism, which implies that knowledge is made and not discovered. According to this paradigm everything important in the world is socially constructed through our interactions with each other and the world. Social constructionism postulates that we gain knowledge from social interactions and that identities are constructed through social and cultural narratives (Crotty, 1998). In line with social constructionism, narrative identity theory was used to understand how identities are constructed in relation to the cultural discourses and narratives that surround them (Ronkainen et al., 2016). Few studies surrounding athlete identities use traditional identity theory as scholars have moved past the idea that identity is constructed as a static way of being but changes as people share and create their stories. The basic idea of narrative identity theory is that identities are culturally constructed rather than strictly individual (Carless & Douglas, 2013).

There have been four major assumptions of narrative identity theory in relation to identity construction postulated by multiple theorists which all apply to the present study. The first assumption is that identity can be constant but that it also has the potential for change (McAdams, 1993) which is demonstrated in the current study through participant stories that

evolve from when they were younger to current experiences. The second assumption is that identity is shaped partially by social processes, such as playing on sports teams (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). This assumption helps explain the influence that playing a sport can have on constructing an athlete's identity. The third assumption indicates that identity is a reflexive process (Gergen, 1999). For example, the stories that participants tell help them shape their identities, looking back on their experiences and reflecting on how those experiences have influenced them both in the past and in the present. Finally, the fourth assumption is that identity is influenced by social categories (McLeod, 1997). Much like the second assumption, being an athlete and part of a specific team can influence how one constructs their identity. Individuals often seek verification of their identities by those around them and in the sports world, and this verification is usually from coaches, teammates, and fans (Stets & Burke, 2005). Narrative theory can help to understand the way personal, social, and cultural factors interact to shape identities (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). Lastly, narrative identity theory posits that identity has the potential to change over time (McAdams, 1993) which is important because it means that multiple factors may influence identity and as these factors change, so do identities. Therefore, using narrative theory helps to provide insight into how individuals, specifically hockey players, construct and re-construct their identities.

Methods

A total of six competitive male ice hockey players participated in the current study. Five participants in this study came from three competitive hockey teams in Northeastern Ontario, Canada. Teams varied between the Junior A level, the Ontario Hockey League (OHL) level, and the Ontario University Athletic (OUA) level. These leagues were chosen because they are of similar skill level while also sharing a similar age range of players. The sixth participant was a

openly gay retired professional hockey player who acted as a key informant in the study. The key informant was crucial to the study due to him being an anomaly in the hockey world. Because he is gay, he brought a unique and important perspective to the research as hockey is a very heteronormative sport (MacDonald, 2018; MacDonald & McGillis, in press). The age of the participants was between twenty and twenty-three, except for the key informant who is in his thirties. All participants were understood by me to be white and they all spoke English. It should be acknowledged that to make assumptions about race or ethnicity can perpetuate the issue of ‘passing’ meaning those with fair skin may face racialized oppression compared to those of darker skin colour. Participants are referred to here by pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board (REB #6019400).

Participants were contacted through a variety of recruitment methods to participate in semi-structured, conversational interviews. Social media, word-of-mouth, and individual emails sent to the team coaches were all used to recruit participants. Interview questions were open-ended to draw out stories and experiences from the participants. Questions were based on questions recommended in other literature, such as “*Tell me about the earliest sporting experience that you can remember*” (Carless & Douglas, 2013). Other questions were created to address some of the key factors that may influence identities (e.g., student status, geographic origin). Additionally, probing questions were used in each interview to gain clarity or further information. Interviews were conducted between November 2019 and April 2020. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher and were held in-person at the local university (prior to COVID-19), and on Zoom or over the phone (during the early months of institutional responses to COVID-19 which required research of this nature to be

conducted at a distance because of public health regulations in 2020). Interviews lasted between thirty and 105 minutes. Steps were taken to ensure the confidentiality of all participants including the use of pseudonyms and participant IDs and any identifying information was changed within the interview transcripts.

Reflexive thematic analysis as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2012) was used for analyzing the data and is widely used in sport and exercise research (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Thematic analysis is a way of analyzing research in a way that can be vague and complex and helps to analyze qualitative data in a systematic way. Reflexive thematic analysis gave structure and a jumping off point to analyze the data while remaining exploratory in nature. I was able to use thematic analysis to develop themes that encompassed not only what the participants were saying but also how I as a researcher impacted that data (see Morrison, 2021). Thematic analysis was chosen because it is an approach that is flexible, accessible, and can be used with multiple theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2012). As social constructionism and narrative identity theory follow the idea that meanings and identities are socially constructed there was a focus on the constructions of experiences when developing themes from the data. Data analysis followed the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012) which included coding transcripts and generating themes from those codes. According to Braun and Clarke (2019), themes are forms of shared meaning supported by a core concept and are produced at the intersection of a researcher's theoretical assumptions, analysis, and the data. Although the steps are outlined in an order, much of the time while doing thematic analysis researchers will go back to previous steps as qualitative analysis is an ongoing process.

By using a combination of inductive and deductive analyses, I developed themes from the data with my research question in mind while also looking for themes not previously thought

about or discussed in the literature such as how playing in different geographic regions might influence identity construction. Because of the flexibility of thematic analysis, I was able to consider each participant's interview narratively (i.e., looking at their experiences as a whole), while also comparing and contrasting participants' stories across the data set. Continuously going back to the data throughout the analysis stage was important for ensuring credibility and reliability in the study (Braun & Clarke, 2012). From the perspective of narrative identity theory, to understand identity one must seriously take into consideration the stories participants tell about their sporting experiences. Thus, codes were developed from the participants' stories which were then grouped together to generate themes that told the story of the data. The major themes generated from the data are presented below.

Results

Three major themes, with supporting sub-themes, were identified in the data. These themes were: 1) the influence of others; 2) what it means to be a hockey player; and 3) building a new identity. Throughout this section, each theme will be discussed with the inclusion of direct quotes from participants to help tell the story of the data. Quotes used in the results section use experiences from each of the six participants. The pseudonyms used are as follows: Michael, Bruce, Jack, Oliver (key informant), John, and Marcus.

Influence of Others

The first theme, *influence of others*, includes three sub-themes: influence of coaches; the Brotherhood; and Being in the Public Eye. Each theme describes how behaviours and attitudes of hockey players are often influenced by those in power positions and the ones they spend the most time with which in turn influenced identity construction.

Influence of Coaches

Every one of the participants spoke about their coaches, usually as one of the most influential people in their life both in and out of hockey with their influence being both positive and negative. The reason that coaches can have such an influence on player's identities comes down to the amount of time spent with players, as well as the leadership role they play in an athlete's life, acting as a role model. For example, a key informant, Oliver highlighted that often coaches are ex-players themselves, brought up through hockey culture using the same language, behaviours, and attitudes that they learned, which in turn influences the new wave of hockey players.

Several participants mentioned that next to parents, coaches are some of the most influential people in their lives. Coaches usually have an influence on more than just play on the ice. Participants spoke about how they can go speak with their coaches about things such as relationships or problems at home. Coaches also influenced how players conduct themselves off the ice, sometimes intentionally and sometimes not. For example, Jack said that "The coaches really helped me become who I am today in terms of preparation, in terms of just standards, in terms of how I conduct myself off the ice." Another participant mentioned how their coach never brought their lessons outside of hockey but the lessons they did teach on the ice could be applied to other facets of life, showcasing the amount of influence that coaches can have on one's identity.

There were also different levels of influence on identity depending on the coaching style and amount of time spent with players. Hockey teams have multiple coaches and players go through several different coaches throughout their hockey careers. For example, Michael spoke about the difference between coaching styles and the effect they can have on a player:

...some push you to breaking points where they don't give you the light of day, they really stack the odds against you and it kind of helps you be a better person. You learn from it and you kind of push through it... [They] teach you how to stick with it and perseverance... You have other coaches that are on the other side of the spectrum where they don't care enough to the point where they're like, they give you all the opportunity and they don't care if players show up early, show up late... With those coaches, they ... influence you less because they kind of make you think 'well, that's not who I want to be' so then there's a benefit of having multiple coaches and then you get to see both sides ... each one forms a different way and ... builds you up, ... develops you as a person.

The idea that coaches are less influential when they portray characteristics of a person that the player does not want to emulate (e.g., rude or too tough) was mentioned by several participants. In the above quote, Michael spoke to a coaching style that he deemed lacklustre. Participants also spoke to how these coaching styles were tougher on the players which provides evidence for why athletes may be impacted more by some coaches and not others. For certain players, a really tough or distant coach can negatively affect a player. For example, as Michael described, "...you get coaches that ... drive you away from wanting to do something, they make you not like the game...". In another instance, Bruce spoke about how he did not feel supported by the coaching staff even though he was in the leadership group of the team. The lack of support from the coaching staff caused some issues with team cohesion and respect and made the year somewhat of a negative experience for the athlete. In all of these instances, the coaches were helping to shape the players' attitudes and the ways that they deal with different situations. Those lessons will be carried with players even after they have retired from hockey and may

influence their experiences, either negatively or positively, in the future in areas such as school, jobs, and relationships.

The Brotherhood

The next sub-theme is the influence of teammates. Teammates are most often the people that players spend most of their time with. According to Oliver, hockey is a very insular sport, meaning that athletes, even when in school, will be practicing and playing games away from their peers. Because of the time the sport takes up, they do not always interact with many others, especially those outside of their age group. Social interaction changes slightly as players grow up. They either stay on the path of hockey as their top priority or they choose another path such as post-secondary education where they get the chance to interact with new people outside of their sport. Thus, they will now have influences outside of hockey that can impact their identities.

The major influence participants saw teammates having was in regards to injuries or how they played on the ice, mostly in terms of encouragement to downplay injuries and to play more aggressively. Participants rarely went into detail about the influence of teammates outside of hockey; if they did, it was more about the stereotypes of hockey players. Like many other aspects in life (e.g., work, family, school), those who were older and in a position of leadership and power had more influence. For example, Marcus spoke about how team identity was shaped by the older players:

I think when you're younger you definitely look up to the older guys and then learn a ton from older guys when it's your first year in the league or whatever, so I feel like how the older guys, like [the] identity of the team, kind of shapes how younger guys do things in the team I guess.

Similar to the influence of coaches, the influence of teammates was very circular wherein new hockey players were influenced by the older ones who were influenced by the players before them. Attitudes and principles that have been around for years are still being taught because they keep getting passed down to the new and younger generations of hockey players. Thus, the way that players are coached and interact with one another is based upon generations of players before them.

Being in the Public Eye

Fans can have a major effect on how athletes behave on the ice as well as how they conduct themselves off the ice. For example, some participants shared their experiences playing in front of a packed arena and the energy they got from cheering fans. In contrast, they would then compare these feelings to the times when they had to play to empty seats and how those experiences negatively affected their playing experience, demonstrating the power that fans can have on players' feelings and behaviours. Other participants, including those that were competing at the OHL level, talked about the influence of fans when it came to what players did on the ice. For example, Marcus said that there were two things that got the biggest fan reactions, "goals and fights", and expressed that a reason some players fight is because that is what they know the fans want. Multiple participants discussed the increased excitement and better atmosphere when arena seats were full of cheering fans.

Players in the OHL, compared to ones playing in other lower level leagues, were more in the spotlight and therefore it was perceived that there was a more of an influence from society as spectatorship was greater and there was more media coverage. John spoke to how important it was to act "appropriately" off the ice:

We have been taught, we've been given speeches and stuff like that, that you're always being watched. But I think it actually is important because especially if you're in the community, you're a [team designation], people know who you are and if they see you being an idiot and driving like an idiot or swearing out in public then they're going to think all these guys are like that and it puts a bad rap on the organization and hockey players in general.

As John described, one of the main differences between the OHL level and other lower levels of hockey was the recognition of players within the community. There were billboards and bus stops around town that had pictures of the OHL players on them, so their faces were more well-known. As John described, players must often be on alert even off the ice because people are always watching. While fans could sometimes have a negative effect on players in terms of encouraging aggression and violence on the ice, they could also positively affect the behaviour of athletes off the ice in terms of helping to keep them in check and keeping them accountable for their actions. However, this point was contradicted by Oliver who talked about his own experience and perception of how hockey players can get a pass for their behaviours simply because they are hockey players: "You know, because ... it's so engrained in our culture and such a big part of Canadian [culture], that hockey culture is given a pass and almost celebrated and almost been taken into work culture and different cultures in our society". This quote describes not only the special privilege that athletes can receive because they are athletes but also because they are athletes of a sport that is highly valued in Canada. Overall, fans, both in the arena and out of the arena, influenced how the players thought about themselves as both athletes and men.

What it Means to be a Hockey Player

The next theme is used to explore the general experiences and feelings of being a hockey player. It is an overarching theme that encompasses how athletes are treated because they are hockey players, the different experiences they go through, and the lessons learned through the sport.

Learning to Make Your Way

One of the first questions I asked in the interviews was about the player's first and happiest experiences in their sporting careers. Most of the participants remembered a hockey story as their first sporting experience; they told stories of watching *Hockey Night in Canada* with their family or playing on their outdoor rink in the backyard. The common thread when talking about participants' happiest hockey experiences was the connection with friends and family they had during those times. Participants discussed not being the best team or best player but of the times they celebrated with their teammates and family and when they felt closest to those around them. One participant, Jack, spoke about a time finally winning a championship with teammates he had played with for years and reflecting on how he felt in that moment: "I think it was just seeing the looks on our faces that was probably when I was like 'this is what hockey is for.'" This story enforced not only the impact that hockey has on a player but also the real feelings behind why someone chooses to play hockey. Another participant, Michael, expressed how important hockey has been in his life and will continue to be: "...sports...they'll always be a part of who you are...but I have other plans and I'm totally ready to go do other things as well...it's always going to be a part of who you are." Although Michael will not be continuing with his hockey career after he finishes university, he recognized the impact hockey has had in helping shape the person he is today and who he will turn into.

Participants also discussed the ways in which hockey shaped them in different ways outside of the sport. For example, several participants brought up the travelling aspect of hockey and how leaving home at an early age helped to make them grow up quickly. For example, Michael spoke to living with billet families and how travelling has impacted him:

You grow up really quick...you're with a family but they don't do everything the same way your family does...you really gain your independence. Bouncing around you really get to learn how different people interact with each other, so you get a bunch of different personalities and you learn how to make your way.

This quote demonstrates the small differences within the hockey community compared to life outside the sport, such as moving away at age sixteen to live with another family and going to a new school to play hockey full-time. John also expressed how people view you differently when you reach a certain level of hockey:

You're kind of like someone they look up to ... and they kind of idolize you, I don't like saying that, but that's kind of how it is, like people look up to us and especially younger kids...

When asked what hockey had taught the participants, the number one response from participants was work ethic. Work ethic was mentioned in every single interview. Above all else hard work is taught on the ice through drills and practice which transfers into other facets of life such as work and school. However, as Oliver argued, hard work is a great characteristic but not the only thing that should be taught in hockey:

I think hockey gives people work ethic and teamwork and the ability to [develop] all these great characteristics, like the ability to learn from and work with a boss

and different things like that right. What I wish hockey gave is also the ability to engage with different minded people and allow people to truly be themselves.

Here, Oliver is expressing how he wishes hockey culture would be more inclusive so players would feel comfortable being themselves. He reiterates this point in the next quote:

I had spent my entire life sacrificing my sexuality and sacrificing who I am for the sport I loved and because of that I had a lot of depression and like I said substance abuse and different things and a lot of injuries.

This quote depicts the problem with having a high level of conformity in hockey because people will change who they are just to play the sport that they love. It is not only Oliver in the study who mentions the impact of trying to conform or appease others to play the sport. For example, Marcus also stated:

Well I didn't really know it [ankle] was sprained like I wanted to [play] cause it was a back to back game, we played the Friday night and then played again the Saturday and it was ... my first game in the OHL for the full season so I wanted to get the start the next day so just kind of played on it [injury] and I don't think it helped a whole lot cause it kind of bugged me all year.

Reaching a professional level of hockey is very competitive and this participant wanted to show everyone what he was capable of that he put his body in danger in order to do so. There are many factors within hockey culture that impact a player and their identities but sometimes there are factors outside of hockey that can also influence the game and the players, which is described in the next.

More Than Just a Hockey Player

The act of stereotyping involves believing that because some/most members of a particular group share certain characteristics, all members of that group must share those same characteristics (Kimmel, 2010). Often it is the mass media that (re)produces stereotypes, which tend to be negative in nature (MacDonald & Lafrance, 2018). Stereotypes are not inherently wrong but often do not encapsulate everyone in a particular group, which is the case with hockey players. However, stereotypes do have the power to influence the behaviour and attitudes of people in the group that is being stereotyped because of the pressure to conform to the perceived idea.

