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The Broncos: A Social Support Approach to Team Tragedy

By

Shaun Smith

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the Department of Kinesiology in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Human Kinetics at the University of
Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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The Broncos: A Social Support Approach to Team Tragedy

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January 17th, 2022

Declaration of Originality

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Abstract

Throughout the last decade there has been a widespread effort to collectively acknowledge mental health challenges faced by individuals within society and to improve their outcomes through social support. While much of this discussion has included sport, sport organizations remain resistant to change at every level from the professional level to school sports.

Accordingly, individuals have continually faced mental health challenges that originated or were compounded by their participation in sport. This study attempted to identify the social supports and barriers to those supports that resulted in athletes having poor outcomes, while also identifying the strategies and social supports used by athletes to eventually reach positive outcomes in sport's social environment. A case study methodology was used, with the 1986-87 Swift Current Broncos WHL team serving as participants. The team was chosen due to their experience with two stressors: a bus accident that killed four teammates, and their coach being a serial pedophile. The study's results showed that nearly all participants experienced mental health challenges because of these stressors, and that a majority of participants perceived that the social environment of Canadian junior hockey in the 1980s contributed to the athlete's negative mental health outcomes by acting as a barrier towards social support. The implications of this study suggests that the environment within junior hockey is not conducive to positive mental health outcomes, a conclusion that was seriously heightened by Hockey Canada's 2022 scandal involving a sexual misconduct fund that occurred just after the study was completed.

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List of Abbreviations

Canadian Hockey League (CHL)

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)

National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR)

National Hockey League (NHL)

Ontario Hockey League (OHL)

Participation Action Research (PAR)

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL)

Systematic Crisis Intervention Model (SCIM)

Western Hockey League (WHL)

Glossary of Terms

Canadian Hockey League: A developmental hockey organization that oversees three leagues (WHL, OHL, and QMJHL), and whose primary function is to act as the pathway to the professional NHL for its young players, who are generally between the ages of 16 and 20. (Grygar, 2013).

Hegemonic Masculinity: A set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy. (Jewkes et al., 2015)

Mental Health: A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (World Health Organization, 2004).

National Hockey League: The largest professional hockey league in the world by commercial revenue, the NHL represents the pinnacle of professional hockey worldwide. It is the end goal for most CHL players (Grygar, 2013).

Social Support: An exchange of resources between at least two individuals, which is perceived by the provider or the recipient to enhance the well-being of the recipient (Holt & Hoar, 2006).

Well-being: The ability to successfully, resiliently, and innovatively participate in the routines and activities deemed significant by a cultural community. Well-being is also the states of mind and feeling produced by participation in routines and activities (Weisner, 1998).

Researcher Position Statement

This study primarily examines factors and relationships contained within Canadian junior hockey. I do not play hockey, have never played hockey, and by and large do not follow any hockey leagues at the junior hockey level or otherwise. I have no financial or emotional investment to any hockey player, team, or organization. My interests as a researcher are less in the sport of hockey itself, and more in the experiential outcomes of those who participate in it.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to retrospectively examine the social supports in place for Canadian junior hockey players by analyzing the lives and experiences of the 1986-87 Swift Current Broncos bus crash survivors. This research assesses the social supports available to the survivors, as well as identifies which supports the survivors feel would have aided them in the aftermath of the crash. Finally, the outcomes that resulted from a lack of these resources are investigated using the 36-year timelapse between the accident and the study. By determining the

necessary resources, and the barriers to those resources, this research can assist administrators, educators, coaches, parents, and players themselves to have a better understanding of the needs of junior hockey players in relation to their well-being and emotional health.

Introduction/Context

On the afternoon of December 30, 1986, 21 members of the Swift Current Broncos, aged 16-20, boarded their team bus and travelled the Trans-Canada Highway for a Western Hockey League (WHL) away game in Regina, Saskatchewan. Also on board the bus were six other passengers that included the driver, team staff, and a local reporter. In adverse weather conditions, and only four kilometres removed from their departure point in Swift Current, the driver lost control of the team bus on the ice-covered highway, leaving the road and overturning at 55 kilometres an hour (Culp et al., 2012). The resulting crash killed four players: Trent Kresse, aged 20, Scott Kruger, 19, Chris Mantyka, 19, and Brent Ruff, 16. The surviving players were left with physical injuries that mended with time, and invisible mental scars which would not be so easily healed. (Culp et al., 2012).

The surviving players were not offered counselling despite the tragedy that reverberated across the country and devastated the local community. Instead, players were denied access to essential resources (Kennedy & Grainger, 2007). The magnitude of the calamity was such that stronger forms of aid should have been provided to the people who experienced the accident. Ultimately, decision-makers pushed an agenda that emphasized a return to normalcy as soon as possible and the team returned to play just 10 days after four of their teammates had died, and only a few days after the funerals and a public memorial (Culp et al., 2012). The players attempted to cope with the emotional and psychological distress alone or with one another, but without the adequate social support; some Broncos survivors gravitated to alcohol and other vices as escape mechanisms (Culp et al., 2012). Some players presented with anxiety, depression, and substance abuse issues in the years following the deaths of their teammates that December day (Culp et al., 2012; Kennedy & Grainger, 2007).

Hockey culture in Canada has long manifested a so-called warrior code that champions aggression, violence and playing through adversity, often with emotional detachment that allows for adherents to separate the task of hockey from their personal feelings (Allain, 2008; Gee, 2009). These traits are associated with hegemonic masculinity and have been reinforced in hockey by marketing campaigns (Gee, 2009), media personalities (Allain, 2008), and hockey fans (Allain, 2010). This stereotyped image of the hockey warrior has created a belief that any indication of weakness is unacceptable (Allain, 2008; Anderson, 2018; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017). Masculine stereotypes certainly emerged in the case of the Broncos and the expectations of their coaches, supporters, the WHL, and even the nation itself anticipated the team's return to the ice to honour their fallen comrades, which the Broncos did in quick course (Culp et.al, 2012). The players' demonstration of grit and determination was aligned with the Canadian hockey identity (Kennedy et al., 2019) and was predictably lauded, as well as their mental fortitude in the face of a tragedy (Culp et al., 2012).

Why the players were not given adequate resources to assist in their post-crash healing is not clear. There was no precedent that charted a tried-and-true course for the league to follow but the affection with which the Broncos were held within Swift Current, the smallest community with membership in the WHL, seemed to indicate a desire for the best possible outcomes for its players (Corelli, 1987; Jamieson, 1988). Certainly, one figure casts a long shadow from the lack of action and support provided surviving players: Graham James, the head coach and general manager of the Swift Current Broncos. James, while not the focus of this study, was tried and convicted of sexual abuse that involved several of his former players, including a Bronco player from the season of the bus crash, in the decades following the accident (Graveland, 2015). James served five years in federal prison as a result. Any counselling offered to the players, for

example, made James vulnerable since his misdeeds could have been revealed during therapy sessions. In the years that followed the accident, James was faulted by members of the 1986-87 Broncos for intentionally withholding professional support (Francis, 2018; Kennedy & Grainger, 2007), although the press at the time feted James as the individual that successfully guided the team through emotional hardship (Culp et.al, 2012). Closing ranks amid adversity, after all, was a time-honoured tactic in the sports world, and no one publicly questioned James' management of the crisis (Culp, et.al, 2012)

Regardless of James' role in post-crash care, Canadian junior hockey failed to ensure the players were adequately resourced. No systems existed to place survivors on a pathway to healing and the players confessed they were unsure how to engage with support had it been offered (Culp et al., 2012, p. 75). At the time, many CHL coaches held the attitude that they needed to "break down their players and then build them back up" (Culp et al., 2012, p. 77). While contributing to the overall warrior culture prevalent in hockey (Allain, 2008; Gee, 2009), this environment also regularly exposed players to emotional challenges (public humiliation in the media, isolation from friends and family, verbal abuse from coaches, etc.) as well as physical abuse through hazing and playing through injury. The accident was unprecedented in the CHL but there were the norms in place for the surviving Broncos players to follow (Culp et al. 2012). It could be effectively argued that the CHL did not operate to create emotionally aware and healthy young men, it existed to create elite hockey players that had the potential to play in the NHL. The hockey norms of the time perceived the best way to reach that outcome was a meaningful dose of what can be identified as emotional and physical abuse. When these cultural attitudes met the need to properly support suffering players that had just survived a tragedy, the

CHL failed to support the victims and did not acknowledge or provide necessary social support for the players or ensure that the club did so (Culp et al., 2012).

Thesis

From the available information of the past 36 years, it is clear that the 1986-87 Broncos survivors received little to no social support from the CHL, WHL, or the club itself. While informal support through the community and teammates was present, this lack of formal social support led to reliance on traditional hockey norms that were not conducive to a healing environment for the players. Utilizing the model created by Holt and Hoar (2006), that is detailed in the Theoretical Framework section of this document, the resources available to the players are identified and categorized to determine the resources provided, both at the initial time of the accident, as well as in the years that followed. Using the passage of time, the testimony of the survivors details not only the resources offered, but those desired to assist with their recovery. It is expected that the findings of this study will give institutions, educators, coaches, and players an understanding of what resources should be provided to young athletes following team tragedies, in the short and long term, and opens doors for future research to create operational programming for young athletes in times of tragedy.

Methods

Participant Pool

The majority of the participants of this study are the surviving players from the 1986-87 Swift Current Broncos junior hockey team. Insights from team personnel and billets were also solicited to provide contextual details, recollections, insights, and interpretations. While the WHL was given opportunity to add their voices to this chorus, they did not respond to the

request for comment. As many of the remaining individuals as possible with a connection to the 1986-87 team were recruited. Participants were granted anonymity if desired, and one participant requested such anonymity. A challenge of this research was the relatively small pool of potential participants who were available to be interviewed. As such, the methodology was constructed to meet the standards of qualitative research set by Sandelowski (1995), who established that achieving a “new and richly textured understanding” (p. 183) through qualitative interviewing, and Morse (2000), who deemed that the more usable data was collected by researchers from each individual participant, the fewer participants would be required for qualitative interviewing. By creating thorough and comprehensive interview guides (Appendix A), these standards of qualitative research can be met by the methodology of this project.

Regarding demographics, the player participants were all between the age of 16 and 20 at the time of the bus crash, putting them between 51 and 55 years-old today. All are male and predominately white, with one exception, and all were born and grew up in Canada.

Procedure and Data Collection

Ethical clearance was granted by the University of Windsor’s Research Ethics Board. Informed consent was gained from the participants before the data was collected, both in the Letter of Consent, where consent is required to proceed, and through verbal consent which was obtained at the start of the interview. Individual, open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Qualitative interviewing is recommended when exploring a participant’s past experiences as it allows more opportunity for the interviewee to comprehensively answer inquiries (Ali, 2014).

An interview guide for the semi-structured interviews was developed with relevant themes and topics that can be found in Appendix A. By offering open-ended questions that sought personal information regarding the experience and recommendations of the individuals who experienced the Broncos bus crash and aftermath, it gave these affected individuals a mechanism from which to begin to map a better response from hockey institutions (if indeed they found those processes were insufficient). While the questions were standardized for all players in the player interview guide, the interviewer was permitted a level of discretion, with probes available for each question. Additionally, interviewees were encouraged by the interviewer to freely express themselves and elaborate on their feelings and experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This design allowed participants the opportunity to answer unasked questions or address issues they felt relevant. Because of the researchers' limitations in this area, the participants themselves were encouraged to construct their own narrative, diagnosing a perceived problematic situation in junior hockey, and using their own experiences to positively identify potential solutions in line with case study methodology.

This study accordingly utilized a case study methodology because of the exploratory nature of this project. Stake (1978) declared that the case study method, in addition to its exploratory benefits, gives a direct and satisfying way of improving the understanding of a circumstance. Such outcomes fit well with the stated aims of this project. Case studies are appropriate when, according to Fidel (1984), a great many factors and relationships are included, no basic laws exist to dictate which of these are the most important, and when these factors and relationships can be directly observed in the research. Given the stimulus under scrutiny (the bus crash) and the assumed varied personal responses to such a stimulus, Fidel's understanding of case studies matches with the desired research design of this study. It was important to select a

data collection research method which properly allowed for detailed, open-ended expression since it was deemed likely that participants would have different reactions, both short and long-term, following the stimulus. As such, qualitative interviewing was employed through an open-ended interview guide which allowed participants to thoroughly describe their experiences of interest to the researchers. According to Atheide and Johnson (1994), the social world is different from the literal world and instead should be viewed as a world that is individually constructed and interpreted. For the purposes of case study methodology, past researchers have warned against statistical aggregations reducing the social world down to a set of numbers where the result may still be ignorant of reality (Amis, 2005). As such, in an individual interview, the researcher attempted to gain insight into the social world of their participants and acquire the corresponding contextual information that breathed life into the collected data. Amis notes that quantitative figures are still important, and accordingly this project does not rely solely on the individual interviews themselves, but also on a data analysis process that ensured a degree of quantitative validity.

In social science research, the existence of different realities in the minds of different individuals is of interest, and the easiest way to identify these realities is to talk to people (Amis, 2005). The implementation of individualistic semi-structured qualitative interviews for this study allowed for gathering information of the specific realities of participants in depth. As such, this method presents an opportunity to reach the standards of case studies earlier referenced by Fidel to appropriately examine the factors and relationships which are individually perceived within the individual realities of the participants.