When asked what kind of stereotypes hockey players face, I received similar answers from all participants. For example, Michael said:

There's that stereotype around hockey players...you're just ... not a regular person, you're not a regular member of society. It's like they expect you to be mean or they expect you to be cocky or have some sort of arrogance or not be intelligent or that kind of thing.

Other stereotypes mentioned by participants included cockiness, popularity, being mean to girls, not caring about relationships, aggression, and other behaviours associated with being a hockey player. Stereotypes in hockey are often projected by those outside of the sport. For example, one participant mentioned that they faced a number of stereotypes going through high school but never really faced stereotypes within the hockey world because it was normal in the hockey culture. A couple of the other participants spoke about experiences where their teachers or peers would think they were not very smart because they were hockey players and would be surprised when they received good grades. Jack went as far as to downplay his identity as a hockey player when meeting new people to avoid certain stereotypes:

So I try to make it less [of] a priority in my life when I'm introducing myself 'cause I feel like I'm more than just hockey, which is why I don't really bring it up that much to some people, some new people that I meet. I just want them to know who I really am and not base themselves on maybe some stereotypes they might think 'oh, I play hockey, I follow this rule of hockey players'.

Jack also spoke about teammates who would make an effort to fit the stereotype because they believed to be a good hockey player, they needed to portray a certain image. Oliver also reiterated this point speaking about his experience of putting up a front when it came to expressing who he was:

...I tried to mask it [my sexuality] by being the stereotype of what a hockey player is. The perception of like, y'know, be like the next spitting chiclet or in the past there's like gongshow and stuff like that. And this hypermasculine macho bro who's a womanizer kind of jerk. I became that in an attempt to cover it up and it was finally at 23 that I said 'okay, I've got to figure this out.'

Oliver expressed how he thought identifying as a hockey player meant he had to change his other identities to fit into a specific stereotype. Gay hockey players are often seen as being damaged because of their sexuality taking away from their focus and performance (MacDonald, 2019) and as such Oliver thought the only way to be successful in hockey was to mask this identity. Although Oliver was eventually able to fight the stereotype and express his true self-identity, the pressure to portray a specific image hindered his mental and physical health.

Additionally, several participants shared their experiences of what happens on the ice when a player is not being "aggressive" enough, such as by not giving hard enough hits, not blocking a shot, or not getting up after a hit. In these instances, players are looked down on by

their own teammates and fans, being called names like “pussy” or “wimp”. Words such as these promote the aggressive style of play while also exemplifying the degradation of women.

Problematically, stereotypes that are built on the ice and in the locker room may flow into life outside of hockey. For example, Jack talked about how the culture of hockey can cross over the line and off the ice: “I think hockey players tend to be aggressive because in terms of their competition, that’s what they do in their game, and they try to bring it into a real life situation in which it doesn’t respond the same way.”

Jack brought up an important point that just because actions and behaviours work on the ice does not mean that the same outcome will work off the ice. When asked about how aggression may translate into situations off the ice, participants expressed how some players can be too aggressive off the ice, believing that because they are a hockey player, they are able to act in a more aggressive nature by starting fights off the ice or “chirping”. Because it is so engrained into who they are as a hockey player, it can be hard to draw the line and leave that part of their identity at the door when stepping into other situations.

Building a New Identity

The final theme deals with players’ experiences and perspectives on transitioning outside of hockey. Some participants expressed their passion for pursuing dreams outside of hockey while others never wanted to leave the sport. Interestingly, those that were at a higher level of hockey were those who wanted to stay in the sport while those attending university full-time were the ones ready to move on from the sport. For example, John, who plays at a higher competition level, expressed how far he wants to take his hockey career:

I still believe that I don't want to do anything else with my life, I just want to play hockey. It's what I want to do always. I couldn't imagine really having like a regular job as my career.

Similar to John, Marcus also talked about his feelings about continuing his hockey career and the potential of transitioning out of hockey:

...kind of take hockey as far as I can ... live that out and then first job I think kind of like doing something like fire[fighter], policing something like that and there's a lot of good connections to hockey and stuff like that into those jobs so yeah I think that would be good.

What was interesting about this quote was the connection with something Oliver said which was that hockey players often go into careers that have a similar culture to hockey, such as policing or firefighting and as Marcus said there are connections within those fields of work from the hockey community. On the other end of the spectrum, Jack was ready to move on from hockey and focus on his school in order to find a new career path:

I think I'm at the tail end of my career, I'll be honest. It's been a great run, but I think school is more important at this stage of my career. ...so I think focusing on ... different interests, you can build a new identity as a person and I think it's the stage of my career where I need to start focusing on my career 'cause hockey doesn't last forever, even if you're playing in the NHL.

Several other participants reiterated this point where they felt that they were at the tail end of their career but were happy to move on to having school as their top priority. These participants seemed to have identities outside of hockey and were actively trying to build on those identities. For example, Oliver discussed that the reasoning could be because those who

were enrolled in school full-time were introduced to more people and experiences and therefore had more opportunity to build other identities. Those that were keen to continue playing hockey had more of an exclusive identity surrounding hockey. However, it is not always easy to decide what to do outside of hockey as Bruce noted:

...it was kind of always a logical path where I didn't really have to think too much about the decisions I was making...and now I'm kind of faced with more important decisions it's harder to make those decisions sometimes.

In hockey, many decisions are made for you or your dream of making it to the professional level guides those decisions. Once out of sport it can be difficult to make decisions about a career or life path that you were not prepared for. For participants in this study, hockey allowed for the development of an athletic or sport identity but did not always allow for the growth of other identities.

Discussion

Overall, the results of this study demonstrated that there are many factors of hockey participation that contribute to the identity construction of athletes. While all of the participants were unique and had their own experiences, the data showed the key points of hockey that had the most impact on shaping who they are. The results showed both positive and negative aspects of hockey participation, including subjects such as stereotypes, influencers, and life outside of hockey. Furthermore, the themes developed from the data not only substantiate previous literature but also add new perspective and knowledge.

Influence

Ronkainen et al. (2016) describe part of the identity construction process as someone projecting an identity on another and that person accepting and internalizing it. Hockey players

are unique from the general population because of the time they spend with coaches and teammates while also being watched by fans. As participants mentioned, coaches and teammates often project the behaviours and attitudes they want to see, whether that be negative or positive. When using the concept of athletic identity to analyze why coaches are influential, it becomes apparent that athletic identity is a social role which is influenced by the feedback of others (Brewer et al., 1993). Because coaches spend so much time with players, there is opportunity for lots of feedback. As outlined by Pilus and Saadan (2009), coaching is not only about winning but about teaching the skills needed to be successful in society. Coaches not only help athletes form their identity as an athlete, they also help them to express who they are outside of sport.

Furthermore, hockey players are in the position of wanting to please their fans as they receive positive feedback from doing so. Edwards and Jones (2009) found that gender identity in football players was developed through the constant interaction with society's expectations of them as men demonstrating the relationship between the influence of others and the development of identities. According to Visek et al. (2010), athletes often monitor the reactions of coaches, teammates, and fans, and choose to perform behaviours that either verify their identity or counteract misperceptions about their identity. Similar to the findings by Pappas et al. (2004), participants in this study were aware of the positive and negative impact fans can have on the way they play hockey. The results of these studies are similar to the findings of this study where athletes usually engaged in more aggressive or "tough" behaviours based on reactions from others. Therefore, it is clear that identities, especially in the context of sport, are influenced by people they are surrounded by.

Stereotypes

There is no denying that the stereotyped image of a hockey player is something that some athletes emulate, whether it be their true self or not (MacDonald, 2012). For example, Edwards and Jones (2009) found that in football, another highly masculine sport, players would portray themselves in ways they thought society would want them to, instead of who they wanted to be. Most of the participants in this study, when asked about stereotypes, said that they distanced themselves from those stereotypes and expressed how they are different from those stereotypes. In their words, strategies they employed to distance themselves from those stereotypes included not looking the part, not acting the part, or having an interest in more than just hockey. However, it can sometimes be hard to not give into those stereotypes when they are still an active part of hockey. The goal of being a successful hockey player can sometimes cloud the choice to fight stereotypes because of the idea that to make it professional there is pressure to act a certain way (MacDonald, 2012; MacDonald & LaFrance, 2018).

Trying to fit in and become that ideal hockey player can negatively impact a player. The pain principle (Messner, 1990) is taught from a young age to boys, especially through sport, and it relates back to some of the quotes by participants in this study who down-played their injuries and were called sexist terms if they showed signs of being in pain. Tjønndal (2016) conducted a study looking at two biographies of retired NHL players and much like Oliver described that players will sacrifice their body and identities for the sport because of the pressure to fit into hockey culture. Stereotypes can also influence how players express their identities, including avoiding expressing certain aspects of their identities. For many players, the goal was to play professional hockey. Many participants thought that the way to get there was to emulate some of the stereotypical attributes, such as fighting and being aggressive. Participants mentioned the

backlash from teammates and fans if they failed to block a shot or execute a big hit. There was also pressure from scouts to be someone who sticks up for their teammates, again encouraging aggressiveness. Although most participants reported distancing themselves from other stereotypical attributes, such as partying, being degrading towards women, or only caring about hockey, aggression in hockey was still very much present.

The stereotypical image of a hockey player falls within the definition of hegemonic masculinity (MacDonald, 2012) and although some players display some stereotypical qualities, not all players do. There is only a small group that conforms to those stereotypes, but that same group is largely responsible for the negative stereotypes that ultimately influence all hockey players. When conducting a study on the representation of masculinities in Junior Ice hockey players, MacDonald and LaFrance (2018) found that participants attributed some hockey stereotypes to themselves while the current study data showed most participants distanced themselves from most stereotypical hockey behaviours. However, similar to MacDonald and LaFrance (2018), participants in this study saw teammates exemplify traits of a stereotypical hockey players while being judged by society for these same stereotypes.

Participants in this study also identified that there was a difference with respect to the level of influence stereotypes may have depending on the level of hockey. Specifically, lower levels like the university level were viewed as being less susceptible to stereotypes because players were exposed to different things and usually at the tail end of their careers, whereas those in Junior were still on the path to National Hockey League and were constantly surrounded by hockey culture. Other scholars have noted that hockey players at a higher level will often have a higher athletic identity (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2018). Those that play at the OHL level, even if they are in school, can separate their academic identity from their athletic identity. However,

those that play at the university level may be less able to separate the academic context from the sport because they are so integrated (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2018). Based on the literature (e.g., Brewer et al., 1993), it makes sense that those who are more engrained in the sport of hockey and have a greater athletic identity are having a more difficult time thinking of transitioning out of hockey while those who have had more social roles have future plans outside of hockey making it easier to transition out of the sport.

Overall, the experiences and situations that athletes are in outside of their sport also play a role in their future decisions and identity building. Student-athletes have certain grade percentages that must be maintained to stay on the team while representing the school, such that it is harder to separate those identities. However, at any level, stereotypes may shape an athlete's identity to various degrees. Whether players have to fight the stereotypes or whether they choose to exemplify stereotypical qualities, stereotypes have the impact of influencing how a hockey player sees themselves both on and off the ice. Furthermore, all participants shared stories of the fan side of hockey. Whether they were playing in the Junior A level or the OHL level, there were always adoring fans watching. They were now in a position of being a role model for younger kids that are working towards being where they are and where adults are putting them on a pedestal because hockey is so important in Canada. According to Robidoux (2001, 2002) and Adams (2006), hockey is considered just as important to Canadians as employment or education, which may be why players receive so much attention and in the words of the participants, are idolized. Being in that position would certainly have an impact on how the players see themselves and how they present themselves. Researchers have outlined how important hockey is in Canadian culture in terms of being an integral part of national identity (Allain, 2014;

MacDonald, 2014) and Oliver further expressed how some negative aspects of hockey can be overlooked because hockey is seen as Canada's sport and part of our identity as a country.

Identities

Optimal identity development takes place when athletes are able to experience different activities and interact with different people (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2019) which was demonstrated in this study when comparing those who went to school full-time and those that played hockey full-time. The data suggests that those who had more experiences outside of hockey, such as interactions with classmates, had constructed identities separate from sport. Exploratory behaviour and interacting with people of many backgrounds is a key component to optimal identity development (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017).

The results of this study add to the literature on an exclusive athletic identity and the possible repercussions it may have in the future for athletes. Those who saw hockey as a career choice may be at risk for athletic identity foreclosure (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017) because they are not set up to transition out of the sport when the time comes. Specifically, participants may experience identity foreclosure because they are not looking beyond hockey as a career. Some participants did not have a back-up plan for when their hockey career would be over nor were they being pushed to think about life after hockey. As mentioned in the results section, it was mentioned from a participant as well as the key informant the idea that transitioning into a career of policing or firefighting may be easier than other occupations. Like hockey, occupations such as policing are highly masculinized (Prokos & Padavic, 2002) which may be a reason why those who play hockey are comfortable transitioning into such an occupation. With a similar culture it allows players to continue enacting their gendered expression throughout their profession. The idea of still being a part of a "team" and being in a profession that is looked at as an important

part of society may also be a reason wherein hockey players keep a part of their identity while transitioning outside of the sport.

While the authors of other studies have discussed identity construction in relation to masculinity before (Allain, 2014; MacDonald, 2014; Skuce, 2018), the data shows that there is a multitude of factors that influence how a hockey player develops their identities. Although there are many similarities between participant stories, the process of developing their identities was still highly individualistic. Carless and Douglas (2013) identified three narrative types that explain how athletes' identities are created which include the performance narrative, the discovery narrative, and the relational narrative. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into full detail from every participant but each of the six participants could fit into one of these narrative types, adding to the narrative research on sporting identities. Specifically, some participants had identities that prioritized sport and winning over other facets of life while other participants explored life in a more multifaceted sense. The major take home message from the results was the multiplicity of factors related to sport participation that influence hockey players to develop their identities and the prominence of some factors over others.

Future Research and Implications

A limitation of this study was the lack of diversity in participants. Each participant presented as being white and several participants talked about their heterosexuality. For future research, time should be taken to recruit a diverse range of participants including those of minorities to fully understand the impact hockey culture has on shaping a player's identity (Macdonald, 2019). Additionally, information gathered from participants was limited because of lack of time and resources, and potentially because of being a researcher who is a woman in a male dominated space (see Morrison, 2021). Future studies should take into consideration the

positionality of the researcher to fully explore how and with whom participants share their stories. A longitudinal study would also be beneficial to understand how identities change over time, especially for those transitioning out of sport or to a different level of sport (Carless & Douglas, 2013). Finally, future research should include athletes from different sports, as well as female athletes in hockey, as the culture of sport may vary and thus have different implications for identity construction. Further exploration using any of the avenues mentioned above has the potential to enhance knowledge on the role of sport participation in identity development. Despite these limitations, this study had several strengths including representing a variety of hockey players in Northeastern Ontario, the use of conversational interviews, and the use of a key informant.

There are various implications from this study for both practical and research contexts. The current study has the potential for helping athletes to reap the benefits from sport participation while reducing the negative consequences by understanding the aspects of sport which drive positive and negative identity development (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). Understanding the complexity of athlete identities is important for both researchers and practitioners to understand the uniqueness of individuals both in and out of sport to improve sporting experiences and reduce identity oppression. Furthermore, the results of this study may help in understanding the multiple identities of hockey players and contribute to the research surrounding the value and privilege some identities hold over others. By first understanding the identities and the ways they are influenced, coaches and practitioners may be able to facilitate a more culturally inclusive sport environment which benefits athletes (Ge, 2018).

Conclusion

There are many aspects of sport and sport culture that contribute to the way players construct their identities. The results of this study have added to the literature on athlete identities by providing a more comprehensive understanding of how participation in sport can impact hockey players who play at a competitive level. Three major themes were presented in the study: the influence of others, what it means to be a hockey player, and life outside of hockey. Each theme portrayed the unique experiences of hockey players that ultimately play a role in how athletes construct their identities. Although each participant has their own narrative, there are similarities between stories that help explain their participation in hockey as a whole. Coaches, teammates, and fans/society all project certain identities onto hockey players where they either choose to accept or reject components of those identities. Experiences different from other peers, such as moving away from home at an early age or constantly being on the road, contribute to identity development. Stereotyping, especially surrounding masculinity, from those in and outside of the sport can influence who players think they should be and how they express themselves. Lastly, balancing multiple identities and choosing which ones are more salient plays a large role in the future of athletes. Overall, the findings demonstrate the importance of sport in developing athlete identities and the pros and cons of such development. It is critical for researchers, practitioners, and coaches to understand how participation in sport may impact athletes in both positive and negative ways, to mitigate the negative consequences and make sport a more inclusive space.

References

- Adams, M.L. (2006). The Game of Whose Lives? Gender, Race, and Entitlement in Canada's 'National' Game. In D. Whitson and R. Gruneau (Eds.) *Artificial Ice: Hockey, Culture and Commerce* (pp. 71-84). Peterborough: Broadway Press.
- Allain, K. A. (2014). 'What happens in the room stays in the room': Conducting Research with Young Men in the Canadian Hockey League. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 6(2), 205-219.
- Allain, K. A. (2008). 'Real Fast and Tough': The Construction of Canadian Hockey Masculinity. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 25, 462-481.
- Atkinson, M. (2010). It's Still Part of the Game: Violence and Masculinity in Canadian Ice Hockey. In L. K. Fuller (Ed.), *Sexual Sports Rhetoric: Historical and Media Contexts of Violence* (pp. 15–30). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Blinde, E. M., Taub, D. E., & Han, L. (1993). Sport participation and women's personal empowerment: Experiences of the college athlete. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 17(1), 47-60.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). APA handbook of research methods in psychology. *Cooper H, Thematic analysis*, 2.
- Brewer, B. W., & Petitpas, A. J. (2017). Athletic identity foreclosure. *Current opinion in psychology*, 16, 118-122.
- Brewer, B. W., Van Raalte, J. L., & Linder, D. E. (1993). Athletic identity: Hercules' muscles or Achilles heel? *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 24, 237–254.

- Campbell, K. (2020, June 18). More explosive and shocking allegations against junior hockey in newly filed lawsuit. *The Hockey News*. <https://www.si.com/hockey/news/more-explosive-and-shocking-allegations-against-junior-hockey-in-newly-filed-lawsuit>
- Carless, D., & Douglas, K. (2013). "In the Boat" but "Selling Myself Short": Stories, narratives, and Identity Development in Elite Sport. *The sport psychologist*, 27(1), 27-39.
- Coakley, J. (2008). *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies* (10th ed). New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Connell, R.W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (1st ed). London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications.
- Edwards, K. E., & Jones, S. R. (2009). " Putting My Man Face On": A Grounded Theory of College Men's Gender Identity Development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(2), 210- 228.
- Eitzen, S., & Sage, G. (2008). *Sociology of North American Sport* (8th ed.). Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: WW Norton & Company.
- Frank, A.W. (2010). *Letting stories breathe: A socio-narratology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Ge, Y. (2018). *The intersecting social identities of Canadian national team female boxers* (Doctoral dissertation, Laurentian University of Sudbury).
- Gergen, K. (1999). *An invitation to social construction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

- Hernandez, J. (2021, May 4). *Misogyny, racism and bullying prevalent across Canadian youth hockey, survey finds*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/misogyny-racism-bullying-across-canadian-youth-hockey-1.6014070>
- Holstein, J.A., & Gubrium, J.F. (2000). *The self we live by*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Kimmel, M. 2010. *Misframing Men*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Kroshus, E., Kubzansky, L. D., Goldman, R. E., & Austin, S. B. (2014). Norms, Athletic Identity, and Concussion Symptom Under-reporting Among Male Collegiate Ice Hockey Players: a Prospective Cohort Study. *Annals of behavioral medicine*, 49(1), 95-103.
- Levy, D. P. (2007). Hegemonic masculinity. *The Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology*.
- MacDonald, C. (2012). *“That’s Just What People Think of a Hockey Player, Right?”: Manifestations of Masculinity Among Major Junior Ice Hockey Players* (Doctoral dissertation, Concordia University).
- MacDonald, C. A. (2014). Masculinity and Sport Revisited: A Review of Literature on Hegemonic Masculinity and Men's Ice Hockey in Canada. *Canadian Graduate Journal of sociology and criminology*, 3(1), 95-112.
- MacDonald, C. A. (2018). Insert Name of Openly Gay Hockey Player Here: Attitudes Towards Homosexuality Among Canadian Male Major Midget AAA Ice Hockey Players, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 35(4), 347-357. Retrieved May 29, 2021, from <http://journals.humankinetics.com.librweb.laurentian.ca/view/journals/ssj/35/4/article-p347.xml>
- MacDonald, C., & Lafrance, M. (2018). “Girls Love Me, Guys Wanna Be Me”: Representations of Men, Masculinity and Junior Ice Hockey in Gongshow Magazine. *The International Journal of Sport and Society*, 10(1), pp.1-19.

- MacDonald, C. (2019) "It's hard to be different in the NHL": Six former National Hockey League players discuss conformity in relation to the lack of openly gay players in the league. *Hockey in Society*. <https://hockeyinsociety.com/2019/09/09/its-hard-to-be-different-in-the-nhl-six-former-national-hockey-league-players-discuss-conformity-in-relation-to-the-lack-of-openly-gay-players-in-the-league/>
- MacDonald, C. A., & McGillis, B. (in press). "I never thought I'd get here, I thought I'd be dead" An In-depth Interview with an Openly Gay Former Professional Ice Hockey Player. In C. A. MacDonald & R. J. Edwards. (Eds), *Overcoming the Neutral Zone Trap: Hockey's agents of change*. University of Alberta Press.
- McAdams, D. (1993). *The Stories We Live by*. New York, NY: The Guildford Press.
- McLeod, J. (1997). *Narrative and Psychotherapy*. London: Sage.
- Messner, M. (1990). Boyhood, Organized sports, and the Construction of Masculinities. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 18(4), 416-444.
- Papathomas, A., & Lavalley, D. (2014). Self-starvation and the Performance Narrative in Competitive Sport. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 15, 688–695.
- Pappas, N. T., McKenry, P. C., & Catlett, B. S. (2004). Athlete Aggression on the Rink and off the Ice: Athlete Violence and Aggression in Hockey and Interpersonal Relationships. *Men and Masculinities*, 6(3), 291-312.
- Pilus, A. H. M., & Saadan, R. (2009). Coaching Leadership Styles and Athlete Satisfaction Among Hockey Team. *Journal of Human Capital Development (JHCD)*, 2(1), 77-87.
- Pringle, R.G. and Hickey, C., 2010. Negotiating Masculinities Via the Moral Problematization of Sport. *Sociology of sport journal*, 27 (2), 115–138.

- Prokos, A., & Padavic, I. (2002). "There Oughtta Be a Law Against Bitches": Masculinity Lessons in Police Academy Training. *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 9(4), 439–459. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.00168>
- Robidoux, M. A. (2001). *Men At Play: A Working Understanding of Professional Hockey*. Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Robidoux, M. A. (2002). Imagining a Canadian Identity through Sport: A Historical Interpretation of Lacrosse and Hockey. *Spring 115*(456), 209-225.
- Ronkainen, N. J., & Ryba, T. V. (2019). Developing Narrative Identities in Youth Pre-elite Sport: Bridging the Present and the Future. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 1-15.
- Ronkainen, N. J., Kavoura, A., & Ryba, T. V. (2016). A Meta-study of Athletic Identity Research in Sport Psychology: Current Status and Future Directions. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 9(1), 45-64.
- Skuce, T. (2018). Re-framing and Re-enacting Masculinities in Elite-level Ice Hockey Players. *Research Connection*. Brandon University. 3(2)
- Stryker, S. (1968). Identity Salience and Role Performance: The relevance of symbolic interaction theory to family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 558-564.
- Tjønndal, A. (2016). NHL Heavyweights: Narratives of Violence and Masculinity in Ice Hockey. *Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research*, 70(1), 55-68.
- Visek, A. J., Watson, J. C., Hurst, J. R., Maxwell, J. P., & Harris, B. S. (2010). Athletic Identity and Aggressiveness: A Cross-cultural Analysis of the Athletic Identity Maintenance Model. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 8(2), 99-116.

Yukhymenko-Lescroart, M. A. (2018). On Identity and Sport Conduct of Student-athletes:

Considering Athletic and Academic Contexts. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 34, 10-

19.

Studying Male Ice Hockey Players: Reflexive Thoughts From a Master's Student

Kirsten Morrison¹, M.A. Candidate

¹School of Rural and Northern Health, Laurentian University

The current manuscript is formatted for submission to the Journal of Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health

Abstract

Reflexive writing is often left out of published articles due to word constraints and lack of emphasis on the significance of a reflexive research practice. The purpose of this paper is to share how my positionalities impacted my research and to encourage other scholars to do the same. The paper follows the steps of reflexive work I took conducting a study involving interviewing male hockey players on how they construct their identities through sport participation. A background of the research study is given before delving into the reflexive work. I share the reasons I started my research and how the methodology of my research aligns with writing a reflexivity paper. The paper follows the route of my research study using excerpts from my reflexivity journal to help explain the decisions made along the way as a researcher. The bulk of the paper is dedicated to how I conducted reflexive work in my Master's research study and how I impacted my research throughout the research process. I focus on why I chose my research topic, the recruitment process, interviews with participants, and how I interpreted the data through the analysis stage. I discuss my experiences, thoughts, and feelings in relation to already published reflexive work and draw conclusions about the impact original research can have on the researcher, not just the participants.

Keywords: reflexivity, novice researcher, positionality, reflexive, qualitative research

Studying Male Ice Hockey Players: Reflexive Thoughts From a Masters Student

Introduction

Reflexivity is an important part of research as a way of interacting with and understanding the research you are a part of as a researcher. While being a reflexive researcher is highly beneficial and taught as an important aspect of qualitative research, too frequently it is excluded from published papers, often because of word limits and the idea that study results are more important (Poulton 2012). The purpose of this paper is to dedicate the space of what would be study results and discussion to presenting my reflexive work on a study that was conducted with competitive male hockey players in Northern Ontario as part of my Master's research. In this paper I share my experiences and perspectives as a researcher who is a woman in a male dominated space who is also a first-time interviewer trying to navigate the qualitative research space. Poulton (2012) suggests that researchers should be more transparent in the research process. Research can sometimes be messy, it is not always a smooth process, and researchers have to deal with a variety of challenging situations that all contribute to study outcomes. Many aspects of the research process are shaped by the researcher's personal biographies, such as their research interests, access to the field, relationships with participants, and the representation and interpretation of the data (Poulton 2012).

Reflexivity has been practiced for more than a century but a shift occurred in the 1970s with respect for more conscious writing including researcher bias (Mitchell et al. 2018). Scholars criticized mainstream research for perpetuating power inequalities regarding race, class, gender, and ability (Kincheloe and McLaren 1994). As such, reflexivity is used to acknowledge and diminish those imbalances. Reflexivity is the practice of acknowledging the effect of the researcher through every step of the research process. Writing reflexively about the research

process is like looking in a mirror, situating scholars within their research and the effect their positioning may have on the setting, participants, interview questions, data collection, and interpretation of the data (Berger 2015). There are many positionalities of a researcher (e.g., gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation, personal experiences, biases) and according to Berger (2015), these positionalities may influence research in three ways. First, access to the field may be impacted because of participants being more willing to share experiences with someone they feel understands their situation (De Tona 2006). Second, the researcher-participant relationship may be impacted which influences the type of information participants share with the researcher. Third, the perspectives and background of the researcher influences the way they construct and see the world, the language they use, the way they ask questions, and the way they interpret the information gathered to shape the findings and conclusions of their research (Kacem and Chaitin 2006).

In this paper, I argue that qualitative researchers should engage in reflexive work to better understand how they influence their research and strengthen the accuracy and credibility of their research (Berger 2015). Engaging meaningfully in a process of reflexivity is important when conducting research across different fields of study due to the various positionalities of scholars and understanding the how and why of research findings. A core problem in the methodology is that our own biases feature in all of our research choices which must be acknowledged to challenge the notion that we are not impartial to our research (McGannon and Johnson 2009). Throughout the paper, my gender difference, racial proximity to participants, and being an outsider to the hockey community will all be addressed in relation to how these positionalities were expressed in my research.

Background

To help understand the reflexive work presented in this paper, I will first give a brief outline of the study that was conducted. A descriptive qualitative study was conducted with cis-gender, white male competitive hockey players in Northeastern Ontario, to explore how they develop their identities through sport participation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants, including one retired professional hockey player who acted as a key informant. Questions were designed to explore the effects of sport participation on forming the identities of hockey players, both in and out of sport. While the athletes were asked many questions about their personal histories and experiences with their sport, questions included specific inquiries about themes that appear in the literature. For example, participants were asked about their early and happiest sporting experiences, as well as the influences of coaches, and their experiences playing in different geographic regions. The kinds of stereotypes in hockey, as well as feelings of masculinity and showing aggression, were also discussed. Questions were open-ended and participants were welcome to interpret and speak about experiences in the ways they wanted to. Participants were all males and between the ages of 20 and 37.

Before I set up any interviews, I was advised by my committee to consider that being a young novice researcher who is a woman doing interviews with young males may not be easy and that I should be aware of the impact being a woman could have on my research. When reading literature on other studies with male athlete participants I read examples of male participants expressing their dominance with researchers who are women (e.g., Allain 2014), making me wary that I would not be respected or listened to in the way that I hoped. Experiences such as Allain's (2014), paired with my inexperience and assumption I was going into a closed space, created a sense of apprehension. Along with these thoughts and many others, I started the

data collection process and through my reflexive writing realized many things - some surprising, some not.

This paper draws on the reflexive journal I have been writing in since the beginning of my Master's research (e.g., picking my research topic, writing my literature review, and on-going discussions with my supervisory committee) and is supplemented with a reflexive project assigned by my committee. It was not the intention at the beginning of the research process that my reflections would be written up for a publication on their own; however, after speaking with my supervisory committee and realizing that the researcher-participant relationship has such an important influence on the research, my experiences and the challenges I faced may be worth sharing. Within the last decade, many reflexive pieces of writing have been published, especially in the sports literature as it has become more acceptable for researchers to write about their personal experiences and perspectives and how these experiences have impacted their research (Douglas 2009; Drummond 2010; McGannon and Johnson 2009; Schinke et al. 2012). As outlined by Schinke et al. (2012), it is important for researchers not to pretend neutrality in the research process and to ground themselves within the research.

My research began with the idea that I wanted to better understand the influence of sport, and the cultural and social influences that come with being an athlete. In high school, I watched a documentary called *The Hunting Ground* (Dick & Ziering 2015), which addresses sexual assault on college campuses in the United States. There was one story presented in this documentary that stuck out to me. This story was of Jameis Winston, a Florida State quarterback destined for the National Football League (NFL). He was accused of sexual assault and yet went on to help the school win a championship while his accuser was receiving death threats. Watching this film led me to formulate several questions: Why did he do it? Why did the school shove it under the rug?

Why did other students only blame the victim? What effect do these actions, along with playing football, have on this young man and the decisions he makes? Are athletes more entitled and more likely to commit acts such as sexual assault simply because they are an athlete?

For my undergraduate thesis I conducted a study examining the media portrayals of NFL athletes accused of sexual assault and how these stories may impact their identity or their perceived identity (Morrison 2017). This research acted as a stepping stone to what I would then go on to do for graduate level research. My institution does not have a football team, so I decided to choose another sport that was still considered to be highly masculinized which was hockey. I wanted to know how playing hockey could impact an athlete, as well as how participation in hockey could play a role in constructing their identities. More specifically, I wanted to know how certain characteristics of hockey (and sport more broadly), such as masculinity and aggression, would translate into a player's identity.

I am a twenty-five-year-old white, cis-gender, heterosexual female Master's student in Interdisciplinary Health who found a passion with sport psychology/sociology research. I have an undergraduate degree in sports psychology and am constantly learning about the sport research world and how I fit within it. I grew up in a small town attending my sibling's soccer games and eventually it was my turn to start the sport, many times being one of the few girls on the team. I went on to play most varsity sports through high school and continued to play recreationally throughout university. One sport I did not play was hockey, partly due to the fact it was an expensive sport and partly because it was very much a men's sport when I was growing up. I do have many friends who play or have played hockey (both male and female) and have been a spectator of the game, however I am still considered and still consider myself an outsider to the sport. Even though I am an outsider, hockey is still an important part of Canadian culture,

especially in places such as Northeastern Ontario and I wanted to get a closer look at a sport I have only seen from afar. I have always been a person who loves to observe, and am drawn into what others are doing and saying, especially in social contexts. I always wanted to know more, always wanting to understand people's stories and how their behaviours and attitudes change, which is why I think I took such a liking to the sociology side of sport. Therefore, situating myself was the first step of the reflexivity process. In the next section I will discuss what reflexivity is and how I have incorporated it throughout the research process.