The semi-structured interview developed for this study has four objectives divided into four sections: 1) to determine social support provided, 2) to determine the social supports

available, desired, and unavailable, 3) to determine the barriers to those resources and support, and 4) to determine the outcomes of having or not having resources and support. The first section aided the researcher establish an understanding of the social support the players had before and after the traumatic event, and featured questions such as: Did you feel supported in the immediate aftermath of the crash? The second section helped the researcher identify the resources made available to the players following the accident and their perception regarding the positive or negative impact of these resources (or lack thereof), featuring questions such as: Do you believe you required or did not require social support in order to recover from the bus crash? The third section helped the researcher identify the barriers which prevented the players from accessing social support or mental health resources, and featured questions such as: Why do you think resources you believed should have been provided were not provided? The fourth section helped the researcher identify the short and long-term outcomes of the player's well-being and quality of life following the bus crash. Questions featured include: Did you abuse any substances following the accident? A trauma therapist was made available after the interview should the interviewee be triggered by reliving the experience. Additionally, the researcher received training on trauma-based interviewing to aid in the interviewing process itself. Happily, the participants were able to conduct their interviews without the intervention of the above resources.

The interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams, with an additional option given to participants to conduct the interview over the phone, which one participant utilized. This adaptation is a COVID-19 adjustment, as the initial plan was to conduct the interviews face-to-face in person. Audio recording for transcription purposes is necessary for the data analysis portion of the study and both mediums allow for that outcome.

Data Analysis

Data from the interviews was transcribed by the Descript software. The accuracy and confidentiality provided by Descript makes it a useful tool to transcribe the audio from the recorded qualitative interviews. Following the transcription, the data was stored and analyzed on a password-protected hard drive only available to the researcher. Following this, the researcher first managed the data documents through interview transcripts and field notes of observations (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Second, the researcher managed the interview ideas in terms of conceptual and theoretical matters. Finally, the researcher developed the query questions of data through interrogation processes (Patton, 2014). For the analysis portion of the process, a thematic analysis was used. According to Clarke and Braun (2017), thematic analysis is a method that allows the investigator to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning also known as themes. Furthermore, this methodological technique demonstrates to the investigator the themes (or patterns of meaning) relevant to the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Daly et al., 1997; Nowell et al., 2017). This method allowed the researcher to identify patterns and differences within the data. A useful aspect of thematic analysis is to “capture something important about the data in relation to the research question...and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Widely used in psychology, thematic analyses have now been utilized by other academic disciplines, such as media and sport studies, primarily to better understand experiences, perceptions, practices, and casual factors underlying phenomena (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Fugard & Potts, 2015). Accordingly, thematic analysis is a viable research tool to use for this project, given the circumstances. The qualitative research software Dedoose was used for the coding portion of the thematic analysis. This software enabled categorization and organization of large sets of transcription data, which

allowed for an in-depth thematic analysis to take place. Themes were categorized through a comprehensive alignment of the data into relevant categories which, in turn, improved the reliability of the study.

Finally, the use of the critical friend method (Costa & Kallick, 1993) allowed for “a greater capacity for self-evaluation as well as open-mindedness to the constructive thinking of others” (p.51). The critical friend was a colleague with a high level of education and background that evaluated the work of the primary researcher. This critical friend asked provocative questions and analyzed that data through a different lens, offering an additional perspective to the data set. This feedback was clear and constructive, and resulted in an enhanced development of the project. Summarized, the primary role of the critical friend was to help guide the coding process by recognizing and establishing themes.

Theoretical Framework

A model that allows for the systematic study of social support is Holt and Hoar’s (2006) conceptual framework of social support in sport. This model took inspiration from earlier research, which postulated that social support results from the interaction between athletes and their social environment (Vaux, 1992), and is viewed as a multidimensional construct consisting of structural, functional, and perceptual dimensions. Structural social support refers to the type and number of relationships and the integration into social groups. While structural support includes several primary networks: significant others (up to five individuals with whom a participant is intimate), exchange networks (approximately 20 people with whom the participant is close), interactive networks (everyone the participant interacts with daily), and global networks (anyone who would recognize the participant), it is important to note that the existence of structural social support does not guarantee supportive exchanges between the individuals and

the participant (Holt & Hoar, 2006). As such, structural social support only outlines the social support network around a participant and not the social support they actually receive in practice. Functional social support is directed at the frequency with which an individual has obtained supportive resources, which directly refers to the social support received. A support exchange between the participant and any other individual of any type (emotional support, esteem support, or even tangible aid in the form of resources), constitutes functional social support. Perceptual social support explains an individual's belief that assistance would be available to them when it is required but lacks the actual delivery of support described by functional social support. For perceptual social support, the belief that support would be provided if requested is as meaningful as functional social support itself.

These three social support dimensions are believed to influence two types of mechanisms: the main effect model and stress-buffering effect model (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The main effect model establishes the notion that social resources have a beneficial influence on the individual (Sarason et al., 1990). The stress-buffering effect model assumes that social support acts as a coping resource that helps individuals manage the negative effects of stress. These two mechanisms are moderated by (a) social environmental factors (e.g., culture, social context, gender) and (b) individual factors (e.g., personality, maturity). Finally, the model contains two types of outcomes: instrumental and relational. Instrumental outcomes refer to the social support concerned about relieving distress (e.g., burnout, positive/negative affect, motivation), while relational outcomes refer to development and strengthening of relationships (e.g., increases in team cohesion, interpersonal coping). The Holt and Hoar (2006) theoretical framework is applicable to this study (Appendix C). This conceptual framework describes social support as consisting of a host of factors that impact people's health and well-being. Groups,

such as hockey teams, have a tremendous social impact on the lives of each team member (e.g., players, coaches, team administrators). This program of research intends to use the Swift Current Broncos tragedy as a way of exploring the importance of social support (e.g., social support dimensions, mechanisms, outcomes, and moderators) and how these factors affect health and well-being from the viewpoint of the players. These insights will be employed to establish policy and best practices for when these types of tragedies occur in the future.

Limitations and Delimitations:

Limitations of three sorts are anticipated in this study: participation limitations, generalizability limitations, and limitations due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Limitations with regard to the participants included the small sample size and the duration between the event being investigated and the interviews for this study. Only a small number of potential participants were on the bus at the time of the accident in 1986. Furthermore, there was resistance from potential participants to discuss the subject with strangers from academia. Such a resistance may have been inspired by a variety of elements discovered in the existing literature: everything from distrust of hockey organizations (Grygar, 2013) to the shame of trauma (Kennedy & Grainger, 2007). This sample size has been addressed in the methodology of the study, by using semi-structured interviews that include open-ended questions and dynamic prompts. Through this methodology, it was possible to reach the “new and richly textured understanding” standard for qualitative research established by Sandelowski (1995, p. 183), and additionally takes guidance from Morse (2000), who posited that the more useable data collected from each participant, the fewer participants are required. Furthermore, the concept of data adequacy being reached when theoretical saturation occurs in qualitative interviewing (Vasileiou et al., 2018), means that when participants begin to echo one another, validity has been achieved

as no new information is likely to be forthcoming. Given the specific nature of the interviews, the researchers found that this theoretical saturation was achieved without the need for a large participant pool.

The other limitation that relates to participants is the 36-year span of time between the event in 1986 and today. While this passage of years provides the study insights into the long-term effects of the social support which was provided, it also could potentially limit the memory of the participants with respect to the social support they did or not receive.

Generalizability limitations stem from the nature of the project. The Swift Current Broncos of 1986-87 are a single hockey team, in a single league, with a single age bracket, in a single country. While it is possible and anticipated that certain aspects of their experience could extend to athletes in similar situations, the uniqueness of their circumstances could diminish the universality of their accounts. As well, the team structure of hockey demonstrates experiences not present for athletes in individual sports. Sex and gender could also play a role in the findings, as all Broncos were/are male. This factor has wider ramifications as the masculinity so heavily infused in junior hockey provided consequences. A female soccer team that experienced a similar bus crash might tell have different stories than those of the Broncos, even if many of the other variables were the same. While the researcher hopes that the findings of this project could prove useful for a wide variety of athletes (or even non-athletes) that experienced a traumatic event and utilized (or did not have access to) the social support which followed, it is nonetheless a limitation of the project. However, as case study methodology focuses on identifying the causes of an outcome in a single scenario, it is possible through this project to comprehend what happened to the 1986-87 Broncos in a highly detailed way. Nevertheless, this project is primarily concerned with validity than universality, something to which the case study methodology is

ideally suited. If these causes are generalizable to other CHL hockey teams today is possible, but will require further research to confirm.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents additional limitations to this study. Instead of face-to-face interviews, online or audio interviews were used. Not everyone is comfortable with technology and, as we have seen the past 18 months, technical difficulties (internet outages, for example) represent issues that would not be present in face-to-face interviews. Furthermore, researchers preferred in-person, face-to-face interviews due to rapport-building factors that can be created more naturally in that context. Connections can be virtually built, but the presence of technology serves as a filter. Non-verbal cues can be more difficult to spot, especially if a video feed is not strong. While the researchers for this project were confident and comfortable in the Microsoft Teams environment, some participants were maybe not (although it was not detectable to the researcher but might have existed), and this could also have a limiting effect on the vital connection between interviewer and interviewee that could create a forthcoming forum.

Delimitations are mostly restricted to scope. The choice of the Swift Current Broncos was carefully considered, as the benefits of hindsight and being able to observe long-term effects were taken into account. However, this decision does impact the generalizability of the data which the project will produce, as listed above. This project accordingly does not attempt to quantitatively analyze the response of the CHL, number of resources provided, or any other numerically relevant figure associated with social support. Instead, the open-ended qualitative nature of the methodology for the project attempts to garner from the participants their highly personal experiences with the social supports that were present, and the social supports which were not. The objective of the data collection process accordingly is to observe patterns of meaning which the participants experienced, which can be organized into themes, and from

which conclusions can be drawn about the lived reality of the Broncos. Hopefully from there, these conclusions can be built upon into concrete recommendations for junior hockey organizations and institutions.

Literature Review

Hockey in Canada

Noonan (2002) declared that the sport of hockey in Canada was a social construction containing a set of meanings and myths which tied the institution to the culture of Canada as a whole. While a cursory look around the nation during a Winter Olympic year might make this obvious even to a casual onlooker, Noonan (2002) went further by stating that hockey was a “ritualized Canadian social institution upheld by a set of culturally specific myths which have been appropriated by the discourse of Canadian hockey, legitimized by the discourse, and then disseminated through [popular] media” (p. 4). What this meant to Noonan (2002) was that hockey was infused into the Canadian identity to the point that a relationship between Canadians and hockey was not so much questioned as it was utterly taken for granted. This can be seen at every level of Canadian society, including “high society” where the leading political party in Canada at the time used hockey as a pre-eminent signifier of “Canadianness” in an effort to appeal to the average voting Canadian and to create a so-called “ordinary Canadian” (Scherer & McDermott, 2021, p. 107). It is as such no surprise that many Canadian youths play the sport as children and aspire to reach the heights of the professional players who they saw on popular TV programs such as Hockey Night in Canada. Hailing from outside the country, academics new to Canada such as Pryer (2002), noted from their non-hockey backgrounds that children learn about masculinity, femininity, social identity, sexuality, class, race, and gender relations from popular culture practices, and in Canada, the dominant culture practiced is that of hockey. As such, “the

popular cultural practice of hockey functions as a powerful form of public pedagogy within varied Canadian social, geographical, economical, political, and historical contexts” (Pryer, 2002, p. 75). In short, Canadian children, and by extension older Canadians who themselves were once children, developed their identities and attitudes through the lessons hockey taught them. But what lessons does hockey teach? Given the importance of the institution in the development of Canadian children, the sport has come under increased scrutiny. The hyper masculine subculture within hockey concerned researchers like MacDonald (2014), who concluded that not only was ice hockey the primary site of socialization for boys and men, but that it also offered a form of identity construction that resulted in hegemonic masculinity and increased nationalism to its adherents. Other researchers noted a racial exclusion component to Canadian hockey culture, where it was socially acceptable for players defined as white to participate as opposed to those who could or would not identify as white who would then be excluded, noting that Canadian hockey “assumed whiteness” (Lorenz & MacKenzie, 2021). As a result, hockey is more than a game to many Canadians, but instead represents a collection of values, views, and morals which govern their lives. It is this identity construction that Canadian leaders had been attempting to tap into to increase their popular appeal (Scherer & McDermott, 2021). However, this identity and set of values carried by hockey players and their fans created a psychology different from many other sports. Botterill (2004) drew links between Canada’s early pioneer culture and hockey, seeing that the “win-despite-cost” and “eye-for-an-eye” (p. 17) value systems potentially had roots in Canada’s past identity. However, even hockey players are not invincible, and when they do not meet the criteria of their hockey-created identity of winning and toughness (due to injury or other factors), this can cause a loss in perspective which resulted in a volatile swing and loss of one’s perceived identity (Botterill, 2004). While this is undoubtedly

problematic for professional hockey players, it is especially so for those who may never reach those heights – junior hockey players.

Modern Junior Hockey in Canada

The CHL acts as a development pathway for junior hockey players to the NHL, where the opportunities of professionalism, glory, and multi-million-dollar contracts await. CHL players are between the ages of 15 and 21 and play throughout the country in regional leagues. The WHL, the OHL, and QMJHL make up these regional leagues who produce the majority of NHL players operating in one of North America's so-called Big Four sports' leagues. However, of the 1,400 players who operate on the 60 teams in the CHL, it is only a small minority who will advance on to the NHL. Grygar (2013), called it "chasing the dream" (p. 44). When evaluating the experience of CHL players, Grygar (2013) highlighted the disparity between the league's administration and its players through two quotes:

We are of the opinion that no junior hockey league in the world has made more changes to support the best interest of its players both on and off the ice as the CHL. -David Branch (CHL President 1996-2019)

It's like child slavery down there. It's a joke, 50 dollars a week? But as a kid I made the team, I was just trying to fly under the radar. You're not going to say shit. Now that I'm older, I realize that was bullshit. -Former CHL player (p. 44).

When researchers calculated the odds of making the NHL from all boys enrolled in junior hockey in Ontario in 1985, only 0.04% went on to play in the NHL (Campbell, 2013). However, for young athletes "chasing the dream" this number is not important, and the players remain "hopelessly transfixed with ambition and desperately hold onto...the dream" (Grygar, 2013, p.

45). This creates a large power imbalance with the CHL and their affiliated organizations possessing a high degree of influence over their child athletes. Grygar found that CHL players had a singular focus, and that focus was the NHL.

When I was playing in the [CHL], my goal was going to the NHL, just like every friggin' player. Fucking going to play in the NHL and make millions. -Former CHL player

When I was playing minor hockey all I thought was that I would one day be playing in the NHL. Not making it wasn't even a consideration. I was just trying to pick what team I wanted to be on. -Former CHL player (Grygar, 2013, p.46).

It was not just Canadian boys (literally) signing away their bodies and lives to a dream. From 1992 on, the CHL has regulated the inclusion of non-North Americans who come to the CHL with similar ambitions. While these foreign athletes generally had positive experiences, the same players reported feelings of loneliness, harassment, and language issues, along with other migrant issues (Allain, 2005). They were not the only ones. While the billet system of hosting CHL players with local families can create lifetime bonds, it can also exacerbate loneliness and isolation (Culp et al., 2012). Furthermore, the cultural dynamic of a hockey identity that was the focus of Noonan in the previous section proved to become increasingly dangerous for participants in junior hockey. This has a particular effect given that there are increasingly younger players, so called fast-track prospects, who enter into the CHL system at a very young age, who experience negatively affected psychological development compared to non-fast-tracked players (Bruner, 2002). While Bruner ultimately saw a positive environment (billet, organization, etc) as being the key factor in psychological and emotional development, the literature often reveals that CHL players do not feel like the environment that they were in was positive (Bruner, 2002; Culp et al., 2012; Grygar, 2013).

Hegemonic Masculinity and Warrior Hockey Culture

Examining hockey culture and its particular role in Canadian culture has revealed reoccurring themes of hegemonic masculinity (Allain, 2008, 2015). Defined by Jewkes et al. (2015), hegemonic masculinity is:

A set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy. (p. 113)

In Canadian hockey, this plays out as the so-called warrior code which trumpets actions such as aggressiveness, fighting, and playing through injury (Allain, 2008; Gee, 2009). This unwritten code of toughness and masculinity has been perpetuated through marketing campaigns (Gee, 2009), media personalities (Allain, 2008), and hockey fans (Allain, 2010). By creating such norms, hegemonic masculinity has manifested in a stereotyped image of a warrior hockey hero for fans to worship (Gee, 2009), and has also made it so any form of weakness in the warrior is unacceptable, which in turn dictates the behaviors of hockey players on and off the ice (Allain, 2008; Anderson, 2018, Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017). With the stigma of mental health seen as a weakness, it is unthinkable for athletes to seek out mental health assistance (Gulliver et al., 2012), which played out in the case of the 1986-87 Broncos (Culp et al., 2012). It is important not to put the onus solely on the athlete, however. Hockey organizations and institutions have operated as closed communities, unwilling to adapt to new cultural norms (Allain, 2013; Cote, 2017). A so-called code of silence has been shown to prevail inside junior hockey culture (MacDonald, 2012), and widely this seems to be kept at all levels. This is in direct opposition to

some professional players and other hockey stakeholders who have been vocal in their efforts and willingness to update the culture of hockey to improve player experiences (Anderson, 2018; Aston, 2019; Austin, 2019; Johnston, 2019). This institutional inaction, coupled with coaching abuse, creates problems for some athletes (Stirling & Kerr, 2013), but the ensuing section exacerbates all these issues even further.

While not limited to Canada, hegemonic masculinity is an identifiable primary trait in hockey and the wider culture that surrounds hockey (Gee, 2009; MacDonald, 2012; Rasinkangas & Toiviainen, 2013). For junior hockey specifically, MacDonald (2012) argued that the experience within the CHL's hockey culture saw the players seeing themselves become men, transforming into a larger physical stature, as well as thoughts of an adult professional career and a family. This development could go several different ways, as the players looked to their families, older teammates, and coaches to learn what it meant to be a man, and these influencers were not always laden with hegemonic masculinity (MacDonald, 2012). However, in her conclusion, MacDonald (2012) absolutely confirmed that through interviews with an entire Canadian junior ice hockey team, the Major Junior hockey player fell within the ideal of hegemonic masculinity, "laden with arrogance, toughness, and womanizing, and a stifling of emotion, or better yet – the code of silence" (p. 114). The media has perpetuated this issue by increasing the popular perception of rough hockey players. Junior hockey has often been described as a "gongshow" and while no officially recognized definition of this term exists, the colloquial definition points to "out of control young men" and notes that the term originates in "Canadian junior hockey culture" (MacDonald & Lafrance, 2018, p.1).

Emotional Abuse in Sport

Emotional abuse has been defined in sport as a pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviours within a critical relationship between an individual and a caregiver that has the potential to be harmful (Stirling & Kerr, 2008). Because elite athletes spend more time with their coaches and teammates than with their families and friends (Dubé et al., 2019), coaches and trainers meet the level of this critical relationship, leaving athletes vulnerable to abuse from these sources (Donnelly, 1993). In the case of junior hockey specifically, players move away from their families and hometown to live with billets or host families nearby to their team (Dubé et al., 2007; MacDonald & Lafrance, 2018; Wright et al., 2019). These living arrangements are especially relevant because emotional abuse conducted by coaches has stronger outcomes when in a critical relationship. This means that if the coaches were not dominant figures in the lives of their athletes, the conduct would not meet the standard of abuse, instead being categorized as harmful mistreatment in the form of bullying, harassment, or neglect (Stirling & Kerr, 2009). Past research has shown that while many elite athletes experience abuse in sport, especially from coaches (Kavanagh et al., 2017), not all are able to recognize it at the time. When Kavanagh et al. (2017) examined athletes' coping strategies for the emotional and physical abuse they experienced at the hands of their coaches, some denied they were being maltreated, only acknowledging it after they had left the sport. For athletes operating at this level, the outcomes of higher performance outweighed the negatives of experiencing abuse (Culp et al., 2012; Kavanagh et al., 2017). Olympic hopefuls were willing to tolerate anything due to assumptions that the emotional abuse maximized performance and accepted the extreme emotional challenges that they perceived lay outside the boundaries of tolerable treatment or behaviour (Kavanagh et al., 2017). This situation is especially problematic because experiencing emotional abuse as a minor has been suggested to be a threat to the psychological well-being of elite child athletes

(Gervis & Dunn, 2004). The short-term outcomes of this emotional abuse were mixed. Some athletes reported increased motivation, while others reported decreased motivation and reduced enjoyment of sport (Stirling & Kerr, 2013). Among the Broncos as well, certain players did not respond well to the coaching methods of James and while still becoming NHL draftees, did not approve of his conduct (Culp et al., 2012). Research has shown that athletes buy into a win-at-all-costs mentality and rationalize the emotional abusive coaching practices as necessary to their own development and success in sport (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2013, 2009;), although that same research has indicated that there were negative psychological effects that resulted from these coaching practices. (Stirling & Kerr, 2013).

Athletes were able to successfully mitigate many of these negative psychological effects through a litany of coping strategies in the moment, although this was more difficult to do over the long-term (Kavanagh et al., 2017). What is clear is that coaches push athletes to the breaking point and occasionally beyond, resulting in dropout (Kavanagh et al., 2017; Stirling & Kerr, 2013). What is not clear is how athletes who face a strong additional stressor, such as the 1986-87 Swift Current Broncos did with the bus accident, can cope with the psychological trauma of said second stressor in addition to the regular emotional abuse received from their sporting activity. Most of the research on emotional abuse in sport notes that the athletes are isolated with their teams, coaches, and sporting activities (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Kavanagh et al., 2017; Stirling & Kerr, 2013). This naturally limits external factors and stressors from other sources, which allows for coaches to control the amount of abuse the athletes sustained and limit potential damage. However, when a second stressor becomes a factor, there is no available research that explains how athletes respond to trauma in addition to the regular abuse they already face.

Social Support in Sport

Because sport is an institution with dynamic social networks of teammates, coaches, trainers, opponents, fans, and media, the relationships between these groups has been well-studied. Especially worth noting are team sports, where support from teammates counteracts the anxiety and depression that festers more frequently in individual sports (Pluhar et al., 2019). Additionally, team resilience has been noted as a process which protects individuals from the negative effects of stressors through a variety of characteristics: group structure, mastery approaches, social capital, and collective efficacy (Morgan et al., 2013). Leadership present on the team from peers plays a large role social support, leading to more technical support from coaches, and social support from teammates (Dubé et al., 2007; Loughead & Hardy, 2005). Social support is therefore present in sport and has been associated with reducing burnout and emotional or physical exhaustion (DeFreese & Smith, 2014; Gabana et al., 2017), limiting sport drop-out intention from youth athletes (Lavallee et al., 2019), and well-being and optimism during injury rehabilitation (de Groot et al., 2018; Lu & Hsu, 2013). Collegiate athletes have cited that the social support characteristics of athletic departments were essential, both in their own development and in promoting social relationships within the organization (Berg & Warner, 2019). Varsity athletes also noted that they received social support from parents and siblings which also contributed to a variety of positive outcomes, such as motivation and development (Lundy, et al., 2019). However, for the purposes of Canadian junior hockey, the players had access to neither an athletic department nor parents or siblings, instead living in remote communities with billet families. This makes a study by Dubé et al. (2007) particularly relevant, as researchers examined the social support networks of major junior hockey players in remote regions of Canada. Respondents identified four key sources of social support: coaches, friends on the team, teachers, and the community. Coaches were given mention for their emotional

challenge support (helping players through adversity) instead of their technical support as is typically expected for elite coaches (Dubé et al., 2007), although for the purposes of this study, it does not appear that head coach, Graham James, was seen similarly (Culp et al., 2012). The remote locations of junior hockey teams played a role in this view of social support, with players commenting that the seclusion caused them to stick together and believed these social supports may have been exclusive to the smaller regions. Particularly relevant to this belief was the accommodations and understanding players received from teachers, who they cited as being one of their key social supports, and who the players did not believe they would have had such a strong relationship with in a larger urban area (Dubé et al, 2007). The relationship with the community was a little more mixed, with both emotional support and technical support present; community members would cheer on the players at games and in public, but would also question poor results and express expectations of the players' performances (Dubé et al., 2007).

In the occurrence of a traumatic event, athletes looked to their teammate peer leaders as informal support resources, due to shared experiences and position (Buchko, 2005). Athletes expected their peer leaders to primarily provide social support, as opposed to coaches or outside sources (Kavanagh et al., 2017). This could be highly problematic given that these individuals are unskilled in providing social support and therefore are poor providers of support, giving assistance based off their interpretation of what the athlete needs from their intuition alone (Rees & Hardy, 2000). The relationship athletes had with coaches was more complicated. Coaches may not perceive managing mental health issues as part of their role and may doubt their abilities and resources to help with their athletes' mental struggles (Kroshus et al., 2019; Lebrun et al., 2020). This is not always the case, as noted by Simpson and Elberty (2018), when coaches of individual sports did offer social support in times of crisis, it created a family-like team situation with

support coming from both peers (training partners) and authority figures (coaches). Following the suicide of a teammate, participants in team sports were found to engage in teambuilding and group post-traumatic care sessions, with the shared experiences and mutual support that characterized team sport effectively managing the shared traumatic event (Buchko, 2005).