Understanding My Role as a Researcher

There is no exact method of how to proceed with a reflexivity (Watt 2007), as it is a very personable and continuous process that cannot be broken down into simple steps to follow. However, there are some guidelines in the literature that advise on how to approach a reflexivity. Multiple researchers recommend writing notes to oneself during the research process, suggesting that putting down ideas and thoughts, almost like a journal, is actually the start of the data analysis stage (e.g., Berger 2015; Glesne and Peshkin 1992; Maxwell 1996; Watt 2007). Keeping a reflexive journal was the approach that best worked for me to start my reflexivity. Other approaches such as member checking, peer support network, and using an audit trail are also suggested and ones that I used in my research (Berger 2015).

My reflexive process started when I was narrowing down what I wanted to research and how I wanted to research it. Fortunately, I had a great deal of choice in what I wanted to study, and thus the influence on my research started at an early stage. The bulk of my reflexivity notes came from the interview and data analysis stages. After each interview I would sit down and write down my feelings, perspectives, and thoughts I had about how the interview went, what was said in the interview, and what those thoughts could mean. This reflection time was

designated time that I gave to writing in my reflexivity journal. However, I found myself having times between interviews where something about the interview would pop into my head and where I would take the time to write down what I was thinking (e.g., as a quick note on my phone or on a scrap piece of paper), demonstrating the continuousness of the reflexivity process. Even when not actively working on my research, I would also be cognizant of thoughts that would come to mind and make sure to make note of it to further explore at a later time. For example, hockey culture has been prominent in the media lately and sometimes after reading an article I would relate these stories back to my thesis work and some of the stories participants shared.

As an early researcher, it was important for me to go through the whole process myself, such that I conducted all of the interviews myself, transcribed all of the interviews, and then analyzed them. I followed the steps of reflexive thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2012) with a social constructionist positioning wherein knowledge is created and not discovered and everything important in the world is socially constructed (Crotty 1998). My choice of data analysis aligns with my epistemological paradigm given the nature of analyzing the data in a way of generating similar themes from the data. Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis is in and of itself a very reflexive process by continuously going back to the data and re-reading transcripts and coding charts. Additionally, writing a reflexivity is also aligned with social constructionism because through reflexivity, matters relating to the identity of the researcher are acknowledged in relation to how they shape knowledge construction (McGannon & Johnson 2009).

According to social constructionist approaches to the study of identity formation, my interaction with participants has an impact on my research and reflecting on those interactions

allows me to gain further knowledge into my research. Writing a reflexivity journal and conducting all steps of the research process myself also helped to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of my research (Berger 2015; Lietz et al. 2006; Poulton 2012). I was sure that the interpretations I made in this paper are grounded in my perspectives and understanding of the data. Transcribing the interviews gave me an opportunity to relive those interviews and really listen to what participants were saying without the pressure of doing the interview and thinking about what to say next. I was able to reflect on myself as an interviewer by listening to the audio recordings and re-reading the transcripts.

It was not until the end of data analysis and part of the way through writing where I could really look back at the research process from start to finish and reflect on how I as a researcher influenced the process. Lietz et al. (2006) were right when they said that when a reflexive researcher considers the ways that they both help and impede the process of co-constructing meanings that they are enhancing the quality of the research. Researchers are then able to interpret and present the data better and address their contribution to the process of knowledge production (Berger 2015).

To analyze my reflexivity in preparation for writing this paper I read through my reflexivity journal a number of times making note of what I thought were some of the more important reflections (e.g., what was more meaningful and what related to the literature I was reading). For example, some of my reflections were just simple observations, such as one interview going better than another interview or a wish that I had phrased a certain question differently. However, other reflections were more complex and went beyond the surface level. Some reflections were focused on looking inward and facing my own biases or ways of thinking or trying to make sense of the interviews. Choosing which reflections I would include for this

paper was hard, but I tried to choose the reflections that gave an overall picture of the interview process from start to finish in an effort to tell the whole story. As previously mentioned, I also chose reflections that related to past literature (e.g., my clothing choices, how the participants spoke to me) and even themes that I generated through data analysis for my study (see Morrison et al., in preparation, for the results of this study).

A Deeper Self Analysis

The reflexive insights that are presented in this section follow the path of the research process from the inception of my research topic through to the recruitment stage and the interview process. Excerpts from my reflexive journal are presented from various points in time during the research process and those excerpts are discussed in greater detail in connection to the larger body of literature. To tell the full story, it was important for me to organize the reflexive insights in a way that flowed and made sense chronologically; thus, they are broken up into three broad sections: 1) finding the right path; 2) what a hockey player looks like to me, and; 3) the research process.

Finding the Right Path

I do believe that sports are an integral part of our society and that they offer people of all ages many benefits outside of the obvious physical ones. Participation in sports has taught me a lot, coaches have taught me a lot, and the experiences I have had in sport have helped shape me as a person. For example, I learned the importance of teamwork and supporting those around you. I also learned the importance of listening to leadership and knowing your strengths so you can best help your team in the collective goal. I do, however, also believe that there are negative aspects to organized sport and that these negatives can have a significant impact on how a person thinks and acts. Specifically, negative aspects of sport such as violence, a win-at-all costs

mentality, and sexist, homophobic, and racist attitudes (Allain 2014; Macdonald 2014) are all problematic. Sport, and specifically hockey, acts as a major socialization space for young boys and men but can become problematic when certain traits, as mentioned above, are embodied (Skuce, 2018). Conditioned behaviours such as heteronormativity, homophobia, and effeminophobia become even more problematic when they are transferred into a broader social context outside of hockey. There are issues in sport that can be changed without changing the positive benefits of sport in terms of fun, competition, or development. The first step to making these changes is to learn how athletes are impacted by these discourses and how their experiences in hockey translate to their everyday life.

To be honest, when I was thinking about what and who I wanted to research, I did not think much about how my positionality would influence the research. Reflexivity was discussed very rarely in my undergraduate classes and it was not until my thesis year and the start of my graduate degree where I learned what being a reflexive researcher meant. I had produced a section on reflexivity in my undergraduate thesis but the tricky thing about reflexivity is that it does not come naturally and is something that needs to be worked on continuously (Berger 2015; McGannon and Johnson 2009). In my thesis proposal, I spoke about why I wanted to do this research, but I did not think about how I as a person would influence the type of data I would collect or the way I would interpret the data. It was not until I took a qualitative methods course in my first semester of my Master's where we were tasked with looking inwards and writing down how our positionality would influence our research. I had a tough professor who pushed me to really look beyond the surface and have been trying to do so ever since. My whole committee has been very supportive and encouraging of the fact that my reflexivity would be an important part of my research study and that I should pay close attention to how I may affect my

own research. The next two sections go into greater detail on how I situated myself in the research and how I may have impacted my research from data collection through data analysis. I first draw on a reflexive piece based on the request of a committee member and secondly discuss excerpts from my reflexive journal.

What a Hockey Player Looks Like to Me

“What does a hockey player look like to me?” When I was asked this question by one of my committee members, I became a little guarded and said “well, I think anyone can play hockey, but there are stereotypical looks out there that scream hockey player.” She said to go home and make a collage of what I thought a hockey player looked like. So, I did. I wrote about it in my reflexivity journal when I had time to think it over:

I had to come face to face with my own bias when in a committee meeting I mentioned that one of my participants did not look like a typical hockey player and she asked me what I thought a typical hockey player looks like and to include it in my reflexivity. I didn't really want to admit that I had a bias on what I thought a typical hockey player looks like as I would be giving into the stereotype but then I thought there is a stereotype for a reason and it is part of what feeds into that hockey culture and the pressure to act or look a certain way.

I do believe that anyone can play hockey, but that does not mean I am without an unconscious bias of what a ‘typical’ hockey player looks like. These discussions with my committee really got me thinking about my own ideas of hockey players, as well as what is shown in the media, and what is projected from hockey players themselves. My wariness of admitting I had a bias of what a hockey player looks like was rooted in not wanting to accept that I was part of the problem. I assumed that because I had a pre-conceived notion of what a hockey

player looks like, I was contributing to the mentality that anyone who was different than the picture in my head was not good enough. While I know physical looks do not equate skill, the assumption that one had to look the part most likely came from how hockey players are portrayed in the media especially in shows like “Hockey Wives” and watching my friends ogle over Sidney Crosby. When creating my collage, I searched through Google Images to identify pictures of hockey players, both current and past, and chose the ones that best fit the idea in my head (see Figure 1 below).

I chose the method of using Google Images as it seemed to be the most accessible in terms of conveying the picture in my head. Often when I think about what a hockey player looks like I think about people that I know who play hockey. I think of their physical characteristics - usually muscular, tall, attractive, and white. Being tall and muscular is a functional part of playing hockey which may be why so many players fit that description. However, we should ask the question of whether players are chosen because of functionality alone or if there are some self-replicating choices such as choosing white players or those who look more fit than others. I also think about how the media portrays hockey players that often influence my conception of a hockey player (Judd 2017; Poniatowski and Whiteside 2012). For example, the “goon” persona of the hockey player is often shown in the media in movies and television shows as the player who is the largest on the team who is missing teeth and is constantly getting into fights while also not being presented for their intelligence (Fitzsimmons 2013).

Based on my perceptions, I compiled several pictures of the different ‘types’ of people that I imagine when I think of hockey. I categorized them into two categories with both categories comprising of only white players: 1) the clean shaven, good looking player, who cares about their appearance but can back up those looks with their skill and speed, and; 2) the “goon”

type player outlined in movies and TV shows, including players with long hair and a missing tooth or two.

The similarity between these two categories is something that can be seen on a person but is not necessarily part of their appearance; that is confidence - or, in my assumption, cockiness - wherein I believe that all hockey players exhibit some level of confidence or arrogance that really defines them as a hockey player, both on and off the ice. It was hard to choose pictures that showed the confidence aspect of how I see hockey players, but it is worth noting that it plays a large part in how someone is perceived.



Figure 1. A collage of nine headshots of hockey players. Google Images.

When I was compiling my collage of hockey pictures from Google Images, one thing became very apparent to me: all of the players I had selected for my collage were white men. I wondered if that was because of my own bias or because of the selection from Google. I think it is a bit of both. Messner (2002) speaks to the fact that hockey is dominated by white males, so it makes sense that most of the images of real hockey players that I selected are white. The bias of a hockey player being white is somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy in the sport because statistically the majority of hockey players are white (Judd 2017) and thus when I think of a hockey player (as a white person myself) I see a white hockey player. My thinking of a

stereotypical hockey player as white is most likely shared by many other people which then further cements the idea that to play hockey one must be white.

Additionally, Watson (2017) writes about the Canadian national identity being represented by white, middle-class, heterosexual men, and hockey being a marker for that identity; thus, also being filled with white, middle-class, heterosexual men. A 2013 study done by Statistics Canada found 77% of Canadians identified hockey as a national symbol (Sinha 2015). It is because of the projection from the media (Poniatowski and Whiteside 2012), but also the fact that most hockey players are white, that the picture I have in my head is of a white hockey player. I scrolled through half a dozen pages on Google, each filled with at least one hundred head shots of hockey players, and I only came across a handful of Indigenous and racialized male-coded people on each page with not a single female player popping up. It is important to note that all of my participants in my study were also white, most likely because of the ratio mentioned before but also because of the geographic location of the present study. Although not all participants were originally from Northeastern Ontario, the majority of the area is made up of White people with about ten percent Indigenous population (2016 Census, Statistics Canada). Thus, it was important for me to be aware throughout the data analysis stage that because of the lack of diversity within hockey I was also missing an integral part of the story by not having any non-white participants.

The Research Process

Recruitment

The recruitment process was probably one of the hardest parts of the whole research process for me. After reading Allain's (2014) paper on interviewing elite male hockey players, I had an idea that I might run into some issues. Unfortunately, many researchers do not speak

about the difficulty of recruiting participants from a space where you are not a welcome participant. I wrote about my feelings about this challenge one day in my journal:

It seems like other studies don't have a problem getting participants or having mixed-methods studies or multiple interviews and data collection mediums. I'm not sure if it was the population I was recruiting from or whether I'm a woman or whether I'm a first-time interviewer. I just think I could have done better. I guess that is part of the struggle as a graduate student and as a researcher. There is only so much time, so many resources, and just like sports, you need to practice to get better.

My first interview took place in November of 2019 and my last interview took place in April of 2020. I only had six participants and there was almost half a year between my first and last interview. Originally, the pre-determined minimum number of participants I wanted to recruit was six individuals, but as time went on this goal changed and, by the end, I was ecstatic to get six willing participants. In my journal, I attributed my struggles with recruitment to several factors. I thought maybe, like Allain (2014), it was because I was a woman going into a space full of male gatekeepers. I also thought it had to do with being a Master's student and only having so many resources at my disposal. It was difficult to compare my struggles while reading literature on studies conducted with dozens of participants. I had to find the balance between accepting that I may not have as many participants as other studies while also pushing myself to use everything in my power to get as many participants as possible.

Novice researchers are often unaware of the potential challenges of recruiting and published literature and qualitative methods textbooks rarely go into detail about recruitment methods (Marks et al. 2017). A reason for this may be because recruitment is not of interest compared to other parts of the methodological narrative (Kristensen and Ravn 2015). When I

first started my recruitment, I emailed all of the head coaches and general managers of the teams I was recruiting from and asked for either a meeting with the team or to pass along my recruitment poster to the players. I did not hear back from any of them, so I emailed again with still no reply. I knew it would be difficult to actually be able to meet with the teams in-person as I was considered an outsider, but I was expecting responses from the coaches saying that they would pass along my recruitment poster. Unfortunately, I did not get either, so I had to switch tactics.

I decided I would try to reach the players in a more direct way by using social media. I shared my recruitment poster on my personal social media pages, as well as by sending it to all of the teams' social media pages in the hopes that it would be passed along to the players. Only then did I get replies from people who worked with the teams and I at least knew my message was getting out to a couple of the teams. It was at this time where I started to get a couple of participants, two from seeing the advertisement on social media and one from speaking to the person that worked with the organization and ran one of the team's Facebook pages.

Although I read Allain's (2014) article before I started my data collection, I also read it again after I had completed my interviews. A similarity I noticed was we both gained traction from making a connection with a member of the organization who is a woman to gain access to the players. Using mediators or gatekeepers in qualitative research is an effective way of facilitating contact with potential participants (Kristensen and Ravn 2015). Through speaking to two staff who are women of two different teams, I acquired three of my participants. As an outsider trying to access a male dominated space, I think that finding an ally who was a woman within the organization is very important to gaining further access (Allain 2014). Whether it be someone on the coaching staff or management team, having someone on the inside can make a

huge difference in recruitment. Although both Allain and I benefited from connecting to a female staff member, Allain (2014) was also refused access to potential participants from female staff attributed to the closed off attitude of elite level hockey (Robinson 1998). Although considerable research has been done on access to the field (Peticca-Harris, deGama and Elias 2016; Reeves 2010; Wanat 2008) little has been done on the impact women gatekeepers can have in a male dominated space. As outlined by Reeves (2010), being a researcher who is a woman can have positive or negative effects on access to the field but having a personal connection with a gatekeeper is an important benefit to conducting successful research.

I truly believe that if this had been a study endorsed by coaches or other staff on the teams I was recruiting from, I would have been more successful in recruiting more participants and my influence as a woman would have had a different impact. The participants I was able to recruit took part in the study willingly and all reached out to me because they wanted to; there was no pressure from other members of their hockey community. Although all studies are voluntary, there is no debating that some studies have different resources, incentives, and time needed, which can all influence whether someone chooses to participate or not (Kristensen and Ravn 2015). I believe that I would be sitting here telling a different story if I had been able to interview every player on a hockey team. Based on my own experience with recruitment I would encourage other researchers to use every way possible to gain access to their participants, especially in ways that are easily accessible such as social media and using already made connections. There are many gatekeepers in qualitative research, especially in sport and it is my perspective that figuring out a way to either by-pass or work with those gatekeepers will yield the best results for recruitment. You will not always be outwardly welcome in certain

communities but participants have their own voices and are able to make their own decisions on whether they want to participate or not so it is important to reach them directly.