The relationship between athletes and the organization itself is also complex. While players have expressed a hesitation to ask for or expect social support from coaches (Buchko, 2005; Kavanagh et al., 2017), they are even more hesitant to approach their organizations for social support. When presented with a sport psychologist working for the sport organization, an athlete participating in the study by Kavanagh et al. (2017) stated that there was a distrust – “I don’t think I would have trusted that she wouldn’t have told the coaches [what I had said]” (p. 16). This highlights a lack of trust that prevents athletes from being honest or engaging with the social supports provided by their sport organizations. Furthermore, the stigma associated with mental health as a weakness, coupled with a lack of mental health literacy, is likely to prevent athletes from seeking out mental health aid at all (Gulliver et al., 2012). Much like the athlete studied by Kavanagh et al. (2017), other studies found that athletes feared help-seeking behaviour would lead to a loss of playing time or other negative consequences (Gulliver et al., 2012; Purcell, 2019). The culmination of this research on social support in sport is that peer-to-peer support is key, with coaches less relied upon, and organizational support being met with outright suspicion.

Tragedy in Sport

Tragedy in sport is a highly publicized affair, with movies, books, and high volumes of newspaper columns dedicated to reporting and commemorating such events. However, academic literature has rarely examined the perspectives and behaviours of those involved. The Munich

Air Disaster involving Manchester United has been explored in how it changed fandom surrounding the club (Mellor, 2004; Pope, 2016), research examining the premature death of NASCAR driver, Dale Earnhardt, explored the online reactions of fans (Wann & Waddill, 2007), and sport has been analyzed from a symbolic perspective in its role in recovery and rebuilding from Hurricane Katrina (Serazio, 2010) and the September 11th terrorist attacks (Brown, 2004; Chidester, 2009). Moreover, Brown (2004) and Kennedy et al. (2019) have examined how sport and tragedy can interact to develop or reinforce a cultural identity. Aircraft accidents involving a Russian hockey team, Lokomotiv Yaroslavl (Sokolova, 2014), and Brazilian soccer team, Chapecoense (Casagrande Dal Bello et al., 2019), have been examined from a supporter perspective, while the sudden death of athletes is frequently examined in disciplines of medicine (Corrado & Zorzi, 2017; Maron et al., 2014). Hughson and Spaaij (2011), in examining the death of ninety-six soccer fans at Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield, England, revealed that these events can cause long-lasting cultural trauma that can cause hardship for larger human groupings that were uninvolved in the accident. Sport tragedy literature does illustrate, however, that these occurrences are far from isolated and can take many forms, calling attention to the need for resources for athletes and other sport stakeholders affected by catastrophic events.

Although the outcomes of players involved in high-profile tragic events in professional sport have received little attention, there has been examination into these aftermaths of tragedy and trauma in collegiate sport. Henschen and Heil (1992) investigated the psychological effects experienced by ten collegiate football players after the sudden death of a teammate. Responding to open-ended questioning from the research team, the players identified four central themes of their psychological response to the death: disbelief and shock, continued memories, a specific circumstance eliciting memories, and common meaning attached to the event (Henschen & Heil,

1992). While the study did not explore the support offered or coping strategies of the players, multiple players revealed that the death was not discussed within the team. Despite the interviews being conducted four years after the player's passing, it was also clear that the players continued to suffer from the shock of the event and that continued sobering thoughts were common within the team (Henschen & Heil, 1992). Like Henschen and Heil (1992), Simpson and Elberty (2018) conducted open-ended interviews with collegiate athletes who experienced the death of a teammate, but with athletes at varying ages, stages of their career, and across several sports. The interviews identified a series of behaviours, emotional responses, and support systems that the athletes utilized during the tragedy – support that was not examined by Henschen and Heil (1992). Players revealed that their immediate emotional response ranged from feelings of shock or denial to unexplainable emotions, while the behavioural responses included isolation from others, coping by means of exercise, or shared tributes within the team by means of tattoos or memorial jersey patches (Simpson & Elberty, 2018). Support also came in several forms, including from faith or religion, members within the players' social circle, and within the leadership or unity of the team (Simpson & Elberty, 2018).

Vernacchia et al. (1997) also examined the psychological responses of collegiate athletes to the sudden death of a teammate, highlighting the value of the critical incident stress debriefing (CISD) process and identified stages of grief and loss within a basketball team. Seven distinct stages were displayed by the athletes: 1) shock, confusion, and denial; 2) performance resolve; 3) realization of loss; 4) glorification and memorialization; 5) closure and relief; 6) avoidance and debriefing; and 7) re-entry and acceptance (Vernacchia et al., 1997). Vernacchia et al. (1997) noted a strong network of support provided to the players, both from the university's clinical psychological services (outside services) and the team coaching and sport medicine staffs (inside

resources), who were able to continually employ the CISD process and respond to the needs of those involved in the tragedy; preventing feelings from being repressed or spilling-over into other facets of life. Several key events emerged within these stages. In the shock, confusion, and denial stage, the teammates of the deceased player experienced strong emotional feelings, as for many, this was their first experience involving the death of someone their own age (Vernacchia et al., 1997). The players endured this stage in the public eye as the media closely followed the case, limiting the opportunity for players to grieve in private. Moreover, Vernacchia et al. (1997) highlight that the young male athletes contended with expectations of “burying their feelings” or portraying “strong, silent images” (p. 228-229).

The trauma and recovery experiences of those involved in the Boston Marathon Bombings, the terrorist attack at the finish line of the 2013 Boston Marathon, has also received research attention. In response to the event, more than 120 teams of grief counsellors were deployed and more than 200 mental health sessions were delivered, serving in excess of 1500 individuals within a 600-hour timeframe (Beinecke, 2014). Moreover, 34 Massachusetts trauma center responders served over 600 individuals directly and 3,500 indirectly in the three weeks following the bombings (Beinecke, 2014). Federal agencies, state mental health authorities, public safety organizations, local hospitals, the Red Cross, and the Boston Athletic Association had employees or volunteers that either helped with event operations or were deployed after the bombings and assisted in the medical or mental-health care of those involved (Beinecke, 2014). This event brought attention to the need for preparedness and coordination of the delivery of mental health services (Beinecke, 2014), but also the need to ensure mental health services are delivered to those who are first responders or spectators of a trauma (Beinecke, 2014; Resnick, 2014). Public health officials also assisted in delivering post-bombing emotional care to residents

in Boston and surrounding areas that were not present at the Marathon (Resnick, 2014). Health officials also noted the value of community support groups for those who suffered physical injuries from the explosion (Resnick, 2014).

Through semi-structured interviews with Boston Marathon runners ten to twelve months after the bombings, Timm et al. (2017) revealed that participants – regardless of their proximity to the explosion – experienced feelings of shock, distress, and surrealism, similar to athletes who endured the death of a teammate (Henschen & Heil, 1992; Simpson & Elbert, 2018; Vernacchia et al., 1997). Interviewees highlighted reoccurring emotional responses in the months after the bombings, including continued feelings of shock, uncertainty, fear, guilt, and a need for closure, with one participant noting feelings of embarrassment when others expressed concern for her as she had not suffered physical injury (Timm et al., 2017). Coping strategies frequently cited included counselling, following news surrounding the incident, visiting the site of the explosion for closure, or running, while most participants discussed the value of social support from loved ones or fellow runners (Timm et al., 2017). Each of the runners also described positive outcomes experienced in the aftermath of the explosions. Crucially, many runners displayed development of personal resiliency and discussed a tightening or strengthening of the running community after the incident (Timm et al., 2017), not dissimilar to the community building or strengthening noted in other sport tragedy events (Brown, 2004; Kennedy et al., 2019).

Post-Tragedy Clinical Support

In the aftermath of a tragic event, those involved or who witnessed the incident become more susceptible to emotional and physiological outcomes. Those who experience tragedy may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or experience emotional symptoms such as anxiety or fear, depression, grief, and feelings of remoteness (Lewis, 1993), feelings of

embarrassment (Timm et al., 2017), shame, or guilt (Wilson et al., 2006). Moreover, there are risks of physical symptoms such as fatigue, muscle tremors, and difficulty breathing, or cognitive effects, including memory impairment and mental confusion (Lewis, 1993). Regehr et al. (2002) surveyed and interviewed paramedics who were exposed to a traumatic event, finding that alcohol abuse, use of psychiatric medication, and mental health stress leave increased after the event.

While suggesting specific therapeutic interventions is outside of the scope of the current study, research has illuminated the value of professional post-traumatic care. Hickling and Blanchard's (2006) investigated the PTSD caused by vehicular accident. Their research revealed that 76.2% of participants who received cognitive-behavioural therapy no longer met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD, as opposed to 47.6% in the supportive treatment group, and 23.8% in a wait-list control group (Hickling & Blanchard, 2006). These findings were echoed in an examination of the efficiency of trauma-focused psychotherapy on war refugees, where participants who received psychotherapy reported significantly reduced symptoms of trauma and somatoform disorders than the group who did not receive this intervention (Kruse et al., 2009). Various strategies, such as trauma focused cognitive-behavioural therapy (Hickling & Blanchard, 2006) and the Systematic Crisis Intervention Model (SCIM) (Buchko, 2005), have been employed to successful outcomes; however, research has also indicated that patient preferences regarding the structure and process of treatment may dictate outcomes, highlighting that no single approach to clinical intervention can be considered best (Cloitre, 2015).

Academic literature has explored the effectiveness of some clinical intervention strategies in sport settings. As previously mentioned, Vernacchia et al. (1997) explored the employment of the critical incident stress debriefing (CISD) process in a team enduring the sudden death of a

player; a process that involves group meetings where emotions and other reactions are expressed, while practitioners provide education and support to aid participants in understanding the traumatic event and feelings associated with it. CISD team members make themselves available for individual meetings but encourage participation in group meetings as frequently as possible, and crucially, follow-up services are offered or suggested at the end of the formal CISD process due to the shared experience and emotions within the group (Vernacchia et al., 1997). In the instance examined by Vernacchia et al. (1997), members of the university's counselling centre were made available to coaches and athletes for individual services, and team meetings and individual consultations with coaching and sports medicine staffs aided the team in their bereavement. Coaches and athletes most frequently turned to the educational sport psychologist who had worked as a performance consultant to the team and had developed rapport with the team members (Vernacchia et al., 1997). Support from the university's clinical psychological services, coaches, and the educational sport psychologist were offered during the offseason as it was noted that many players avoided playing or practicing basketball, prompting the support team to hold individual formal meetings with each player. Utilizing a similar strategy, the Systematic Crisis Intervention Model, Buchko (2005) noted the value and even necessity of group sessions, as they allowed athletes to create mutual support and attachment within the team and share mutual experiences or feelings. Like the CISD, this model offered professional support throughout a staged process, but stressed the importance of making additional support available beyond the scheduled exit from the system (Buchko, 2005).

Purcell et al. (2019) proposed a framework to respond to mental health issues in elite athletes. In the first stage of the framework, which involves preventative or foundational components, it is suggested that athletes are provided mental health literacy resources, are

provided support to develop and acquire skills to manage athlete life and prepare for career transitions and provided mental health screenings and feedback. In the second stage, those athletes at-risk for mental health impairments are identified and key staff are trained to identify early symptoms or micro changes in athletes in order provide prevention programs where necessary. It is crucial that athlete privacy is addressed in this stage. This is followed by the early intervention stage when athletes with mild to moderate mental health issues are provided structured clinical support in-house by clinicians within the organization. In the final stage, specialist mental health care is delivered to athletes where there is risk of harm to themselves or others. Purcell et al. (2019) also suggest that program evaluations account for other factors that may influence mental health, such as individual-vulnerability factors which may have emerged from past trauma.

The important role of intervention after tragedy has been well-documented in research; however, athletes often perceive barriers to receiving professional aid. Athletes have cited stigma surrounding mental health (Gulliver et al., 2012; Purcell et al., 2019; Rice et al., 2016), support provider's unfamiliarity with elite sport culture, and unlikelihood of intervention success (Gavrilova & Donohue, 2018) as reasons to not utilize or seek mental health services. Due to these hesitations, researchers have called for models of psychiatric intervention that are specific to elite athletes (Gavrilova & Donohue, 2018; Rice et al., 2016). Athletes often look to social support resources, such as family or teammates, for support, resulting in recommendations that interventions include the social circles of athletes in mental health intervention processes (Gavrilova et al., 2018; Rice et al., 2016). Disclosure and treatment of mental illness in elite athletes has recently been viewed through a lens of strength and development, rather than inaccurate perspectives of weakness that athletes, fans, and other stakeholders have traditionally

held (Parrott et al., 2021), bringing attention to the need to have these services available to athletes when issues, stressors, or tragedy emerge.

The 1986-87 Swift Current Broncos

While not the subject of academic literature, an omission this project intends to fix, there has nevertheless been some examinations of the 1986-87 Broncos through other forms of writing. Culp et al. (2012) created a comprehensive chronicle of the events leading up to, and surrounding, the bus accident titled, *Sudden Death*. Because Leesa Culp was a witness to the accident and co-author Bob Wilkie was a member of the 1986-87 Broncos and was on the bus, the book adds a personal perspective to the event. Some of the Broncos reached for comment in the work were unsatisfied by the social support received (Culp et al., 2012), although the specifics of this were left unspecified. While this creates a gap in the literature that this project was in part created to remedy, it is not the only work on the 1986-87 Broncos. In 2013, the rights for a movie based on *Sudden Death* was acquired by Trilight Entertainment, although the movie, titled “Broncos” is still allegedly in development (Trilight Entertainment, 2021).

In 2006, Gare Joyce published a long-form journalistic offering for ESPN.com that was particularly critical of how the city of Swift Current had, in their collective memory, created a legacy of “remembering and forgetting.” He also noted that a civil suit had been filed against the Broncos by the families of two of the victims of the crash, but was unsuccessful due to the statute of limitations (Joyce, 2006). Joe Sakic, now a member of the Hockey Hall of Fame and who was on the Broncos 1986-87 team, described the attitude of the city as an “old fashioned reserve” and that no one “was comfortable opening up” (Joyce, 2006). Joyce also observed that the 1986-87 Broncos seemed to be a taboo subject, with no memorials or attention given to the team in the town’s museum, despite them being far and away the most famous thing about the

area, between the bus crash and the team's Memorial Cup success a few years after. This taboo continues onto the current team, with the legacy of Graham James' conduct and other allegations framing how the current players are treated, by their own account (Joyce, 2006).

The internationally successful Canadian author-journalist, Roy MacGregor, wrote an article for the *Globe and Mail* titled *The Lessons of Swift Current* in 2008, in which he explored the events and talked to some of those involved, including Sakic and Colleen MacBean, who was a billet family for several players and their "surrogate mother" (MacGregor, 2008). MacGregor's article is notable, because, unlike many of the other works on the 1986-87 Broncos, he actively looked at the surrounding environment of the team, such as their billets, in an attempt to tell the full story. And then of course, there is the man who was there, Brian Costello. A young reporter at the time, Costello had a front seat on the bus when it crashed, and when recalling his immediate reaction to seeing the two dead bodies of Kresse and Kruger, Costello notes that in a moment of narrow-mindedness was, "wow, those horrible injuries will keep them sidelined for awhile" (Costello, 2011). Everyone, from a trained reporter on the bus itself to the wider Canadian public, could not believe that such a tragedy had occurred.

When a similar tragedy, the Humboldt Broncos bus crash, captured Canadian media attention in 2018, the Swift Current Broncos of 1986-87 were once again seen and remembered by Canadian audiences resulting in some coverage. By now, the 1986-87 Broncos were seen as victims no longer, and instead as mentors and old hands who could offer their sympathies and perspectives to a new generation of traumatized young men who were experiencing what the original Broncos had, more than three decades before (Cook, 2018; Humphreys, 2018). This transition in how mainstream Canadian media (and by extension Canadians themselves) view the 1986-87 Broncos transitioning from victims to mentors may or may not be actual reality, but it is

worth noting nonetheless. It makes work such as this project vital, because if we are to indeed as a society take lessons from the 1986-87 Broncos, an understanding of their experience 36 years ago is paramount.

Hockey in the 1980s

While this study is being performed to improve the outcomes of participation in junior hockey for current and future players, because this study focuses on participants whose experience in junior hockey occurred in the 1980s, it is imperative to provide a contextual understanding of hockey at that time. The previous section examined the Broncos themselves, yet there are other resources which contextualize the Broncos hockey environment.

In Theo Fleury's 2009 *Playing With Fire*, he outlined the party-hard lifestyle enjoyed at all levels of the hockey world, internationally, in the NHL, and in junior hockey present in his junior hockey career in the mid-late 1980s and early NHL career in the early 1990s:

It was like any group of college kids or twenty-somethings. Getting pissed was a great way to bond. Most of the coaches left you alone as long as you produced. I showed up many times in the morning completely annihilated. I hadn't even gone home yet...sometimes I would come in a little slow, hungover from the night before, but I dealt with it by drinking a coffee and having three or four cigarettes. I was having a full-body orgasm. Money, fame, and chicks. I made the most of it. What was I going to do? Slow down, stay at home every night and watch TV? Forget it. (Fleury & Day 2009, p. 62-63).

Fleury's autobiography makes it clear throughout that those who succeeded and gained respect within the world of hockey did so on the predication of their toughness. To be a good skater or score goals was not enough, one also had to prove themselves as a warrior. It is made abundantly

clear that Fleury himself held great respect for those he perceived fit this model, and a degree of disdain for those who did not. This respect extended beyond the ice and to the hockey world at large, with Fleury even noting how the trainer in his NHL rookie season had been well-liked because he “went to war with us” (p.66). All in all, the book presents hockey in the mid-to-late 1980s as a constant dynamic between proving one’s manhood both on the ice and off it, with the former achieved through toughness, and the latter achieved by hard drinking and using women as “sex trophies” (p.72).

Other sources within the literature note this aspect as well, particular in regard to masculinity. The book *Hockey Night in Canada* notes that during this period, when Europeans were still a rare within the league, it wasn’t uncommon for them to experience difficulties with the “adolescent sexism” before becoming acclimatized to the masculine subculture within North American hockey (Gruneau & Whitson, 1994, p.120). Gruneau and Whitson concluded that this subculture had a strong negative element, and that many athletes internalized this, “leading them to expect sex from women as part of their sense of celebrity privilege,” which although normally consensual, was not always the case (Gruneau & Whitson, 1994, p.121). The drinking problems were also mentioned, although it was not seen as a systemic problem caused by the structure of junior and professional hockey. Instead the authors passed the responsibility down onto the individual level, expressing pity at the careers that were wasted, not the men whose lives were negatively impacted by substance abuse (p.141).

Another element present within Fleury’s observations was the power of the men in power over the players. Fleury was sexually abused by James, prior to the latter’s involvement as the head coach and general manager of the Broncos (Fleury & Day, 2009). Fleury was not alone in

this. Sheldon Kennedy, a member of the Broncos, was also sexually abused by James, and in his book *Why I Didn't Say Anything*, Kennedy addresses this power discrepancy:

In junior hockey, your coach is like a god. He tells you when and how you play, who you can play with, who you can talk to outside of the team. He can call up your parents, your teachers, your guidance counsellor, and the police and tell them whatever he wants about you. A coach can ground a player for bad behavior or failure to keep up in school...the coach regularly speaks to the player's parents, reporting on their progress and behavior on and off the ice. The coach even has the power to send a player home. If this happens, you may as well kiss your pro career goodbye. Minor league hockey in Canada is a tight closed community of men who have worked and played together, often for decades. If one of the fraternity decides that a player is "difficult," soon everyone in the league knows. (Kennedy, 2011, p.46)

In equally stark terms, Kennedy described the impact that this structure had on the young players. Put in a vulnerable position already away from their communities and families, and who face enormous pressure to perform on and off the ice for for-profit organizations, very little care was given to the players. Kennedy does, however, stop shy of criticizing the structure of minor league hockey in Canada as whole, stating that it is "not necessarily better or worse than others," but that it is a "perfect breeding ground for the kind of abuse that happened to me and god knows how many other junior hockey players" (p.47). There is also no room to report such abuse because "they [the players] also know if they complain, they can be sent home or blacklisted" (p.48). A review into the sexual misconduct of educators (including coaches) found that only five to six percent of sexual abuse cases involving minors become known to social services or police and concluded that seven percent of all men (as well as fifteen percent of all women) were

sexually abused as children (US Department of Education, 2004). While the WHL and CHL attempted to portray James as “a bad apple who had snuck into the sneaky clean world of junior hockey” (Kennedy, 2011, p.150), findings like this as well as the Calgary Sexual Assault Centre reporting that following James’ conviction calls to their helplines increased by a factor of four and many calls involved abuse from hockey coaches (Kennedy, 2011) suggest that this is not the case. This data, as well as anecdotal accounts from individuals like Fleury and Kennedy, cast heavy doubt on the CHL’s casual attitude towards the situation. Furthermore, literature from prior to the sexual abuse scandals coming to light also noted the power discrepancy between players and administration. Gruneau and Whitson observed: “Hockey is certainly not the only sport in which a manager’s personal feelings can have a greater impact on a player’s career than is normal in workplaces...but in hockey, autocracy and paternalism have been particularly resilient” (p.125). It must be acknowledged that Gruneau and Whitson made these observations in regard to the bargaining power of hockey players as workers, yet it nevertheless fits what Fleury and Kennedy describe to a tee. This is phenomenon was explained by summarizing:

The NHL [hierarchy] has been a highly conservative subcultural world in which tradition measured through experience has counted for more than anything else, a world in which newcomers are likely to be greeted with suspicion and resistance unless they operate in the same old ways (p. 126).

Kennedy’s writings draw other parallels to Fleury’s beyond the shared experience they had of being sexually abused. When describing a day in the life of a junior hockey player, Kennedy observed that, “you are in a closed world with its own codes of conduct, but many of those codes, as anyone who has ever watched a hockey game knows, are based of demonstrating your physical and emotional toughness” (p.81). For how these ideals manifested, he wrote, “you

never show weakness around the other players or your coaches, doing so will get you labelled a baby” (p. 81).

While the attitude in wider society has seemingly become more accepting of mental health and emotional well-being, as well as a less favorable view of hypermasculine displays, it is very important to note that the literature suggests that these trends are not as present within the world of hockey. In a report commissioned by the CHL into its operations, the independent panel found that an unspoken code of silence was still widely used within the organization (Theriault, et al., 2022). Of perhaps greater interest from the report was a section where anonymous individuals who had witnessed or experienced an incident worth reporting (harassment, hazing, or abuse), and not reported the incident. The responses of why the incident had gone unreported ranged from “at the time it was considered accepted behavior” alongside “I didn’t want to lose my job or have an NHL team look at me poorly” and “the CHL, GM, and coaches have all the power over you and are able to threaten to take away years of school if you aren’t completing the role that you have been given” (Theriault, 2022, p. 134). While the first response is a coach or long-tenured staff member, the others are clearly from players who saw the situation the same way Fleury and Kennedy had 30 years earlier. This is not without merit, both in the 1980’s and today. When the Swift Current Broncos became aware of Graham James’ activities through player complaints, the players were traded, silenced, or otherwise ignored (Kennedy, 2011). In the words of Kennedy:

It gave me no joy to find out that one of my fears about telling anybody about the abuse had proved legitimate. During my years in Swift Current, I was given many signals from every layer of authority that they didn’t want to know what Graham was doing with me. I

believed that they had wanted me to just keep my mouth shut and score goals. Now I know I was right (p.154).

Of equal importance from the report's findings involved the outcomes of incidents that were reported to CHL. Some were dismissed, some were run up the chain of command and disappeared, most said simply, "no outcome" (Theriault, 2022, p.133). With the lack of internal organizational support, abused players who have come forward do so not to their coaches or other administrators within the hockey world, but increasingly through the legal system or journalists. The CHL is currently fighting a class-action lawsuit against harassment stemming from hazing, bullying, physical and verbal harassment, sexual harassment and sexual assault, in which the perpetrators named were senior players, adult coaches, staff, administrators, and employees (Ferris, 2020). The NHL has not been exempted either, with the head coach of the Calgary Flames, Bill Peters, resigning amid abuse allegations (Canadian Press, 2019), and Kyle Beach going public with sexual assault allegations against a Chicago Blackhawks coach, Brad Aldrich, who has since been convicted (Grant, 2021). These options of going public, while theoretically available in the 1980s, would have been made to a society that was less understanding of such issues, and may not have received the popular support that they do today. In 2013, a lawsuit involving concussions and the NHL's role in player safety was filed and eventually over 300 retired players were involved. While the NHL ultimately settled for \$18.9M USD (Whyno, 2018), it also brought attention to how poorly some of the retired players were faring. Joe Murphy, a former first overall draft pick in the NHL, lived homeless in Kenora, Ontario, and plagued with extreme mental challenges brought about by his time in the NHL, and he was not alone in experiencing difficulties, as the lawsuit had proved (Westhead, 2020).

Results

Overall, all things considered, did you feel supported in the aftermath of the bus crash?

-Interviewer

Not for a minute. No. And I don't think there's one guy in that team that would say that either. There was no support to them. None. -Tracy Egeland, player

Participants:

All of the individuals on the 1986-87 Swift Current Broncos who could be located through publicly available information or through existing participants were contacted. In total, seven players, two billets, the trainer, and the assistant coach agreed to be interviewed. Several other individuals responded to the invitation but declined to participate. Most of these responses were to existing participants of the study who reached out to the potential participants on behalf of the project. The sample of participants that was collected resulted in a variety of perspectives and responses, including an array of player ages at the time of the accident ranged from 16 to 19, a biracial player perspective, the administrative viewpoints of the assistant coach and trainer, and the thoughts of billets, one of whom was female, the project's only non-male contributor. One participant requested anonymity, and is recorded in the data as Participant 2. Furthermore, action was taken to protect the identity of participants when potentially damaging information was revealed, either by themselves or by other participants. Finally, the interviews ran between 50 minutes and two hours, reflecting a deep desire from the interviewees to share their stories, which resulted in full utilization of the semi-structured interview methodology.

Dimensions of Social Support

Pre-Crash Structural Support

The participants were first asked to describe their structural social support situation at the time prior to the bus accident. This information assisted the researchers in understanding the social environment of support present in 1986-87 junior hockey. It also enabled the researchers to determine what social support is sufficient or insufficient that already exists in the social environment of the players. This determination provides understanding of if additional resources are required to aid in recovery, or if the existing social environment itself is sufficient. Finally, an understanding of the player's structural social support provides a base of comparison from 1986-87 to the modern day, and allows future researchers to determine the extent to which the experiences of the 1986-87 Broncos are directly comparable to current levels of social support provided to junior hockey players.