I will probably never know the real reason that I had problems with recruitment. Based on the literature and similar qualitative studies, I never thought I would have as difficult a time as I did with Allain's (2014) study being the only one that spoke to the challenges of the recruitment process in a similar context. Most authors do not include detailed recruitment methods in their journal articles because of word limits and wanting to showcase the results and discussion section of their studies (Kristensen and Ravn 2015). However, this lack of information can give a false narrative regarding recruitment and other parts of the research process, implying to new researchers that results are the most important part of research and the rest of the research process is straightforward (Kristensen and Ravn 2015). Part of the reason for writing a reflexive based article is to forgo the results of the study and to focus on the research process so that future researchers can understand the good, the bad, and the ugly of conducting research, as well as the practical challenges that may be experienced by doing research and the layered challenges faced by graduate student researchers. In the next section, I will discuss how my research was impacted throughout the data collection phase and my reflexive thoughts throughout the interview process.

The Interview Process

Much like Allain (2014), I thought long and hard about how I would present myself, in terms of my femininity, to the participants. According to Poulton (2012), female researchers when compared to male researchers are more aware of being positioned within gendered spaces. I was not sure what kind of affect my being a woman would have on the data collection. Through discussions with my supervisors, and also based on previous literature, I knew that being a

woman when interviewing men would have an impact on my interviews (Allain 2014; Poulton 2012). As an example of how continuous the process of reflexivity is, during the time of writing this paper, my supervisors provided comments that some of my writing depicted the assumption that I believed all hockey players were heterosexual. It was not until I read these comments that I realized the bias I had within myself even though I know first-hand not all hockey players are heterosexual. I then had to think about how this may have affected my research. I placed so much emphasis on how I would dress and how I would act as a researcher who is a woman thinking that my participants are heterosexual, yet I did not stop to think of the impact it would have with participants who identify with a different sexuality. The next excerpt from my journal describes the thoughts I had about what I was going to wear to my interviews:

If this was an interview with another cohort, I would probably not be thinking so hard about this and go with an outfit I have worn for presentations and job interviews in the past. But this time is different, my outfit could really matter here. I have an idea of what I might wear, jeans, a simple blouse (not too low cut), or a blazer, with a necklace to dress it up and a pair of boots. I'll leave my hair down and do simple make-up. I want the participants to feel comfortable with me so I'll wear the jeans to be more casual but I also want them to respect and see me as a professional so the blouse I hope will achieve that look.

Based off of what I have seen about hockey players in the media, and what I have read in the literature, I was persuaded to think about how what I wear could impact how my participants would interact with me. Everyone who has been to a job interview knows the importance of dressing appropriately but for me to assume that my clothing choice would influence participants because they are all straight is misguided and simply untrue. The assumed heteronormativity in

hockey has been studied with scholars finding that athletes are not always open about their sexuality because of the homophobic language used in hockey culture (MacDonald 2019). Thus, we as society and me as a researcher need to do better at fighting the pre-conceived notions we have of who can and does play hockey.

According to Allain (2014), she had participants express their form of masculinity by trying to control the conversation and express their knowledge of the hockey game in the way they wanted to. However, I did not find this to be the case for my interviews. The participants in my study were not in a controlling or dominant space nor did I find they spoke to me as if I knew nothing about hockey. There were a couple of instances where I actually had to look up acronyms or clarify information with the participants pertaining to hockey. I believe participants in my study differed slightly than Allain's because of the assumed want they had to share their experiences with me.

Gill and Maclean (2002) suggest that researchers who are women, when compared to researchers who are men, are more aware of the gendered spaces and interactions between different genders within those spaces. Although I was very aware that I was a woman conducting research in a male dominated space, I never felt overtly feminized or degraded because of being a woman. When looking back at my interviews, I did feel as though some of the participants held back in their responses to me. For example, some participants would mention they have had positive and negative experiences with coaches but not go into detail about their bad experiences even when prompted. A significant contributor to this apprehension could have been that I was a woman and/or an outsider to the sport or just not wanting to be perceived as a victim of humiliation or violence. As a first time interviewer it was difficult to know when to probe the participant to speak more about a negative experience and I think experience plays a large role in

knowing when to push and when to hold back. Perhaps if I had been more prepared with follow up questions regarding negative experiences, I would have been more comfortable probing the participants for more information. Overall, I felt respected in every interview that I conducted. As this was my first time conducting interviews on my own, I did not have any pre-conceived notions on how participants would treat me. I could only refer to the literature and what other people told me from their own experiences.

What I ended up wearing to most interviews was a pair of jeans, tall black boots, a high neck black-t-shirt, and some sort of blazer. In contrast to my personal choices, Allain (2014) described that she made sure to wear baggy or conservative clothing to downplay her femininity. The outfit I chose is much like something I would wear going to dinner with my friends which is how I wanted the participants to feel. I believed that in doing so I would appear as more friendly and authentic, and therefore the participants would be more open to sharing their experiences. If I could go back and do it again, I would likely make the same decision. I based my outfit on how I thought the participants would react, but I also dressed in a way that made me feel more confident and comfortable which I believe positively influenced my ability to interact with the participants. However, it is hard to discern whether something as simple as my outfit had an impact on what participants shared or how they shared, as there are many small variables other than clothing choice in an interview that can influence the data. For example, in the next journal entry, I identified how the level of comfort with a participant can influence what I ask or how much I probe with additional questions: “I saw how open he was and I myself was more comfortable asking those questions as compared to the first interview.”

The particular interview I am writing about here was my longest interview, almost twice as long as my first interview. Directly after the interview, I sat down to write down my thoughts

about how I thought the interview had gone and any initial analysis I had of what was discussed. I remember thinking about how, when compared to the first interview, this interview seemed to go a lot smoother, and the conversation flowed more easily. At the time I realized a couple of things that made a difference. The first thing was that now that I had done an interview, I was more comfortable in the situation and I was also more cognizant of the way the participant spoke. For example, in the first interview, I tended to rush through the questions as it was my natural instinct to fill in the silence when there was a pause. In the second interview, I was aware of those pauses in speech but would not go on for a second or two which allowed for the participant to fully finish their thought. It gave them more time to think about their answer rather than me jumping in and moving to the next question, thus getting more information from the participant.

Another factor I realized was that I fed off the energy from the participant. The more relaxed and open the participant was the more relaxed and open I was, and I felt more comfortable probing the participant for more information after answering a question because I felt I would get more detailed answers from participants who showed openness. Participant energy was reiterated through other interviews, such as my interview with my key informant where he was very relaxed speaking about his experiences and what he has seen and heard through his participation in hockey.

However, in my last two interviews, I had a tougher sense of judging the level of comfort of the participants as they were conducted over Zoom and the phone due to the extenuating circumstances of COVID-19. These also ended up being my two shortest interviews in comparison to the others I conducted in person. That is not to say that I did not collect as much data, as some of the content from those interviews proved very helpful in answering my research

questions. However, I felt a level of disconnect with those participants and not quite as comfortable as I had felt with some of my first participants. Overall, I think these challenges really had an impact on the conversation. I think part of the reason was because I had something in common with the other participants and that was the fact that we were full time students, while the other participants had hockey as their number one priority adding to the level of disconnect between participant and researcher. The difference between the length and quality of information gained in the interviews really speaks to how influential small things can be such as the type of communication used, the level of comfort, and personality. The next journal excerpt highlights my expectations going into interviews being a woman and the reality of the situation:

When I think back through my interviews and the research process as a whole, so far I can't help but to think of the ways that it has differed from my expectation, in a multitude of ways. I thought I would feel different as a woman going into this male dominated space and I'm not saying it hasn't had an impact, but it hasn't had such an overt impact as I thought it might. Such as in all of my interviews I have felt respected and comfortable, now this may be because the hockey players who are willing to participate are more likely to be cooperative and comfortable speaking to me.

After reading Allain's (2014) experiences interviewing hockey players, and hearing the advice from my committee, I went into my first couple of interviews thinking there would be this very noticeable feeling of I am a woman interviewing a man. If not for my reflexive practice, I probably would not have given the gender differences a second thought because I did not notice any major implications of the gender differences. I may have gotten lucky where I had participants that were very respectful and did not try to overtly show their masculinity as a way to dominate the interview. I believed this to be so because there were no signs of toxic

masculinity characteristics (e.g., speaking to me as if I'm inferior); however, there are many versions of masculinity and various ways it can be expressed. Previous readings of researchers' interactions with male athletes (e.g., Allain 2014; MacDonald 2014) as well as how hockey players are portrayed in the media (MacDonald 2019) led me to believe I should expect a certain type of participant when in reality it was not true for my study. I went into the interviews with a pre-conceived notion of who I would meet which led me to be surprised when participants were different than my expectation. My experience demonstrates the difference between researchers conducting similar research. After feeling a bit of a disconnect between my expectations based on literature and comments from my committee, I was happy to have a few "lightbulb" moments in my interview with my key informant.

The final excerpt to be discussed is one written after my interview with my key informant, about halfway through my data collection. However, I chose to use it at the end of this paper, as the conversation was the missing piece that I was looking for in my research. From this interview, I was really able to tie together a lot of reflections I was having:

I was able to connect literature I have read to stories or experiences that my key informant had or witnessed which was great and made my research feel validated.

Based on some of the literature I read, I was expecting more of the issues discussed in the literature to come up within my interviews, such as the negative aspects of hockey and how these negative aspects can influence identities. After my first three interviews I had a lot of good data about how playing hockey can influence a person, but I was uncertain whether I was getting some of the information I originally expected. However, after my interview with my key informant, I was able to look at my data with a new perspective and I realized the wealth of information I had already collected. When comparing my interview with the key informant (a

gay man) to my other participants (presumably straight), I found the topics of sexuality and masculinity flowed more easily with the key informant which could also be due to his public speaking abilities. Additionally, I was able to have a different lens going into my last two interviews, where I had more confidence asking questions about perceived negative stereotypes or characteristics of hockey. For example, when on the topic of masculinity and aggression within the sport, I would ask about the influence of teammates and fans in the encouragement of those traits. My interview with my key informant was like the missing piece to my puzzle, as it validated all of the literature I had been reading to prepare for conducting my research. It also validated some of my initial findings in the data, such as the difference in attitude and perspectives from those with different levels of athletic identity. A reason that my key informant interview was so valuable may be because he has spent much of his career reflecting on his time in hockey and the ways in which hockey impacted and shaped him as a person.

After that interview, I was able to make better sense of what I had been listening to in my first three interviews and apply that clarity to the rest of my interview analysis. For example, while speaking to my key informant, the topic of homophobic and sexist language was brought up. At that time, it brought me back to my second interview where the participant told me a story about a teammate asking if he had to “suck the coaches’ dick in order to become co-captain of the team.” I was able to realize that this story, which suggests that power and advancement are held by male coaches and that the only reason for advancement is a suspected homosexuality, is not an isolated incident in hockey language, such that it is often used to express toxic masculinity (Allain 2014; MacDonald 2014; Skuce 2018). Another example was in my last two interviews where both participants spoke about teammates calling each other a “pussy” for coming off of the ice if they were injured. The participants spoke about these incidents as if they happened on a

regular basis and had no problem using that language in the interview, perhaps indicating that they use this language regularly both on and off the ice. A couple of participants shared that they would have presentations and team discussions about not using homophobic or racist language but did not indicate having similar discussions about not using sexist language. Additionally, my key informant brought to my attention that sexist language can be more accepted than racist language because of the culture of hockey and some of the characteristics of toxic masculinity. Clearly there are sexist, homophobic, and racist issues embedded within hockey culture (Maclean's 2020). The connection between the narrative expressed by the participants and the key informant highlights the importance of having a key informant for this study. However, without looking at the data in a reflexive manner both during and after the data collection process I would not have been able to fully understand the data or understand the ways in which I interpreted the data. Being a reflexive researcher allowed me to interact with my research in a more productive and beneficial way.

Conclusion

Reflexivity is the process of being aware of and acknowledging the ways in which a researcher influences their research through biases, positionalities, and perspective. It is impossible to know what small variables influenced my research, whether it be the way I dressed, the way I asked questions, or other minor details. However, it was important for me to be aware of those variables and the ways they could have made a difference in my research findings. I believe my research is a more well-rounded, credible, and trustworthy piece because of the reflexive steps I have taken from the beginning of the research process to the end. The exploration of my positioning as well as the participants' and how that shaped what was presented helps to strengthen the accuracy and credibility of the findings. All qualitative scholars

should take part in reflexive research to be a more active part of their research by accounting for their values, biases, and beliefs. Acknowledging these positions within their written work is an important step in helping readers to better understand their research findings. In conclusion, taking the steps to carefully monitor your research through reflexivity is essential for producing high quality research.

References

- Allain, Kristi A. "‘What Happens in the Room Stays in the Room’: Conducting Research with Young Men in the Canadian Hockey League." *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health* 6, no. 2 (2014): 205-219.
- Berger, Roni. "Now I see it, now I don’t: Researcher’s Position and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research." *Qualitative research* 15, no. 2 (2015): 219-234.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Thematic analysis." (2012).
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *u. Chi. Legal f.* (1989): 139.
- Crotty, Michael, and Michael F. Crotty. *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sage, 1998.
- De Tona, Carla. "But What is Interesting is the Story of Why and How Migration Happened." In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, vol. 7, no. 3. 2006.
- Dick, Kirby, and Amy Ziering. 2015. *The Hunting Ground*. Anchor Bay Entertainment Inc.
- Douglas, Kitrina. "Storying Myself: Negotiating a Relational Identity in Professional Sport." *Qualitative research in sport and exercise* 1, no. 2 (2009): 176-190.
- Drummond, Murray. "The natural: An Autoethnography of a Masculinized Body in Sport." *Men and Masculinities* 12, no. 3 (2010): 374-389.
- Fitzsimmons, Lyle. 2013. "Ranking the 10 Biggest Goons in NHL History." *Bleacher Report*, August 23. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1748052-ranking-the-10-biggest-goons-in-nhl-history>

- Glesne, Corrine and Alan Peshkin. *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, NY: Longman, 1992.
- Judd, Wes. 2017. "Why the Ice is White." *Pacific Standard*, June 14. <https://psmag.com/social-justice/why-is-hockey-so-white>
- Kacen, Lea, and Julia Chaitin. "The Times They are a Changing': Undertaking Qualitative Research in Ambiguous, Conflictual, and Changing Contexts." *The Qualitative Report* 11, no. 2 (2006): 209-228.
- Kristensen, Guro Korsnes, and Malin Noem Ravn. "The Voices Heard and the Voices Silenced: Recruitment Processes in Qualitative Interview Studies." *Qualitative Research* 15, no. 6 (2015): 722-737.
- MacDonald, Cheryl A. "Masculinity and Sport Revisited: A Review of Literature on Hegemonic Masculinity and Men's Ice Hockey in Canada." *Canadian Graduate Journal of Sociology & Criminology* 3, no. 1 (2014).
- MacDonald, Cheryl. "It's Hard to be Different in the NHL": Six former National Hockey League Players Discuss Conformity in Relation to the Lack of Openly Gay Players in the League. *Hockey in Society*. (2019). <https://hockeyinsociety.com/2019/09/09/its-hard-to-be-different-in-the-nhl-six-former-national-hockey-league-players-discuss-conformity-in-relation-to-the-lack-of-openly-gay-players-in-the-league/>
- Marks, Anne, Lesley Wilkes, Stacy Blythe, and Rhonda Griffiths. "A Novice Researcher's Reflection on Recruiting Participants for Qualitative Research." *Nurse Researcher* (2014+) 25, no. 2 (2017): 34.
- Maxwell, Joseph A. *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Vol. 41. Sage publications, 2012.

McGannon, Kerry R., and Christina R. Johnson. "Strategies for Reflective Cultural Sport Psychology Research." *Cultural sport psychology* (2009): 57-75.

Mitchell, Jennifer, Nicholas Boettcher-Sheard, Camille Duque, and Bonnie Lashewicz. "Who Do We Think We Are? Disrupting Notions of Quality in Qualitative Research." *Qualitative health research* 28, no. 4 (2018): 673-680.

Morrison, Kirsten. *Tackling Male Football Players' Identities Regarding Sexual Aggression: A Media Analysis*. Laurentian University, Sudbury ON. (2017).

Pappas, Nick T., Patrick C. McKenry, and Beth Skilken Catlett. "Athlete Aggression on the Rink and Off the Ice: Athlete Violence and Aggression in Hockey and Interpersonal Relationships." *Men and Masculinities* 6, no. 3 (2004): 291-312.

Peticca-Harris, Amanda, Nadia deGama, and Sara RSTA Elias. "A Dynamic Process Model for Finding Informants and Gaining Access in Qualitative Research." *Organizational Research Methods* 19, no. 3 (2016): 376-401.