With regard to this dimension of structural social support, all players named their teammates. Additionally, most players described satisfactory from their parents but billeting situations generated more of a mixed response. Several players listed their billet families amongst their greatest sources of support, while others found a severe lack of social support from their billets. The same player could have had two very different experiences based on a change in their billet host.

To be honest, my first experience with the new family and billets and things wasn't positive. But luckily, in my second year there, I moved in with a family that was wonderful and took me in and I felt like a part of their family and they treated me like a son. -Participant 2, player.

As noted earlier in this section, every player participant cited teammates as one of the primary sources of structural social support and several participants designated teammates as the most

significant. Structurally, everyone played a role, but teammates played a more significant role, including situations where a player lived in the same billet dwelling.

At that stage when you're out of town, living in a billet, you kind of have your billets to rely on and talk to. I had a player billet with me in the same house, so you always have him for support and then obviously your teammates for support as you go through the everyday grind of the hockey league. That's basically my support system back then. -

Darren Kruger, affiliated player.

Individuals within a player's social environment were highlighted. Girlfriends were mentioned by two participants. Local friends were also pointed to as sources of structural support, primarily by participants native to Swift Current. Some players retained a degree of support from their local childhood friends from their hometowns, even with the transitional nature of junior hockey and the geographical separation it can create.

I still have a group of twelve of us from high school, and I was gone all the time. I was never there other than a couple months in the summer and two weeks at Christmas. But we go fishing together every single year, we have for 25 years, and it's the same guys -

Participant 2, player.

Concerning the Broncos' staff, a variety of opinions were present, most of which will be addressed in other sections, but with regard to social support, the players generally did not perceive the head coach as part of their structural social support, but had positive views of other staff.

Within the organization and the team, any type of social support in a positive way was absolutely – well, I shouldn't say that. The assistant coach was good and the trainer was great. The head coach obviously was not. To put it bluntly. -Participant 2, player.

While this perspective was generally echoed across all interviewed players, it is not clear that the staff members who were positively identified with social support realized how their support was received.

The trainer Gordie Hahn, he was probably very instrumental and more, one of the most influential individuals regarding our players, because for the most part they would go to him, not with major issues, but they would talk to him more about their family lives and everything else like that. -Lorne Frey, assistant coach.

I was just there for them. -Gordie Hahn, trainer.

Post-Crash Structural Support

The bus accident occurring brought additional structures into the social networks of the players. The overall organization of the Swift Current Broncos and the collective action of the team's board of directors did not factor into any participant's assessment of their structural social support networks pre-crash yet was blamed for a lack of socially supportive action post-crash by some participants. While the participants as a whole adamantly noted the lack of support from the hockey organization itself, there were some dissenting perspectives on the board of the Broncos, particularly post-crash. The public memorial, for example, generally garnered positive impressions.

Functional Social Support

The dimension of functional social support was also investigated. As functional social support contains the delivery of social support from one entity to another, the interviews attempted to ascertain the social support situation of the participant's post-crash. The participants responded with a multitude of functional social supports that were present in some way. The attempt of others to provide support, while often well-meaning, were not always interpreted that way by the affected players.

I didn't reach out for myself, I know that...I had to get out of the house because there were people coming by every day...different people coming through the house. So I'd have to escape that just to get away. -Darren Kruger, affiliated player.

Mom, she just kept asking me to come home. She kept trying to get me to see counsellors. We went one time and I remember just running out of the office because I didn't feel connected, didn't feel it was safe to talk about it. I didn't feel I was ready to talk about it, so...she forced me and I hated her for it. -Bob Wilkie, player.

The attempts at functional social support, which were often more successful, usually came from teammates. Every participant reported feeling as though they had become closer to their teammates having gone through the bus crash together.

Guys you weren't as close with on the team, we were probably more driven together team-wise. -Tracy Egeland, player.

I think just going through that experience we came a little bit closer-knit group for sure. I think some friendships grew from that. We had something in common besides hockey and I think that sort of changed it, for me anyway. -Tim Tisdale, player.

A few members of the team were not present during the bus crash for a variety of reasons, yet they also experienced comradery and social support from strangers in the setting they were at the time. The tragedy of the situation was so profound that even far from the accident itself, there were still those willing to offer support to those who were related to the Broncos team. That was the case for Gordie Hahn, away at a prospects tournament in Winnipeg with one of the Broncos players, surrounded by those he barely knew.

The players from that tournament type of thing, they were more supporting than I've ever seen. Like actually, after the game there was a scout from the Winnipeg Jets and he said I got a plane ticket here if you want, we can fly to Regina and back home if you want...that was pretty classy, I thought. -Gordie Hahn, trainer.

The kindness of strangers notwithstanding, being disconnected with familiar faces of family and friends presented a problem for many of those on the bus. Excluding those players who lived at home in Swift Current, all but one player participant mentioned the challenges of living away from their family in a billeted situation. Despite the challenges of distance, parents still were able to offer some players functional social support, although it was not always to the extent desired.

Dad was there as much as he could. You know, he would leave for work on Friday and come down for the weekend and spent the weekend with me, and you know that was good. -Bob Wilkie, player.

It was hard to call home, it was expensive and I'm not sure how often those guys did. Even the incident, like no one had a cell phone at that point, no such thing in the world, right? So one of the first things I did when I got to the hospital is to try to find a phone so

I could call my parents, but I know that took quite a while for some of the guys to be able to do that. -Tim Tisdale, player.

Of course, the local community of Swift Current also played a role in the player's functional support. With the players being the known athletes of the small city, they received semi-celebrity treatment, which included everything from underage drinking privileges at local restaurants to being leeway by the police for certain infractions, both before and after the crash.

[The] community looked the other way...various law enforcement looked the other way, not like bad things. But you know, we had a few fender benders and things that happened that were, you know, probably a few of us here and there that were driving under the influence and got that "get your ass home" sort of thing. -Tracy Egeland, player.

A great place to play, that Swift [Current] community. There's really nothing else going on there, and they really developed this – like they loved us...Great community. Local businesses were always supporting us. There was the owner of a hotel we would used to go and visit with him and when our families would come in then he would given them free room and stuff. Great community. -Lonnie Spink, player.

For local families who had an athlete pass away in the bus accident, the community support was very tangible, with Darren Kruger recalling the community coming to his house to pay their respects for his brother, killed in the crash, and to support his family. Even for the non-local players the community stepped up, with several newer players who had not yet been placed with billets being taken in by a local family temporarily.

At the time of the accident there was a couple of players living in a hotel because they had just been traded and hadn't had billet families. And that night my parents stepped up and

said, “hey, we can’t have these kids staying in a hotel.” So we took a couple guys in that night and one of them ended up staying for the rest of the season. -Tim Tisdale, player.

Related to the community’s functional social support was the high school counsellor, who was also billeted, and, seemingly, the only person involved in the post-crash aftermath with any of counselling experience. The players perceived her role as generally positive, but insufficient for a situation the magnitude of the bus accident.

The counsellor of our school, she was very helpful with counselling us kids, as far as, you know, having made that transition of moving away from home – we’re all young kids. And she was always there for us to talk to about stuff like that. She was very supportive. -Clark Polglase, player.

[The school counsellor] was wonderful. She was good, but it wasn’t really formal school guidance, it was more of just a billet mother who had a family and billets and you know, so she was supportive. -Participant 2, player.

Perceptual Social Support

The final dimension of social support, perceptual social support, was the least mentioned by the participants, with only half of the impressions in the data compared to the structural and functional dimensions. While teammates again were the most mentioned source of perceptual support, none of the interviewed players talked about the accident in a socially supportive way with one another, but many expressed a belief that they could have if they had so desired. Instead, just being there for one another was perceived to have great value.

I think if we wanted to talk about it, that would have been an option, and I don’t think they [teammates] would have hesitated. But for myself, I had my family. If I wanted to have that

conversation – I didn't feel it was maybe something I wanted to burden my friends with. -
Tim Tisdale, player.

Post-accident was 100% teammates. -Participant 2, player.

Well, we didn't share stories or anything. We were just there. We just tried to comfort each other, and that was basically what we just tried to do. What else were you going to say? -
Lorne Frey, assistant coach.

Other sources of perceptual social support that were mentioned primarily included parents, the school counsellor, billet families, and friends. Despite considerable overlap with the functional social support, there remained a lack of engagement from the participants toward their perceived social supports, summarized in the case of teammates by two participants.

It was more teammates [who provided social support] but I wouldn't necessarily say that we talked more. It was probably just more you could look at somebody and knew that they were on the bus with you and shared that experience...at times we talked, but there wasn't – like we never sat down and all talked about it either. Just bits and pieces. -Tracy Egeland, player.
There was a lot of relief sometimes just being around them, right? Not being alone, not being in my basement where I can't control my thoughts. It wasn't a therapy setting, and we weren't talking specifically about the trauma we had suffered, just being able to hang out and be was nice. -Bob Wilkie, player.

Another frequently mentioned source of perceptual social support came from the Swift Current community – even more so by local players. As Darren Kruger noted, “we had support from the whole town for sure.” A final anecdote on perceptual support described how when players felt vulnerable, even collegial support from co-workers could be meaningful.

You know, I had a really good job in [location] when I played there and had another guy I worked with, was a pretty good guy. Did I really confide in him? No, but good enough. He came to all the games and you know, we worked well together. -Tracy Egeland, player.

When constructing an overall compilation of the dimensions of social support present for the 1986-87 Swift Current Broncos, the players clearly indicated that their teammates made up the bulk of all three categories. Parents made up more structural and perceptual social support than functional due to, in part, geographical separation. The exception was locally based players that required no billet and where parents could be more present. Billet families were mentioned primarily positively by the participants who were billeted, although some negative experiences (both personal and from other teammates) were identified. Friends and social circles offered some social support, as did the only trained resource available to the participants, the school counsellor, even though some of the participants perceived that her contributions were insufficient for the traumatic experience they had undergone. The community of Swift Current was generally perceived positively but did not factor in any participant's primary social support, only as an afterthought when players described their existing social support scenario following the accident. Of final note is the hockey organization, which was scarcely referenced, while specific staff were mentioned positively (as noted earlier), other figures were not. The role of the team will be elaborated on in the Barriers to Social Support section.

Social Support Modifiers

There are two modifiers of social support provided in the model of Holt and Hoar (2006): individual moderators and social environment factors. In the data analysis, results that fit under these two modifiers were tagged and organized into subcategories. Links between these subcategories were noted, as some overlap existed. Individual moderators are factors specific to

an individual participant. In the data analysis, the primary subcategories identified by the researchers during the thematic analysis were: maturity/development, personal factors, and trauma.

Individual Moderators

The first subcategory recognized in the results was maturity/development. Every participant referenced the age they were at the time of the bus accident and how this youthful stage effected their outcomes following the tragedy.

I think the part of actually growing older, like with aging, I think definitely helped, of like, being stronger about things. I mean back then we're talking, like I said, 17-year-olds. -Clark Polglase, player.

As an 18-year old, whatever I'm doing, I'm doing. I know what I'm doing. So help that guy over there. So I probably wouldn't have [utilized resources]. -Darren Kruger, affiliated player.

However, there was also a strong desire from participants to discuss how they dealt with the very nature of junior hockey itself as individuals. Many participants very strongly believed that the structure of junior hockey was not conducive to themselves as a teenage boy, often who was immature, receiving good outcomes.

It's like a full-time job really...your school is planned around hockey. Your meals are planned around hockey. Your free time is planned around hockey. So it's a lot for young kids to absorb, and you know nowadays they're living that lifestyle at 12, 13, 14, which I'm not a fan of. I don't believe in that and I don't believe leaving home and travelling

and being that serious that early. I think 15, 16, you can take on that responsibility, but it's still a challenge for many of the kids. -Participant 2, player.

A 16-year old boy getting sent to a town that idolizes hockey players...they have all the pressures of being the cool kid in town mounted on top of their hockey experience and you know, the drinking and the womanizing and all of the press it comes with around them, the agents calling. As I said before, the pressure. Unbelievable. The preparation for these kids to manage that was zero. -Bob Harriman, billet.

Being in the community and going to games and seeing fans and the way they reacted to these young people...I know there was this one guy in town and he was a big fan. He'd yell at these kids, be it [billeted player] or anyone else, 'kill him, kill him' and you hear all of this. And then these kids come home and they have to, you know, put their head on a pillow and try to go to sleep. -Janine Harriman, billet.

That's just the nature of the beast, I think, back in the day. It was a lot stricter. I mean, you did what you were told. I may be speaking out of turn here, but I'm sure there was a lot more verbal abuse, and in some cases, physical abuse in those situations and I'm not purview to that. I've never experienced that myself... But I know from talking to other people that it happened, different situations, other teams or whatever. But I think that's definitely back then. -Lorne Frey, assistant coach.

You're leaving home at such a young age you have to, you know, become a man in a hurry. And that's just the way it was, you know? -Clark Polglase, player.

For some participants, the stressful life of junior hockey was only the beginning. For those that dreamed of a career in the NHL, additional pressures were applied from new sources. This

tremendous responsibility met with players who were perhaps not yet quite mature enough to meet such a responsibility head-on.