Poniatowski, Kelly, and Erin Whiteside. "'Isn't He a Good Guy?': Constructions of Whiteness in the 2006 Olympic Hockey Tournament." *Howard Journal of Communications* 23, no. 1 (2012): 1-16.

Popplewell, Brett. 2020. "Decision time: The Biggest Question this Season isn't Who Wins the Stanley Cup, but Whether the Game Finally Deals with Revelations of Abuse, Racism, Misogyny and Homophobia." *Maclean's*, March 1.
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A616318639/AONE?u=subd78095&sid=AONE&xid=7862b13d>.

Poulton, Emma. "If You Had Balls, You'd Be One Of Us! 'Doing gendered research: Methodological Reflections on Being a Female Academic Researcher in the Hyper-

- masculine Subculture of 'Football Hooliganism.'" *Sociological research online* 17, no. 4 (2012): 67-79.
- Ravel, Barbara, and Genevieve Rail. "From Straight to Gaie? Quebec Sportswomen's Discursive Constructions of Sexuality and Destabilization of the Linear Coming Out Process." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 32, no. 1 (2008): 4-23.
- Reeves, Carla L. "A Difficult Negotiation: Fieldwork Relations with Gatekeepers." *Qualitative research* 10, no. 3 (2010): 315-331.
- Schinke, Robert J., Kerry R. McGannon, William D. Parham, and Andrew M. Lane. "Toward Cultural Praxis and Cultural Sensitivity: Strategies for Self-reflexive Sport Psychology Practice." *Quest* 64, no. 1 (2012): 34-46.
- Sinha, M. 2015. Canadian Identity, 2013. *Statistics Canada*, October 1.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-652-x/89-652-x2015005-eng.htm>
- Skuce, Tim. Re-framing and Re-enacting Masculinities in Elite-level Ice Hockey Players. *Research Connection*. Brandon University 3, no. 2 (2018).
- Statistics Canada. 2017. *Sudbury [Population centre], Ontario and Ontario [Province]* (table). *Census Profile*. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>
- Steinfeldt, Matthew, and Jesse A. Steinfeldt. "Athletic Identity and Conformity to Masculine Norms Among College Football Players." *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 24, no. 2 (2012): 115-128.
- Wanat, Carolyn L. "Getting past the gatekeepers: Differences Between Access and Cooperation in Public School Research." *Field methods* 20, no. 2 (2008): 191-208.

Watt, Diane. "On Becoming a Qualitative Researcher: the Value of Reflexivity." *Qualitative Report* 12, no. 1 (2007): 82-101.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The aim of this paper-based thesis was to understand how participation in hockey has an impact on identity construction of male athletes. In this chapter, findings from the two papers are summarized and discussed in relation to the research questions outlined in chapter one. This chapter concludes with a summary of the strengths and limitations of the current study, the practical implications for coaches and sport practitioners, and suggestions for future research.

I chose to write two publishable papers as part of my thesis document not only for the experience of writing at a level worthy of publication but also for the opportunity it gave for sharing my work with a wider range of scholars. I chose to focus on findings that were most saturated within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and reflected within the existing literature while being mindful of my own impact on those choices. Writing for the guidelines of a journal meant that you I had to stay within a certain page or word limit, and I knew the results of my research would take up a whole paper without leaving room for a proper reflexivity which led to the choice of a paper completely dedicated to reflexivity. More importantly, the purpose of writing a paper dedicated to reflexivity was to bring attention for scholars to be more mindful of their positionality in relation to the research they conduct. Every step of the research process was greatly impacted by my positionalities as a researcher and therefore it was important to give space to both the results of the study as well as the results of my reflexive practice. While this discussion section will focus on the original findings of this study, the reflexivity paper explained how and why the findings were made and how I interpreted these findings. To recap, the primary research question set out in the introduction chapter of this thesis was: How do competitive male ice hockey players in Northeastern Ontario construct their identities through sport participation? The sub-questions were: To what extent do forms of masculinity, as they

relate to sport, play a part in identity construction? What aspects of being a hockey athlete impact identity construction and how does it transfer into other facets of everyday life? To what degree are expressions of masculinity and injury reporting, prevention, and recovery related?

4.1 Summary of Chapter 2

In paper one, some of the results of my original research interviews were presented and discussed. While not all data was presented because of word limitations of the intended journal I plan to submit it to, it is my hope that future publications will address additional results. For the purpose of this paper, the results that were most pertinent to the main research question were included. Results answering sub-questions were also included but only if they did not overshadow the main findings.

I identified three major themes that highlight how participants form their identities. The first theme, *influence of others*, described three primary groups that contributed to identity formation: coaches, teammates, and fans/society. Each group was found to be influential because of the amount of time spent with hockey players and the importance of their perception of the participants. The second theme, *what it means to be a hockey player*, included three sub-themes. The first sub-theme, *learning to make your way*, described the ways in which hockey has acted as a form of development for participants. This sub-theme included the reasons participants play hockey, the developmental traits it teaches players, and the negative traits that can come from hockey participation such as hypermasculinity and aggression. The second sub-theme, *more than just a hockey player*, detailed some of the stereotypes that players face, and the impact stereotypes can have on identity construction. The final theme, *building a new identity*, described the ways participants were transitioned to life outside of hockey and the identities they formed while keeping hockey as part of their lives. All three themes were discussed in relation to the

main study research question of how male hockey players construct their identities through sport participation. Furthermore, the study was based within a theoretical framework that highlighted the impact of the social construction of identities. The results of the study aligned with narrative identity theory through the impact of being part of the social category of being an athlete and the influence of the associated aspects of that category (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; McLeod, 1997).

4.2 Summary of Chapter 3

In the second paper, reflexive work from the current study was presented and discussed. Researchers have previously identified how important reflexive writing is in qualitative research; thus, I felt it was important to dedicate a whole paper to discussing my reflexive work (Berger, 2015; Poulton, 2012). Additionally, it was important for me to write the paper so readers would understand the interpretations I made of the data in the first paper. The purpose of this paper was to address how my positionality affected my research by presenting entries from my reflexive journal, and ongoing critical reflections throughout the research process. For example, in the paper, I addressed my own biases of what I thought a stereotypical hockey player looked like. I did so by physically describing and using photos from Google Images to help depict the images I noticed that I brought with me to the interviews. The purpose of this exercise was to realize my own biases in terms of what I think a hockey player should look like and understand where these biases may have come from. In this paper I explored the implications that the biases could have had on my research. A handful of entries from my reflexivity journal were used to further discuss my biases throughout the research process and my thoughts about how I, as a researcher, impacted the research I was conducting. Although my reflexivity went beyond what was communicated in paper two, it gave an overview of how I, as a researcher, impacted my research and the importance of being aware and communicating those impacts as part of the research

process. Furthermore, the implications of the paper aligned with my theoretical framework because of the attention to the process of co-constructing knowledge with the participants of the study (Crotty, 1998). The main way of co-constructing knowledge with participants was through the interview process and having a conversation with participants instead of a more close-ended question and answer interview. Furthermore, processes such as member checking, the process of writing a reflexive journal, building questions based on previous interviews, as well as using a key informant were all ways the narrative was co-constructed.

4.3 Discussion in Relation to Research Questions

The primary question was answered through reflexive thematic analysis of qualitative interviews with six players. The stories that were shared by each participant and the interpretations that were made about the stories contributed to understanding the aspects of sport that helped in forming identities of hockey players. Each theme described in chapter two gave insight into the ways that hockey influenced an athlete. The people that an athlete interacted with through their participation in hockey, such as coaches, teammates, and fans, influenced who they are as an athlete and as a person. Previous researchers have identified that those in leadership or influential positions such as coaches and other teammates can impact one's behaviour and attitudes (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2014). Additionally, narrative identity theorists postulate the impact that belonging to a social category (such as a sports team) has on identity development (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; McLeod, 1997). The results of this study support these findings because of the many times coaches and teammates were spoken about by participants as people they looked to for guidance on how to or how not to act. While some participants found career paths and leadership skills through their coaches, others found ways in which they did not wish

to act. While some participants saw their teammates as regulators of their behaviour on the ice, others were content to be different than their teammates.

The existing stereotypes within the sport also influenced the way that athletes behaved and the way they think. Stereotypes in hockey have been researched by scholars such as MacDonald (2014) and Allain (2014) wherein they found the way hockey players behave and speak is deeply engrained in the stereotypes set forth within the culture of hockey. Stereotypes such as displaying hypermasculine and dominant traits both on and off the ice are ones that were also found in the current study. However, not all participants nor all hockey players fit into stereotypical roles. It was in this instance that the practice of reflexivity helped guide me to interpret the data in a way that was less biased and more open to exploring why hockey players may be influenced by stereotypes. Those that had hockey as one of the most important parts of their identity and who had a longer career ahead of them seemed to identify with stereotypes more so than those that were closer to the end of their hockey careers and looking to pursue other avenues. The discrepancy did not come as a surprise as researchers have shown that those who play at a professional level are more engrained in the culture of sport and therefore have a harder time transitioning out of sport (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). This study adds to this research demonstrating that even at lower levels of competition, stereotypes have a major influence and the more you have invested the harder it is to leave the sport and pursue something else.

While not explicitly addressed in chapter two, even the geographic region that an athlete played in may have influenced their perspectives and attitudes within and outside of hockey. There were mixed messages from participants about whether they thought hockey culture was different between geographic regions. Kaida and Kitchen (2020) conducted a study on towns where NHL players grew up and found that in the last couple of decades the majority of players

were from large urban centres. The authors also suggested that players who grew up in more rural towns had a different dedication to the sport than those in urban centres because of the extra challenge of travel and lack of resources. Building on this literature, this study reiterated those points while also pointing out that hockey in smaller towns may lead to a more well-rounded development of players rather than just based on skill, based on their perspectives. Where players grow up can have an impact on how hockey players see the game as well as how they see themselves and so location should be taken into consideration when trying to understand the identity development of athletes. Within this study, some players spoke of a definite difference between playing hockey “down south” and playing in Northern Ontario while other players said they have not noticed a difference. The authors of other studies have discussed player development in terms of skill in relation to city population size (Imtiaz et al., 2014) but researchers have yet to look at geographic differences in relation to hockey culture. While a conclusive statement cannot be said about differences in hockey culture between different regions from either this study or the literature, it can be said that the way in which players view hockey growing up is often how they view the game in the future which may also impact how they view other parts of their life.

4.3.1 Discussion in Relation to Sub-Questions

The first sub-question regarding masculinities was answered through participants’ stories surrounding the existing stereotypes and perceptions in hockey such as being macho, cocky, and only caring about hockey. All participants spoke about similar stereotypes they have seen in teammates or stereotypes that have been projected on them. However, participants also described how they differ from a stereotypical hockey player. Participants expressed how masculinity plays a large role in being a hockey player and expressing your masculinity is often seen as being part

of being a hockey player, leading to the feeling that in order to be a successful hockey player you must be highly masculine. Other researchers have talked about masculinity in hockey in terms of hegemonic, toxic, or hyper-masculinity being the preferred and encouraged forms. For example, some researchers identified that players still conform to the traits associated with problematic forms of masculinity mentioned above such as expressing dominance, homophobia, and effeminophobia (Allain, 2014; MacDonald, 2012; Skuce, 2018). Researchers also found that there has been a shift in hockey culture over the last few years and the problematic forms of masculinity are being challenged by players themselves (MacDonald & LaFrance, 2018; Skuce, 2018). Masculinity was expressed by the participants in this study in similar ways to Skuce's (2018) and MacDonald's (2012) work wherein some characteristics of hegemonic masculinity were still present and encouraged within hockey. However, masculinity is not fixed but is ever-changing; some players embraced the hyper-masculine ideals of the sport while others were challenging those notions and embracing a more inclusive version of masculinity.

The second sub-question was answered through participants' stories surrounding moving away from home and the culture of hockey. Many participants learned positive lessons that they used outside of hockey from their time with coaches, billet families, and travelling around the country or province. Character traits such as work ethic, leadership, and dealing with adversity were taught to players and were traits that they applied in other facets of their life such as school, work, and extra-curricular activities. While the positive effects of sport have been researched before (e.g., Coakley, 2008; Eitzen & Sage, 2008), this study adds to the literature in terms of understanding the types of characteristics that shape athletes as hockey players and as people outside of sport. On the other hand, negative aspects of hockey, such as aggression and hypermasculinity, also transitioned into life outside of sport as part of hockey players' identities.

Although most participants distanced themselves from the stereotypical image of a hockey player (e.g., macho, disrespects girls, entitled, only cares about hockey), they did mention how some players may bring the aggressive nature of hockey to situations outside of the sport, such as starting fights at bars or in public areas. According to participants, other players feel they are able to start fights because aggression is the way to deal with issues on the ice and they may translate that thinking to their off the ice behaviour. Similar to the findings of Pappas et al. (2004), where the authors discovered a relationship between hockey and violent behaviours both inside and outside of the sport, participants in the current study also described a relationship between behaviours learned in the sport and behaviours outside.

The third and final sub-question regarding injuries was partially answered through the participants' stories around stereotypes and injuries in hockey. Participants admitted the pressure to recover from an injury quickly or to continue playing injured in order to keep their spot on the team and not be ridiculed by their teammates. Similar to the findings of Kroshus et al. (2014), not reporting injuries such as concussions are linked to the role of being an athlete. Masculinity also plays a large role in injuries because players are less willing to report their injuries out of the fear of being feminized, which may lead to poor recovery and less prevention (Messner, 1990). Sport often teaches players to push through pain (Messner, 1990) and partake in risk-taking behaviours (Belley-Ranger et al., 2016), such as fighting and bodychecking. Through the participants' stories, pressure from coaches, teammates, fans, and hockey scouts all contributed to sacrificing their body in the name of sport. While injuries were spoken about briefly in the interviews, most participants described having very minor injuries that were not worth discussing. However, as described by Echlin et al. (2010) and Todd et al. (2017), injury reporting may not be accurate because of a player's downplaying of the injury or not reporting injuries at

all. Whether participants also downplayed injuries in the interviews is hard to say but could be a reason why this sub-question was not fully addressed. The assumption can be made that some participants had more serious injuries than they let on. Those participants who did speak about their injuries spoke about them in terms of being less serious than other players and therefore did not go into much detail. However, it was also mentioned that showing pain would often result in being ridiculed by teammates or less playing time which all stem from the pain principle (Messner, 1990) or the idea that male athletes are taught to suppress their pain.

4.4 Study Considerations and Strengths

The first limitation of this study was the recruitment of participants, which was impacted by a number of factors. As a woman going into a male dominated space, it was hard to reach potential participants and encourage them to participate. The other challenge with recruitment was the outbreak of COVID-19 and the shut-down of sports, making it more difficult to speak to teams and players during this period. However, I overcame these limitations by changing my recruitment strategies to include social media and reaching out to as many contacts as I could to facilitate word of mouth recruitment. Additionally, I received ethics approval to change my data collection methods to include phone and video conferencing interviews via Zoom so that I was able to continue my interviews during COVID-19 quarantine. Ultimately, with these adaptations, I was able to fulfill my original goal of recruiting six participants for the current study.

Despite these limitations, there were also a number of strengths to this study. There are several strengths that ensured that the current study was trustworthy and credible (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). The first strength of this study was the strongly aligned methodology. Using narrative identity theory that was derived from a social constructionist paradigm and then using a method of data collection (interviews) and data analysis (thematic analysis) which shared the

perspective of the narrative identity theory was important in keeping the study coherent. I spent a lot of time researching different theories and forms of data collection and data analysis to ensure each step was aligned. From the social constructionism paradigm to interpretive data analysis, each step of the methodology had the same underpinnings, so each step made sense with one another (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The second strength of the study was attention to reflexivity. Although many qualitative researchers practice reflexivity on a personal level in their research, not all attend to a reflexivity in the write up of their study. Including a reflexivity challenges the idea that researchers are an unbiased part of their research (McGannon & Johnson, 2009). The inclusion of a written section dedicated to the critical examination of myself as a researcher in the current study helps to not only interrogate myself and my own biases in relation to this study, but also to facilitate the readers' understanding of the results of this study, as they are able to more comprehensively understand the researcher. Many feminist scholars have highly criticized the notion of researchers not including reflexive work, mainly because of the awareness it brings to the unconscious bias as opposed to only finding what we set out to find (Berger, 2015). Within the current study, if I had not engaged in reflexive work, I may have only interpreted the findings in ways that helped to answer my research question that fit with pre-existing beliefs. The use of the reflexivity helped to determine trustworthiness and increase the quality of this study.