I remember one night [name], who was the Western League scout, had come to a game. So [teammate] and I were both drafted. We didn't play very well and he ripped us a new one. The [NHL team] scout was in town with [a different teammate] and ripped him a new one too. And you know what we do? We go down to the Big Eye and order as many rye whiskies as we possibly can and then go four-wheeling through the golf course, with three feet of snow at two in the morning and get pulled over at 7/11 and all get thrown in the drunk tank. It was [teammate's] second DUI. That was the feedback we got, that we were blowing it. So again, let's validate, right? -Bob Wilkie, player.

As a group, the participants considered themselves in general put into a situation that not only were they ill-equipped to face, but provided no resources to aid in their transition. Holt and Hoar's 2006 model decrees individual modifiers such as maturity and development will directly impact the social support received and accepted by the individuals in question. The participants, despite not being familiar with the model, tended to agree.

The 16-year old being left to fend for themselves is probably the best way to describe it for the most part. -Bob Harriman, billet.

The second identified individual moderator was personal factors. Several participants, despite acknowledgements of systematic flaws within the organization of Canadian hockey, still took responsibility for their own individual responses to the bus accident and the outcomes that came with it. For one player, an unwillingness to accept the help that was offered was deemed as a mistake.

I think it always falls on the athlete...I take full responsibility for my ignorance for my inability to talk to that counselor that my mom took [me to]. That's on me. -Bob Wilkie, player.

Additionally, two participants acknowledged that they had been dealing with mental health challenges before the accident, and that the crash only added to those challenges. Polglase, for example, cited mental health issues that existing before the crash and his continued struggle in that area. Another participant stated his unique set of personal circumstances as a player new to the team, acquired in a trade. He had yet to form close connections with teammates based on his newness and that led to a different post-crash experience.

As far as the rest of the team, I didn't really know them. I was just starting to meet them when we were in that bus accident. -Lonnie Spink, player.

Trauma was the third identified individual moderator by the researchers during the thematic analysis, because every player experienced the trauma of the bus accident differently. This moderator is consistent with the current medical understanding of trauma, where the one-time, multiple, or long-lasting repetitive events affect everyone differently (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014). Lonnie Spink, as mentioned, had just joined the team and as a result, while he was saddened by the events, did not share the same connection as his new teammates did to the players who had passed away. Furthermore, the position of the player on the bus during the accident played a role.

It didn't hit me as hard as far as messing with my mind or anything like that. I was up at the front of the bus with [player] and [player], we got thrown around. We were the first ones out. People picked us up. We didn't see a lot of what was happening in the back of

the bus...it's sad and horrible that it happened. We love those guys, but it didn't affect me like the other guys. -Lonnie Spink, player.

The personal factors modification also played a role in trauma as well. For Spink, it was not only his newness on the team that he perceived as contributing to his quick recovery:

I went into healthcare because I can handle that kind of stuff. I work in [hospital]...and have seen everything. I've seen people cut in half and everything and for the most part, doesn't really affect me. I'm not sure if I grew into that or if it was there from the beginning.

For players who were more negatively impacted by the trauma, the ability of some teammates to seemingly recover quickly was the source of some resentment.

I've learned now that trauma is a very individualized experience, and so you know some guys didn't really show signs of anything, and then what happens is you get quite judgemental towards them. Like why are they not reacting the same way I am? And so it created a little bit of conflict within the room, for sure. -Bob Wilkie, player.

With the benefit of a 35-year reflection period, the participants all were more understanding of the differing levels of trauma within their teammates and varying approaches to the crash.

There was a large group of us that were severely affected by it...I struggled very much because I was – I was really good friends with Scotty and Trent. They really helped me a lot. Uhm, seeing their bodies in the snow. Watching Chris Mantyka take his last dying breath, seeing Brett Ruff's, you know, legs underneath, a lot of them didn't see what

[player] and I saw...everyone was off the bus and gone so quickly, and I'm grateful for that because I think it allowed a lot of the other guys to forge on. -Bob Wilkie, player.

The types of traumas experienced by the participants varied and will be discussed in greater detail in the outcomes portion of the results. It was important to note however, that these individual modifiers of connectivity to the team, a participant's place on the bus, or direct observations contributed to the trauma that they experienced and the ensuing long-lasting effects.

Social Environment Moderators

The second social support modifier is social environment factors. The primary subcategories identified in the data analysis were: social context, barriers to social supports, isolation/transition, and billets.

Every participant frequently reflected on the social context of the team in 1986-87. Qualifying statements prefaced many responses, as if participants felt as though this was necessary to contextualize the time period. When pressed by the interviewers on this contextualization, participants had varying opinions of if the social context of 1986-87 remained intact today. Overall, the participants sought to temper their criticism towards the organizations due to differences in social expectations present in 1986-87 compared to our modern understanding.

The culture has definitely changed in hockey since that time. Being still involved, I see it. You know, players have agents now at 14-15 years old and that's a resource that they have that you know care about that kid. So at the time I don't know if any of our players really had agents...It wasn't the norm and that point and just, yeah, the resources that are available to everybody now it's totally different. -Tim Tisdale, player.

I do now think that [resources] should have been brought forward, but then again, you got to look at the time element, the differences in society back then...a lot more of this stuff has been exposed now and it's coming forward, which is great, which is what it should've been. If we knew then what we know now? Absolutely. There would have been a meeting with a crisis person or whatever. Absolutely. -Lorne Frey, assistant coach.

However, not all participants considered the social context of the time period as having as large of an impact on player well-being.

There's still that hierarchy, that ever-present element of power, or that power relationship. It's still there whether it's abusive, manipulative and not, it isn't always oftentimes, nowadays it's a great relationship but it's still there and it's systemic, and it's cultural, and it's not going anywhere until we're at least – you know we can give ourselves a little pat on the back. We're talking about it. We're educating about it. We're understanding about it, but is it changing on the ground day-to-day? Not very quickly. - Participant 2, player.

You know it's funny. You would think that it's improved. I mean these leagues have the Red Cross in there. They have the Canadian Mental Health Association. What they don't understand is those kids aren't fucking listening to that because they're not walking in their shoes. It's not relatable...they are athletes that are tough to get to if you don't have the credibility. They are not going to listen. So I think that they have tried to check more boxes. The problem is that they don't have the evaluation tools in place to really measure the effectiveness because there's more stress. There's more anxiety. There's more substance abuse than there was 30 years ago. -Bob Wilkie, player.

While most participants adopted the position that things had improved and a couple dissented, a middle ground explanation was offered by one participant.

Back then the human being didn't matter most. The hockey player did. Now I think it's come a long way. I would say the human being matters more. Because if that doesn't come first, I think people are slowly realizing that the hockey player is not that good. So you better take care of the person first, yeah? -Tracy Egeland, player.

This explanation of the situation, where the mental health of the players is addressed primarily because it helped hockey performance was directly addressed by other participants, regardless of if they considered things in the modern day to be better or not from the 1980s. The game continued to come first.

Hockey as I saw it then, and may still be now, is telling them get out there and get the goals. It's a business and we're not too concerned about your personal aspect and if you have any personal issues figure it out, as long as you keep your points up. Figure it out. -Bob Harriman, billet.

It's very difficult. In a lot of cases, you end up being a number and that's the way it is. As you go up the food chain [in hockey], it gets worse. -Lorne Frey, assistant coach.

I wouldn't call it all you know, old school, or an archaic philosophy, but these coaches, general managers, they really aren't concerned with that. That they're someone else's kid. You know, they're concerned about wins and losses...putting money in the coffers, keeping their jobs, advancing their careers. -Participant 2, player.

In summary, the participants felt very strongly that the social context of the 1986-87 influenced their post-crash journey. Most stopped short of applying direct equivalencies to their

experience in the 1980s and today's junior hockey players, although a minority were not so hesitant. The majority of participants identified the primary reason for this hesitancy due to how they perceived the improvements made with relation to mental health awareness and treatment in the years since 1986-87. This will be expanded on in the next paragraph, discussing barriers.

The second social environment factor identified was the barriers to social supports. This factor included three subcategories: ignorance of mental health, stigma of mental health, and power imbalance. There was a relationship between all three of these subcategories and the era they played. While the majority of participants agreed that ignorance of mental health has decreased, the opinion was more split with regard to stigma. Some participants felt as though social progress accomplished much to dismantle the stigma of mental health. Other participants were not convinced. All saw the power imbalance of Canadian hockey's hierarchical system as problematic, especially in the context of James, the head coach and general manager of the Broncos.

The first subcategory to be investigated was that of ignorance of mental health. All participants perceived they had been ignorant of mental health and its effects in 1986. Nearly all acknowledged that they would have done things differently with that knowledge they now held.

Nobody, nobody mentioned mental health, nobody talked about it, nobody knew what that was. -Clark Polglase, player.

I wasn't smart enough to realize that probably at the time. I probably would have thought, okay, everyone is going to get over this and it may take some time, but we will get over it. We move on. That's kind of how we were growing up. You fall down, you scraped

your knee, you get up and you move on. That was my mentality moving forward and I assume that was everybody's mentality. -Darren Kruger, affiliated player.

It was always just about the well-being of [billeted player]. That's who we were really concerned about. And again, just never really understood the impact of what he went through, not until 30 years later when we reunited again over the other Broncos [Humbolt] bus accident. So I think for me that was hard and knowing that probably we could have done a lot more to help [billeted player] through that. -Janine Harriman, billet.

Years later some of the kids told me that they had had more difficulty than I thought they did. And I realized – so that's sort of when that occurred there, that really started to open my eyes a little bit, but for myself, you know, I was brought up with...life and death occurs, and you move on when it happens. I guess that's sort of the way we were raised. -Lorne Frey, assistant coach.

With the exception of Graham James' role, the participants did not attribute any ungiven support to malice. The testimony implicated ignorance as the cause instead.

The signs were all there. The signs are always there. It's just people don't see it because they're not trained or educated to see it. -Bob Wilkie, player.

I just don't think anyone sort of understood the magnitude of the incident, what we were going through as individuals and as a team. I don't think anyone truly grasped that. And I know they didn't because I've had conversations with other friends and I don't think they realized what we experienced. It just wasn't commonplace at that time. -Tim Tisdale, player.

I don't even think the mechanisms were there...I need to be fair to the people in this...They couldn't pull a lever and say, "Here you go, we know you're in a tough space and you've got a tough job. Here's some support for you." Those parts weren't there. - Bob Harriman, billet.

This absolution of junior hockey stopped there and, as seen in the second subcategory (stigma of mental health), many participants found fault in the structure of junior hockey and its ability to stigmatize players that require assistance with mental health.

I don't know how that would have been taken [asking for help] where hockey was then. I know from my own situation I think I would have been scared that I would have been looked down upon as weak...there was no real mental health awareness or [place] you even could come out and say you were struggling.... you're expected to go to the rink with a smile on your face and you weren't really going to show any sign of weakness. - Tracy Egeland, player.

There's such a stigma there. Obviously, I have a lot of clients that come to me from parents and that's great. There's such a stigma still associated with it. The whole it's okay not to be okay thing. -Participant 2, player.

I think that it's probably the same reason most people don't reach out. You hate to look vulnerable, especially when you're in that sports environment and I'm supposed to be tough. And the game was a lot different back then as well. Athletes were supposed to be able to handle these situations and getting help was just not the norm back in the 80s. - Tim Tisdale, player.

The participants, as a unit, described a social environment where being vulnerable was untenable. Hockey culture has long been criticized (or praised, depending on the source) for being a bastion of masculinity and dominating personalities. Accordingly, even in a junior hockey environment, participants found barriers at every turn when attempting to address their vulnerabilities caused by the bus accident. Even following an obviously traumatizing situation, the players bought into these norms, and resisted both external help as well as self-introspection.

Part of it is the stigma, part of it is, you know, we don't need help. We can handle those things. We don't want to look vulnerable. I think that's part of it and some of it is just you don't even realize that it's causing an issue for you. You know something maybe isn't right but you don't understand what's causing it. -Tim Tisdale, player.

There was just such a negative connotation towards counseling. You know what I mean? Like it was just that there was something wrong and the last thing as a young male athlete with a huge ego that you wanted to admit or find out whether there was something wrong. So it was terrifying to even think about. -Bob Wilkie, player.

I think there are still huge barriers for young people, athletes, anyone to seek out help. I think the barriers are systemic, they're cultural, they're in the culture and the – you know, the ever-dynamic entity of a hockey team or a hockey organization. -Participant 2, player.

These fears and stigmas were not without rationale. The third identified subcategory under barriers to social support was a power imbalance between junior hockey players and their coach, organization, scouts – among others in the hockey environment. Interviewee testimony demonstrates a clear perception that any display of weakness would damage the player's hockey career. This was an insecurity that continued throughout a player's junior hockey experience,

from the time they were rookies and their ice time was insecure, to the time they were overagers and their draft stock was in question. There was no such thing as job security for the Broncos players.

The athletes need to have a voice, they need to. We need to kind of try to eliminate that power imbalance, like that guy there can make or break my whole life, you know? And that's, I think, what these kids feel, until they're all frozen in fear. -Participant 2, player.