The final strength of this study was the inclusion of a key informant. The key informant added another level of detail to the data and helped to add context during the data analysis stage. The key informant lent new insights into the impact of hockey culture by sharing his own experiences and not being afraid to share who he truly was. He was able to speak to who he was as a hockey player when he was in the same position as the other participants but because he has

reflected on his time in hockey, he was able to give the perspective of someone who has continued developing their identity past hockey. Using a key informant allowed for the opportunity to collect quality information in a short period of time compared to conducting in-depth interviews with many participants (Marshall, 1996). This main advantage of using a key informant was particularly true in this study because of the amount of quality information the informant shared in a time where it was difficult to recruit many participants. In this case, the key informant was able to share his experiences with a wide variety of hockey players he has worked with which gave perspective and context beyond the other participants.

4.4.1 Validation of Findings

Qualitative validity procedures (Creswell, 2014) took place to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability. For example, member checks (Holloway & Galvin, 2016) occurred once transcription was completed. Anonymized transcriptions were sent back to participants through the Laurentian Google Drive Suite to ensure confidentiality, and participants had the chance to read over their interviews and omit or edit anything they said in the interview. There were no changes made by participants.

As described in chapter three, potential bias was clarified in the reflexivity portion of this thesis. By uncovering researcher bias and bringing it into the discussion of the study findings, information that both supported and did not support the research question(s) were presented so that the account was more credible and trustworthy. Each step of the research process, especially how thematic analysis was used, was included in chapter two and three giving the reader a deeper understanding of the work. As there were a small number of participants in this study, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was ensured by keeping consent forms and interview transcriptions separately and assigning each participant a pseudonym. As I was fairly

new to performing thematic analysis, my first three interviews were looked over by my supervisors as a way of ensuring dependability and to increase reflexivity. After each of my interviews I debriefed with my co-supervisor, Dr. Harding, where we discussed how the interview went and what I learned, including a comparison to other interviews. After the first three interviews were transcribed, the transcripts were reviewed by my committee and preliminary themes and analytical thoughts were discussed. I also had on-going meetings with my primary supervisor, Dr. Harding, to discuss my thought processes during the interview and data analysis stages. Finally, critical discussions on generated themes and reflexive journal entries occurred with my committee throughout the data analysis and writing stages.

4.5 Implications for Practice

The results of this study will help athletes, coaches, parents, and other key figures in sports understand the effect sport participation can have on athletes. The results of this study can assist sport sociology researchers in better understanding athlete identities to shift sport to be a more conducive space for the equal and safe development of athletes.

A major takeaway of this study was the difference in constructed identities between players in terms of how much they identify as an athlete with relation to the level of skill of their team. Considering the results of this study, there may be a push to help athletes develop identities outside of hockey so that they may become a more well-rounded person and better be able to transition out of the sport when the time comes. Previous literature suggests that athletes who highly identify with the athlete role have a hard time transitioning after retiring from sport (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). The data from this study supports this research through the lack of future plans that some participants had after their hockey career was done or the plan to continue playing hockey as a source of income which is not always attainable or manageable for all

athletes. This implication is important for parents and athletes but also coaches as they are key role models that can help influence and teach players life skills to be transferred outside of the sport. Participants who had a goal of pursuing careers other than hockey seemed to be more content with who they were outside of hockey and more prepared for life outside of sport. Although athletic identity foreclosure is still an emerging construct, researchers have found there to be a correlation between high athletic identity and poor career transition (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). Coaches and sport practitioners must understand that athletes are unique human beings who exist not only in sport but also other aspects of life, thus coaches should be teaching other life skills that can translate outside of the sport (Ge, 2018). Athletes should be pushed to take interest in things outside of hockey and take part in behaviours that build other skills for the inevitable time that their hockey career comes to an end. Even if players make it to the NHL and make a career out of playing hockey, it is a profession that ends at an early age and players must be prepared for that transition out of sport. As mentioned by each of the participants, hockey is a community and there may be a sense of loss once athletes are no longer playing further demonstrating the need for exploring identities past that of being an athlete.

The results of this study also add to the understanding of the positives that sport participation can provide athletes. However, the results also revealed several negative aspects. Bringing awareness to issues such as promoting hyper-masculinity and exclusive athletic identities will hopefully aid in creating change in the sport. The multiple identities of athletes are not separated from each other but work together to form the person's unique being. However, some identities may hold more power and privilege than others. Narrative identity theory helps to explain this through the assumption that identity is formed through social categories and people will often look to others to validate their identity (Stets & Burke, 2005). Thus, identities

that are valued in hockey such as hyper-masculinity will be validated within athletes and thus take up a more important role. Athletes may learn to suppress the identities that are not valued in sports such as hockey but a more inclusive sport environment from coaches, parents, and sport practitioners can help athletes to embrace all aspects of their identities, including how they express their masculinity. Improving sport in these ways can help to better develop athletes to become more well-rounded individuals both on and off the ice. While the participants of the study were all cis-gender men, these implications can be applied to cis-gender women and trans+-identified players because some hockey experiences will be universal no matter your gender identity. More importantly the results showcase some of the values celebrated in hockey and the negative ways hockey culture can impact people especially for those who are not part of the 'stereotypical' image of a hockey player.

4.6 Implications for Future Research

Future research should focus on further broadening the knowledge surrounding athletes and identities because understanding who athletes are and how sport has an impact on their identity formation is important for improving sport and the well-being of athletes. For example, it would be imperative to conduct a study similar to this one but with female athletes, especially with regard to stereotypes in sport applied to women and how these may impact their identities (Ross & Shiner, 2008). When I was recruiting for the current study, a female hockey player reached out in hopes of participating as she found there were not many studies regarding female hockey players. Unfortunately, because of the inclusion criteria which had already been approved by the Research Ethics Board, I had to turn her down. My discussion with this athlete demonstrates the need for more representation of the whole gender spectrum. Structurally, female athletes have been left out of the conversation and out of sport for many years and

although there has been a rise in female athletes, inequalities still remain (Adams & Leavitt, 2018). The sporting world is largely dominated by men and where women athletes are seen as a threat to male supremacy (Ross & Shinenew, 2008), women are continually excluded from sport and sport research. Thus, research that encompasses a diversity of athletes and their experiences is crucial to understanding the impact of sport culture on all athletes. Additionally, research that focuses on LGBTQ2+ participants should be considered to give a voice to those marginalized in sport (McGannon et al., 2019; Ravel & Rail, 2008).

Further research that examines different sports, both team and individual, that are not deemed as 'masculine' or 'aggressive' would also help to further understand all athletes and their identity construction. This knowledge is necessary because sport culture is different between gendered sport and sport activity and therefore may influence athletes in different ways. For example, the culture of hockey is significantly different than the culture of a sport such as tennis. While there may be some similarities, the ways in which athletes are expected to act and the influence of team dynamics all play a role in how an athlete shapes their identity. As outlined in the narrative identity theory, social processes and social categories are an important part of identity development, thus the difference of having teammates or participating in an individual sport may have an impact on how athletes develop their identities (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). As described by MacDonald (2018) and Allain (2014), there are certain characteristics that are related to being a hockey player and although there may be similarities across other sports, there are also likely different accepted norms of athletes within other sports. The implications of playing a sport such as hockey will be much different than that of tennis and so further exploring other sports and the ways in which sport is influential as a whole and how sports differ is critical in understanding the complexity of athlete identities.

Additionally, one of the limitations of the current study was the lack of racial diversity of the participants. Future studies should focus on hearing the stories and experiences of athletes of colour, especially in sports that have tended to be culturally and numerically dominated by white people (Szto, 2018). The lack of diversity within the current study represents the reality of the sport itself where racialized Canadians are often left out of the sport and left out of the conversation (Szto, 2018). The inclusion of people of colour in future research is vital in understanding the impact of participating in a predominantly white sport and the resulting impact it may have on how they see themselves as a hockey player and as a person. Future research needs to amplify the voices of racialized athletes to demonstrate the important role they play in sports and to understand how we can better facilitate a more inclusive sport environment.

Lastly, the importance of conducting reflexive practices is discussed throughout this thesis, with the inclusion of a chapter dedicated to discussing my biases and the influence of these biases on my research. The use of reflexive thinking and writing has implications for future qualitative researchers. It is the hope that with this paper, other qualitative researchers, including graduate student researchers, will see the importance of not only conducting a reflexivity in their research but also including an in-depth interrogation of themselves in relation to their research and participants.

4.7 Overall Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the ways in which competitive hockey players construct their identities through sport participation with a particular emphasis on masculinity. Adding to the body of literature on developing identities in athletes and the impact of sport culture was a vital goal and outcome of this study. The interviews conducted in this study provided interesting results on the individuality of identity development and the effect of

sport participation, while the reflexivity allowed me and the reader to understand the research process and my interpretations of the data. The results of this study have provided insight into the ways in which ice hockey players in Northeastern Ontario are influenced in constructing their identities and the ways in which a researcher can influence their study. The results of this study reaffirm that there are many parts of being a hockey player that impact how athletes construct their identities including hockey stereotypes, masculine norms, coach and teammate influence, and time invested in the sport. The implications of the current study speak to the importance of encouraging the development of skills that transfer outside of hockey with less emphasis on the outdated stereotypes that can still impact players within the sport. In conclusion, sport plays a large part of the lives of athletes, especially at a competitive level, and while athletes may not continue to participate in sport throughout their lives, the impact it has on their identities is significant and long lasting.

References

- Adams, C., & Leavitt, S. (2018). 'It's Just Girls' Hockey': Troubling Progress Narratives in Girls' and Women's Sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 53(2), 152–172.
- Allain, K. A. (2014). 'What Happens in the Room Stays in the Room': Conducting Research with Young Men in the Canadian Hockey League. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 6(2), 205-219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2013.796486>
- Anderson, E. (2005). *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity*. SUNY Press.
- Belley-Ranger, E., Carbonneau, H., & Trudeau, F. (2016). Recreational and Sport-related risk taking Behaviors Among Men During Adolescence and Early Adulthood: A Scoping Review. *Society and Leisure*, 39(3), 467-480.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07053436.2016.1243829>
- Benedict, J. R. (1998). *Athletes and Acquaintance Rape* (1st ed). SAGE Publications.
- Blinde, E. M., Taub, D. E., & Han, L. (1993). Sport Participation and Women's Personal Empowerment: Experiences of the College Athlete. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 17(1), 47-60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019372359301700107>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology* (H. Cooper, Ed.). American Psychological Association.
- Brewer, B. W., Van Raalte, J. L., & Linder, D. E. (1993). Athletic Identity: Hercules' Muscles or Achilles Heel? *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 24(2), 237–254.
- Bryson, L. (1987). Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10(4), 349–360. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(87\)90052-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(87)90052-5)

Burgess-Limerick, T., & Burgess-Limerick, R. (1998). Conversational Interviews and Multiple-case Research in Psychology. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 50(2), 63-70.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00049539808257535>

Carless, D., & Douglas, K. (2008). Narrative, Identity and Mental Health: How men with Serious Mental Illness Re-story their Lives Through Sport and Exercise. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 9(5), 576-594. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2007.08.002>

Carless, D., & Douglas, K. (2013). “In the Boat” but “Selling Myself Short”: Stories, Narratives, and Identity Development in Elite Sport. *The Sport Psychologist*, 27(1), 27-39.

Clayton, B., & Humberstone, B. (2006). Men’s Talk: A (pro)feminist Analysis of Male University Football Players’ Discourse. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 41(3–4), 295–316. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690207078380>

Coakley, J. (2008). *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies* (10th ed). McGraw-Hill Education.

Connell, R.W. (1995). *Masculinities*. University of California Press.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*, 19, 829–859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>

Crosset, T. W., Ptacek, J., McDonald, M. A., & Benedict, J. R. (1996). Male Student-athletes and Violence Against Women: A Survey of Campus Judicial Affairs Offices. *Violence Against Women*, 2(2), 163–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801296002002004>

Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (1st ed). SAGE Publications.

- Culver, D. M., Gilbert, W., & Sparkes, A. (2012). Qualitative Research in Sport Psychology Journals: The Next Decade 2000–2009 and beyond. *The Sport Psychologist, 26*, 261–281. <https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.26.2.261>
- Dick, K., & Ziering, A. (2015). *The Hunting Ground*. Anchor Bay Entertainment Inc.
- Edwards, K. E., & Jones, S. R. (2009). "Putting My Man Face On": A Grounded Theory of College Men's Gender Identity Development. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(2), 210-228. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0063>
- Eitzen, S., & Sage, G. (2008). *Sociology of North American sport* (8th ed.). Paradigm Publishers.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. WW Norton & Company.
- Frank, A.W. (2010). *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-narratology*. University of Chicago Press.
- Frintner, M. P., & Rubinson, L. (1993). Acquaintance Rape: The Influence of Alcohol, Fraternity Membership, and Sports Team Membership. *Journal of Sex Education & Therapy, 19*, 272–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01614576.1993.11074089>
- Gergen, K. (1999). *An Invitation to Social Construction*. SAGE Publications.
- Greig, C. & Pollard, B. (2017). Men, Masculinities, and Feminism. *Feminist Issues: Race, Class, and Sexuality*. 175-200 (8th ed). Pearson Canada.
- Hirose, A., & Pih, K. K. H. (2010). Men Who Strike and Men Who Submit: Hegemonic and Marginalized Masculinities in Mixed Martial Arts. *Men and Masculinities, 13*(2), 190-209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X09344417>
- Holloway, I., & Galvin, K. (2016). *Qualitative Research in Nursing and Healthcare*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Holstein, J.A., & Gubrium, J.F. (2000). *The Self We Live By*. Oxford University Press

- Imtiaz, F., Hancock, D. J., Vierimaa, M., & Côté, J. (2014). Place of Development and Dropout in Youth Ice Hockey. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 12(3), 234-244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2014.880262>
- Kaida, L., & Kitchen, P. (2020). It's Cold and There's Something To Do: The Changing Geography of Canadian National Hockey League players' hometowns. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 55(2), 209-228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690218789045>
- Kincheloe, J. L., & McLaren, P. L. (1994). Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research. In N. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 138–157). SAGE Publications.
- Kroshus, E., Kubzansky, L. D., Goldman, R. E., & Austin, S. B. (2014). Norms, Athletic Identity, and Concussion Symptom Under-reporting Among Male Collegiate Ice Hockey Players: A Prospective Cohort Study. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 49(1), 95-103. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-014-9636-5>
- Lindemann, N.H. (2001). *Damaged identities, narrative repair*. Cornell University Press.
- MacDonald, C. A. (2018). Insert Name of Openly Gay Hockey Player Here: Attitudes Towards Homosexuality Among Canadian Male Major Midget AAA Ice Hockey Players, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 35(4), 347-357. Retrieved May 29, 2021, from <http://journals.humankinetics.com.librweb.laurentian.ca/view/journals/ssj/35/4/article-p347.xml>
- MacDonald, C., & Lafrance, M. (2018). Girls Love Me, Guys Wanna Be Me': Representations of Men, Masculinity and Junior Ice Hockey in Gongshow Magazine. *The International*

Journal of Sport and Society, 10(1), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2152-7857/CGP/v10i01/1-19>

- MacDonald, C. A. (2014). Masculinity and Sport Revisited: A Review of Literature on Hegemonic Masculinity and Men's Ice Hockey in Canada. *Canadian Graduate Journal of Sociology and Criminology*, 3(1), 95-112. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cgjssc-rcessc.v3i1.74>
- MacDonald, C. A., & McGillis, B. (in press). "I never thought I'd get here, I thought I'd be dead" An In-depth Interview with an Openly Gay Former Professional Ice Hockey Player. In C. A. MacDonald & R. J. Edwards. (Eds), *Overcoming the Neutral Zone Trap: Hockey's agents of change*. University of Alberta Press.
- McAdams, D. (1993). *The Stories We Live By*. The Guildford Press.
- McAdams, D. P., & McLean, K. C. (2013). Narrative Identity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22, 233-238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721413475622>
- McCreary, D. R., & Sasse, D. K. (2000). An Exploration of the Drive for Muscularity in Adolescent Boys and Girls. *Journal of American College Health*, 48, 297-304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448480009596271>
- McGannon, K. R., Schinke, R. J., Ge, Y., & Blodgett, A. T. (2019). Negotiating Gender and Sexuality: A Qualitative Study of Elite Women Boxer Intersecting Identities and Sport Psychology Implications. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(2), 168-186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2017.1421593>
- McGannon, K. R., & Spence, J. C. (2010). Speaking of the Self and Understanding Physical Activity Participation: What Discursive Psychology Can Tell Us About an Old Problem.

Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise, 2(1), 17–38.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19398440903510145>

McLeod, J. (1997). *Narrative and psychotherapy*. SAGE Publications.

Messner, M.A. (1990). When Bodies are Weapons: Masculinity and Violence in Sport.

International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 25(3), 203-219.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/101269029002500303>

Miller, K. E., & Hoffman, J. H. (2009). Mental Well-being and Sport-related Identities in College Students. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 26(2), 335-356.

<https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.26.2.335>

Neimeyer, R., Herrero, O., & Botella, L. (2006). Chaos to coherence: Psychotherapeutic integration of traumatic loss. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 19, 127-145.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10720530500508738>

Pappas, N. T., McKenry, P. C., & Catlett, B. S. (2004). Athlete Aggression on the Rink and Off the Ice: Athlete Violence and Aggression in Hockey and Interpersonal Relationships.

Men and Masculinities, 6(3), 291-312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X03257433>

Poniatowski, K., & Whiteside, E. (2012). “Isn't He a Good Guy?”: Constructions of Whiteness in the 2006 Olympic hockey tournament. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 23(1), 1-16.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2012.641866>

Ronkainen, N. J., Kavoura, A., & Ryba, T. V. (2016). A Meta-study of Athletic Identity

Research in Sport Psychology: Current Status and Future Directions. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 9(1), 45-64.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2015.1096414>

- Ross, S. R., & Shinew, K. J. (2008). Perspectives of Women College Athletes on Sport and Gender. *Sex Roles*, 58(1), 40-57. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9275-4>
- Schechtman, M. (1996). *The constitution of selves*. Cornell University Press.
- Scholes-Balog, K. E., Hemphill, S. A., Kremer, P. J., & Toumbourou, J. W. (2016). Relationships Between Sport Participation, Problem Alcohol use, and Violence: A Longitudinal Study of Young Adults in Australia. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 31(8), 1501-1530. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260514567962>
- Smith, B. (2007). The State of the Art in Narrative Inquiry: Some Reflections. *Narrative Inquiry*, 17(2), 391-398. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.17.2.13smi>
- Smith, J. (2019, December 9). *Wealth of Canadians Divided Along Racial Lines, Says Report on Income Inequality*. CTV News. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/business/wealth-of-canadians-divided-along-racial-lines-says-report-on-income-inequality-1.4721183>
- Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C., (2008). Narrative Inquiry in Sport and Exercise Psychology: What it Can Mean and Why Might We Do It? *Psychology of Sport & Exercise*, 10(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2008.01.004>
- Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2003). Men, Sport, Spinal Cord Injury and Narrative Time. *Qualitative Research*, 3(3), 295-320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794103033002>
- Steinfeldt, J. A., Gilchrist, G. A., Halterman, A. W., Gomory, A., & Steinfeldt, M. C. (2011). Drive for Muscularity and Conformity to Masculine Norms Among College Football Players. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 12(4), 324-338. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024839>

- Steinfeldt, M., & Steinfeldt, J. A. (2012). Athletic Identity and Conformity to Masculine Norms Among College Football Players. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 24*(2), 115-128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2011.603405>
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2005). Identity Verification, Control, and Aggression in Marriage. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 68*(2), 160-178.
- Stryker, S. (1968). Identity Salience and Role Performance: The Relevance of Symbolic Interaction Theory to Family Research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 30*(4), 558-564.
- Szto, C. L. (2018). *Changing on the Fly: Situating multiculturalism, citizenship, and hockey through the voices of South Asian Canadians* (Doctoral dissertation, Simon Fraser University). <https://summit.sfu.ca/item/17912>
- Tjønndal, A. (2016). NHL heavyweights: Narratives of Violence and Masculinity in Ice Hockey. *Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research, 70*(1), 55-68. <https://doi.org/10.1515/pcsr-2016-0013>
- Todd, R. A., Soklaridis, S., Treen, A. K., Bhalerao, S. U., & Cusimano, M. D. (2017). Understanding the Resistance to Creating Safer Ice Hockey: Essential Points for Injury Prevention. *Injury Prevention, 25*(3). 10.1136/injuryprev-2016-042272
- Watson, S. D. (2017). Everyday Nationalism and International Hockey: Contesting Canadian National Identity. *Nations and Nationalism, 23*(2), 289-308. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12163>
- Wilson, T. C. (2002). The Paradox of Social Class and Sports Involvement: The Roles of Cultural and Economic Capital. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 37*(1), 5-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690202037001001>

Yukhymenko-Lescroart, M. A. (2018). On Identity and Sport Conduct of Student-athletes:

Considering Athletic and Academic Contexts. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 34, 10-

19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.09.006>

Appendices
Appendix A: Ethics Certificate



APPROVAL FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Research Ethics Board – Laurentian University

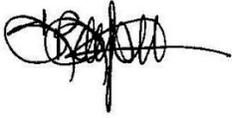
This letter confirms that the research project identified below has successfully passed the ethics review by the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board (REB). Your ethics approval date, other milestone dates, and any special conditions for your project are indicated below.

| TYPE OF APPROVAL / New / Modifications to project X / Time extension | |
|---|---|
| Name of Principal Investigator and school/department | Kirsten Morrison (PI), Interdisciplinary Health, Jennifer Johnson, Kelly Harding, supervisors |
| Title of Project | Constructions of Identities by Ontario Competitive Male Ice Hockey Players |
| REB file number | 6019400 |
| Date of original approval of project | 09 Sept, 2019 |
| Date of approval of project modifications or extension (if applicable) | 23 Oct 2019 February 10, 2020 March 5, 2020 April 09, 2020 |
| Final/Interim report due on: <i>(You may request an extension)</i> | 09 Sept, 2020 |
| Conditions placed on project | |

During the course of your research, no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment or consent forms may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to the Research Ethics website to complete the appropriate REB form.

All projects must submit a report to REB at least once per year. If involvement with human participants continues for longer than one year (e.g. you have not completed the objectives of the study and have not yet terminated contact with the participants, except for feedback of final results to participants), you must request an extension using the appropriate LU REB form. In all cases, please ensure that your research complies with Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS). Also please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence with the REB office.

Congratulations and best wishes in conducting your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Boyko', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Susan Boyko, PhD, Vice Chair, *Laurentian University Research Ethics Board*

Appendix B: Interview Guide

ID number:

Date of interview (dd/mm/yyyy):

Pseudonym:

Before we get started, I want to thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study. I want you to share your stories and experiences how you experienced them, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions. If you do not feel comfortable answering a question or need more clarification, please feel free to ask. I want to remind you that you are free to stop the interview at anytime or take a break when needed. Are there any questions before we start?

Interview questions:

How do you introduce yourself to others?

Tell me about the earliest sporting experience that you can remember. (If the answer is not about hockey, ask them to speak about their earliest hockey experience)

Can you speak about your happiest sporting experience?

Did those experiences you spoke about influence where you are now currently in sport? How?

Do you think being a student-athlete has impacted your participation in sport? How?

Has playing hockey in North-Eastern Ontario impacted how you view or play the game?

How do you see violence and aggression as a part of hockey?

Have you had any injuries caused from playing hockey? If so, can you speak about that experience?

Interview topics:

Masculinity

Violence/aggression

Athlete role

Injury

Whiteness

Demographic information:

Age:

Region of birth:

Current position on hockey team:

Current level of hockey:

How long have you played hockey?

Do you play other sports competitively? If so, which ones?

Appendix C: Sample recruitment script

Dear Potential Participant

My name is Kirsten Morrison and I am a Laurentian University master's student in Interdisciplinary Health who invites you to become a participant in my research project. The goal of the study is to better understand the impact that sport participation has on the formation of identities in some male ice hockey players in Northeastern Ontario.

You are being asked to participate in this research because you are an ice hockey player in Northeastern Ontario. If you decide to participate in this study a summary of the results of the project will also be provided to you at the end of the study.

The study participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study at any time without consequence by notifying me. Information will be collected by performing individual in person interviews, which could last 60 to 90 minutes at a mutually agreed upon location.

I would greatly appreciate if you would consent in participating in this important project. For a more detailed description of the study, please read the attached information/consent form. If you would like to participate in this study or have any further questions, please contact me at the email below.

Sincerely,
Kirsten Morrison, MA Student
School of Rural and Northern Health
K Morrison1@laurentian.ca

Appendix D: Online recruitment posterThe poster features a background image of three hockey players in action on an ice rink. The text is overlaid on this image. At the top, the title 'PARTICIPANTS NEEDED' is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. Below the title is the Laurentian University logo, which consists of a stylized blue and yellow emblem followed by the text 'Laurentian University' and 'Université Laurentienne' in a smaller font. Underneath the logo, the question 'ARE YOU A MALE, COMPETITIVE HOCKEY PLAYER AGE 18 OR OVER?' is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. This is followed by a paragraph of white text: 'We are inviting hockey players from competitive hockey teams within Greater Sudbury, ON to participate in one-on-one interviews to explore their sporting experiences and how these experiences have impacted who they are as a person.' Below the paragraph is a bulleted list of three items, each starting with a white dot. The first item asks 'How long will it take?' and states 'Interviews will last approx. 60 minutes'. The second item asks 'Will I be compensated?' and states 'All participants will receive a \$10 Tim's giftcard'. The third item asks 'Potential benefits:' and states 'At the end of the study, you will be provided a story of your life in hockey/sport.' At the bottom of the poster, contact information is provided in white text: 'If interested please contact Kirsten Morrison (kmorrison1@laurentian.ca) or Kelly Harding (kharding@laurentian.ca)'.

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

Laurentian University
Université Laurentienne

**ARE YOU A MALE, COMPETITIVE HOCKEY PLAYER
AGE 18 OR OVER?**

We are inviting hockey players from competitive hockey teams within Greater Sudbury, ON to participate in one-on-one interviews to explore their sporting experiences and how these experiences have impacted who they are as a person.

- How long will it take? Interviews will last approx. 60 minutes
- Will I be compensated? All participants will receive a \$10 Tim's giftcard
- Potential benefits: At the end of the study, you will be provided a story of your life in hockey/sport.

If interested please contact Kirsten Morrison (kmorrison1@laurentian.ca) or Kelly Harding (kharding@laurentian.ca).

Appendix E: Sample information/consent form

Title of Research Project: Constructions of Identities by Canadian University Male Ice Hockey Players

Principal Investigator: Kirsten Morrison, MA Student, School of Rural and Northern Health, Laurentian University

Co-investigators:

Kelly Harding, PhD, Thesis co-supervisor, Faculty of Arts, Laurentian University

Jennifer Johnson, PhD, Thesis co-supervisor, Department of Women's Studies, Laurentian University

Amanda Schweinbenz, PhD, Associate Professor, School of Human Kinetics, Laurentian University

Purpose of the Research:

We are inviting hockey players from competitive hockey teams within Northeastern Ontario to participate in one-on-one audio taped interviews to explore your sporting experiences and how they may have impacted how you form your identity. The intent of this research project is to better understand how sociocultural processes such as sport participation have an impact on the construction of identities.

Description of the Research:

Evidence has shown us that behavior and identity are related while sporting experiences, especially early ones help to form identities. We are interested in how athletes form their identities through sport participation and whether other aspects of their lives such as being a student or playing hockey in North-Eastern Ontario also impact identity formation. Participants will be identified by contact with the coaches of each team. Interviews are anticipated taking between 60-90 minutes and will be held at a location that is safe, private, and convenient to both the participant and the researcher (e.g., coffee shop, Laurentian University study room). A second interview will be conducted if there is more to discuss after the first interview. The discussion will be recorded and typed at a later date, which will then be provided back to the participant to ensure the information is correct. All audio recordings will be erased permanently once transcribed, and no identifying information will be kept in the transcriptions. The information provided by the participants will be used to explore how athletes come to form their identities.

Potential Discomfort/Inconvenience:

Apart from the time needed to participate in this study, we do not anticipate there being any discomforts or inconveniences associated with participation in this study. However, there is a possibility of sensitive topics arising throughout the interview. A list of mental health services will be provided at the end of the interview.

You will be provided with a copy of the Information Sheet & Consent Form.

Potential Benefits:

As a participant you will have the opportunity to describe your experiences within sport. The insight will be used to gain a deeper understanding of the processes in which athletes construct their identities. At the end of the study, you will be provided with a narrative of your life in hockey/sport.

Confidentiality:

By signing this consent form, you agree to participate in this study exploring the construction of identities by male hockey players through sport participation. Anything that you express, say, or do in the study will not be attributed to you personally. Ensuring your privacy and confidentiality is our utmost concern. No information about who you are will be given to anyone or be published without your permission.

The data produced from this study, including audio recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet, within the locked office of Kelly Harding at Laurentian University. Audio recordings will be erased completely after all transcription has been completed. When the research study is complete, the data will continue to be stored in a secure, locked location at Laurentian University. Data will be kept indefinitely. Published study results from the project will not reveal your identity.

Participation:

Participation in this research study is strictly voluntary, it is your choice to take part in this project and you can withdraw at any time.

If you have questions or require more information about the study itself, please contact Kirsten Morrison (the principal researcher) or one of her co-supervisors; Dr. Kelly Harding or Dr. Jen Johnson. Contact information is listed at the bottom of the page.

As a participant, you understand that:

- Participation is voluntary and that you can withdraw from the study any time by notifying me.
- You agree to be audio recorded during all interviews. The interview will be audio recorded so that it can be typed. The researcher will delete any personal identifying markers to ensure your confidentiality.
- Your name and location will be kept confidential. Any identifiable information will not appear in any documents.
- All information collected will be entered into a secure database accessed only by the principal researcher and the researcher's supervisory committee, Dr. Harding, Dr. Johnson, and Dr. Schweinbenz. All gathered information will be stored in a locked cabinet in Dr. Harding's office at Laurentian University. All electronic files will be secondary password protected. At no time will other parties have access to this information.
- There are two copies of this consent form. You will keep one copy and provide the signed copy to the principal researcher.
- Results will not impact you as a player or your team in any way.

This study has been approved by the Laurentian University research Ethics Board. If you have questions or concerns regarding the ethical conduct of this study, please contact the Laurentian

University Research Officer at (705)-675-1151 or 1-800-461-4030, ext. 3213 or email at ethics@laurentian.ca.

Information About the Study Results:

Prior to the start of the data analysis stage, you will be provided with a copy of your transcribed interview and will have the opportunity to approve, edit, or correct any of the information you provided. After the project report has been written, you will be sent a one-page report of the study's results as well as links to any published academic articles.

I agree to participate in the interview(s)

Participant Signature _____ Date: _____

I would like to receive a copy of a one page/short summary of the study:

Yes No

If yes, please provide your contact information:

Email address _____

Mailing address _____

Kirsten Morrison, MA Student
School of Rural and Northern Health
Kmorrison1@laurentian.ca

Kelly Harding, PhD
Faculty of Arts
Laurentian University
kharding@laurentian.ca

Jen Johnson, PhD
Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
Thorneloe University at Laurentian
jljohnson@laurentian.ca
705-673-1730 ext. 601

Appendix F: List of mental health services

Campus Security: 705-673-6562 or 705-675-1151 x. 6562

WellTrack: <https://laurentian.welltrack.com/>

More Feet on the Ground: <https://morefeetontheground.ca/>

Campus Counselling : 705-673-6506 or email counselling@laurentian.ca or visit them on the second floor of the Parker building

Walk-ins available Monday-Friday from 1pm-3pm

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000 (toll free) speak to a registered nurse

Mental Health Helpline: 1-866-531-2600 (toll free)

Live web chat: https://livechat.connexontario.ca/ECCChat/connex_chat.html

Canadian Mental Health Association: 705-675-7252

<https://ontario.cmha.ca/document-category/mental-health-info/>

Sudbury Mental Health and Addictions Centre – Cedar Street: 705-523-4988

Child and Family Centre: 705-525-1008

Health Sciences North – Crisis Intervention Program: 705-675-4760

Health Sciences North – Mental Health and Addictions Program: 705-675-5900

N'Swakamok Native Friendship Centre: Healing and Wellness: 705-674-2128

Shkagamik Kwe Health Centre: Mental Health Program: 705-675-1596

Crisis Services Canada: Call toll free 1-833-456-4566 Text at 45645

Online chat at <http://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/>

Crisis Text Line: text HOME to 686868

L'association des jeunes de la rue: 705-675-6422