I was going to get drafted [to the NHL] that year. Man, I couldn't let anybody know that there was something wrong through this, even though it was completely obvious to everybody...to be honest, it's just a culture, they don't care, it's just about performance. - Bob Wilkie, player.

As the interviews revealed, this fear was not without merit. One of the (many) participants of the project who still worked within hockey described how a player's mental health was factored into the drafting process.

Yeah, it [mental health] would be a red flag in that [draft process]. What that means just is that we need to talk about it. We need to find out what happened, you know, how does it affect the kid? -(Participant's name redacted at researcher's discretion).

So it's more of a conversation as opposed to a do-not-draft situation? – Interviewer

Yeah it is – you just want to figure out the specifics. You kinda get the professional answer from him as to, you know, can he help our hockey team, then it's all good. I mean if it's something we need to stay away from, then we will. -(Participant's name redacted at researcher's discretion).

However, the biggest focal point for all participants with regard to a power imbalance concerned the specific role of James, who was the head coach and general manager of the Swift Current Broncos in 1986-87. With the benefit of 36 years worth of retrospection and the criminal conviction of James as a sexual abuser of minors, all participants quickly noted that James used the top-heavy hierarchical structure of hockey to fulfill his own personal goals.

Everything deferred to Graham at that time. I mean you either played the way Graham wanted you to play, did the things Graham wanted you to do, and if you didn't, you were blackballed and out of the game. -Tracy Egeland, player.

I can give you the exact answer to that [why no one outside stepped in]. Power. Power and influence. They had no ability. Graham James was seen as a god-like figure in terms of hockey and we were winning and we were successful ... anything involved in the organization or team was run by him and him alone and that's why he got away with what he got away with for 30-40 years, or whatever, because there was no accountability. It was a closed door. There was no outsider influence, and that's where the problem lies. And it's still a problem today, I believe. -Participant 2, player.

It is known that Graham James sexually abused at least two players on the 1986-87 Broncos, one who came forward publicly and contributed to James' conviction (Kennedy & Grainger, 2007), and one who revealed during this project that he was also abused. This is not out of the ordinary based on the existing literature. Studies on the subject have indicated a rate of 2-8% of all minor-age athletes are victims of sexual abuse within the context of sport, usually by a coach or teacher (Parent & El Hlimi, 2012). The participants explained in detail how this was possible within the junior hockey environment.

Nobody wants to be the one breaking that story because you might be breaking the story about something true, but usually the tattletale is gonna be run out of the game quicker than ever, right? -Tracy Egeland, player.

It's because of the power, the power narrative. You know, he's seen as the be-all end-all and he's the coach, he's the general manager and what he says goes. And that's just the way it is. And when you put that much power in one individual's hands, there's bound to be trouble. So there was no outsider looking in. Everybody in the Western Hockey League, from the executive, they knew what he was doing and it's proven. Sheldon [Kennedy] said they knew what was going on and it was like the Catholic Church. They just kept moving him and allowing him to go to other places. So the power. I mean, he was *Hockey News* man of the year and all this. Understand this about Graham, he was extremely intelligent, extremely articulate, extremely manipulative, and unfortunately people who are predators have a radar for who to go after and they have a real way of making it look like they're first-class citizens. -Participant 2, player.

You look at any culture or any group that's been through something like this, people knew, and you know when you're in charge and you know that this is going on. I don't know how they sleep with themselves. I don't know how they get past it. -Bob Wilkie, player.

This dynamic of power imbalance created a significant barrier towards the players receiving any type of help following the bus accident. All of the participants to a degree attributed the lack of resources they received to James attempting to keep his sexual abuse from reaching public view.

There's no doubt we had a barrier and that was, you know, we had a coach that probably went out of his way to make sure that we weren't being interviewed [by a therapist] individually. And I don't think he wanted that to get out at that point...it wasn't just that we had an accident. We had a coach that wanted to make sure that his secrets didn't get out. -Tim Tisdale, player.

Apparently, we had an individual come forward and ask to speak to the kids about, uh you know, the post-accident and stuff like that. It never happened. And my understanding was Graham [prevented it], and maybe later you could figure it out, but my understanding was that it just wasn't relevant. The kids didn't display anything that, you know, we thought was detrimental for them, although like I said, later it did come out that some of them had. -Lorne Frey, assistant coach.

The combination of society's ignorance of mental health in the 1980s and James' efforts to keep his abuse secret were identified by all participants as the primary barriers to receiving social support. An individual from the community with credentials came forward and offered to speak to the players in a supportive capacity but was turned away.

He was a member of the community. I think he was, I can't quite remember, but my feeling is that it might've been a pastor of the community or surrounding area. -Lorne Frey, assistant coach.

While a consensus does not exist in the literature regarding the effectiveness of religion-accommodative counseling, a metaanalysis conducted by the American National Institute for Healthcare Research found that there was no evidence that religion-accommodative approaches to counseling were more or less effective than the standard approaches (McCullough, 1999). It

therefore stands to reason that this individual could have provided useful support to players who had been struggling. However, his offer of support was denied by James and this decision was not challenged by the others who knew of it. James' decision was not a surprise to the participants.

Graham had things to hide, so I'm sure he didn't want people involved at all, right? -

Lonnie Spink, player.

[Graham James], strong individual. He had a strong personality, wasn't a dumb guy. He was very smart, very intelligent. Yeah, obviously used it in bad and horrible ways....and I think you know, he saw that road, that path where we're bringing in professional help. I mean obviously because of what was going on, and how he'd been living his life, that wasn't going to be an option. -Clark Polglase, player

Given the participants perception of James' role as a barrier, the participants were additionally asked why they thought James was allowed to operate with impunity by the hockey environment they were all a part of. Most pointed to a prioritization of hockey operations above the players.

He was a smooth talker. He knew how to get people on his side. He knew how to get the powerful people on his side, everyone in the community loved him. He was funny, dynamic, and we had a winning team, right? -Bob Wilkie, player.

Personal charisma notwithstanding, the primary reason as to why the participants perceived James as being given total autonomy was due to his proficiency as a hockey coach and the results his teams won.

I don't know if you've talked to anyone about Graham. Ninety percent [of the players] will tell you he's the best coach they've ever had. -Lorne Frey, assistant coach.

Many participants echoed this statement, albeit understandably begrudgingly. There were, however, a couple of dissenters. These dissenters pointed to poor personal relationships with James as the reason for their dissent.

I absolutely resented him. Graham and I did not have a good relationship at all. You know the day of the accident, we got back to the hospital and I had blacked out at a certain point. I woke up in the hospital...and Graham came into my room and not once did he say 'are you okay? How are you?' All he asked was 'where's Joe [Sakic] and where's Sheldon [Kennedy]' and you know that to me – I never wanted to be in the same room with that man again. -Bob Wilkie, player.

Nobody even asked me [if I was okay]. Graham James is walking about the hospital asking if Sheldon Kennedy and Joe Sakic were okay. That's all he cared about. Sheldon because he was abusing him and Joe because he's the best player that ever put on skates. -Participant 2, player.

A summarized perspective was once more offered by Egeland, who felt as though the specific qualities unique to the 1986-87 Swift Current Broncos aided in the power imbalance and total control of James. At the time, the team had just relocated to Swift Current from Lethbridge and the excitement that surrounded the team in Swift Current was perceived to have had an effect.

That team in Swift Current was a perfect storm for Graham. Community-owned team and here was this funny guy that could get all these reporters and everybody eating out of the

palm of his hand. Had a board of directors that he had to answer to? Kind of, sort of, maybe. But you know, he was the hockey guy. I think teams that were owned by an owner would have never had a coach like Graham to begin with. So you look to some of the other teams in the league back then...seems like they were owned by individuals, that had decent coaches. I think those people would put some thing in place to get some help [for the players], yeah. -Tracy Egeland, player.

As a final note, previous documentation noted that no teammates were aware of the abuse outside of those being abused, as those being abused did not tell anyone (Kennedy & Grainger, 2007). This was consistent with the testimony given by the participants.

Sheldon [Kennedy] was one of our good friends. He hung out with us and like, we went out and had fun together all the time. We had no idea when this came out. We were so shocked, like we could not believe it. Sheldon was with us a ton, and when that information came out, complete shock. No idea. Like if we would have known ... like then we would have helped. -Lonnie Spink, player.

The third social environment moderator was isolation and transition. The nature of the operations in Canadian junior hockey requires players to relocate to a team that drafts, signs, or trades for them, often at a moment's notice. This transitory nature necessitates removing an individual from their current social environment and relocating them (often far away) from their old social supports and putting them into a new social environment. Those participants who were not local to Swift Current found aspects of their transition challenging.

Moving away from home, being away from my family, that was – just think looking back on it, that was a huge mountain to climb. -Clark Polglase, player.

It's hard, these 16-year old kids that came into this town called Swift Current. All of them were dragging the suitcase through the front door of a stranger. The support mechanism from home was, you know, you gotta do this if you're going to get into the NHL and the NHL is everything...so it's a lot of pressure, saying these kids are under pressure is an understatement. -Bob Harriman, billet.

For the participants that lived Swift Current with their families, they attempted to gauge the difference in support if they had been away from home.

I would like to think that I could handle it, overcome it without having to go outside and change the person I was. But, at the same point, I'd look at some of those guys before and after what they went through. Just fortunate that I wasn't there [in that situation]. -Tim Tisdale, player.

Overall, the local factor was important to note as a modifier to social support, because it exemplifies the near-complete changing of an individual's social support network. Billets, the fourth and final social environment modifier, were a large part of this network, and have been touched on already in a number of categories. However, the billet experience itself, as told by the billets, often lacked support just as much as the players did.

We were a young couple with little kids and were we prepared for this teenage stuff spinning around us at that time, never mind the accident? But all that and then add on top the hockey business and the agents calling, the parents calling, and the madness of that? Were we prepared for that? No. Did we work our way through it? Absolutely. Did we have any support in that [from the hockey organization]? Zero. -Bob Harriman, billet.

First of all, to have somebody even come to our house before [billeted player] got there. I mean [billeted player] showed up on our doorstep in October all alone. There was nobody with him...not even a formal introduction was made to us. So to have a process where somebody comes to our house, sits down, and tells us about the things you can expect. And yeah, there are going to be some bumps along the road. So when you go away to Calgary for the weekend, come home and every drop of liquor in your cabinet's gone, those are things that happen. How do we expect you to deal with that? But yeah, when you look back now, it's just kind of mind-boggling to think there was absolutely no contact. The only contact that would have been made was or that we thought we would have ever received was Graham James for 11PM curfew. -Janine Harriman, billet.

The foster system has inspectors, and checks, and balances, and standards. Show me where that is in the hockey system. -Bob Harriman, billet.

This lack of support or resources for billet families, who were all new billet families due to the team's relocation in 1986 from Lethbridge, reveals a complete lack of standardization by the hockey organization. This confusion was reflected by the participants, who had mixed experiences with their billet families as expressed earlier. As a result, given the seemingly chaotic nature of the billet situation itself, expecting a solid foundation of social support would have been unrealistic. Nevertheless, this was the reality for some participants.

Well, I think [billet family] for sure were definitely more supportive. They saw the change in my behaviour, so they were constantly in contact with my parents trying to say 'he's not doing very well. We're trying.' Just had to deal with those things and growing up in a culture where you don't talk about if you're feeling shitty. It was – it was a very difficult time. -Bob Wilkie, player.

In summary, there were significant modifiers of social support present within the participants. Between the individual factors and social environment factors, there were often insurmountable barriers. The structure of Canadian junior hockey, the power imbalance, the attitude towards mental health in that environment, all variables contributed together to oftentimes negate the social support that did filter through. A final quotation from a participant spoke to the nature of the overall environment of Canadian junior hockey in a general sense, absent of the specific factors of the 1986-87 Swift Current Broncos team.

There's lots of hockey players out there who were never through a bus accident and they're in the same difficult space. And it's clearly because they're not prepared as young people to manage it. -Bob Harriman, billet.

Desired Social Support

This project's next aim was the ascertainment of participants' desired social support. It is possible to learn from the surviving Broncos and create an ideal set of social supports for any future crisis moments, or even better navigate the difficult environment of Canadian junior hockey as previously detailed. Participants were asked to describe their ideal social support scenario, and hypothesize what would have helped them best recover. Through this line of inquiry, absent social supports were identified. Finally, participants were asked about the likelihood of resource utilization in 1986-87 had they been provided. To start, however, it was necessary to determine if participants felt sufficiently or insufficiently supported during and after the bus accident and if they felt they needed mental health resources to recover.

Overall, all things considered, did you feel supported in the aftermath of the bus crash? -

Interviewer

Not for a minute. No. And I don't think there's one guy in that team that would say that either. There was no support to them. None. -Tracy Egeland, player.

Participants generally agreed that the available supports were insufficient. A minority of participants personally experienced sufficient support but only due to pre-existing social support environments, primarily from their family. Even the sufficiently supported could see, however, that less resourced teammates struggled.

Oh, it definitely wasn't handled appropriately...I really haven't dwelled on it and said they should have done this or that, but [player] needed some counselling and he didn't get it. [Different player] needed counselling. -Lonnie Spink, player.

If that same situation happened now, I think we've learned from that incident that we need that [resources] and that being the first time, I think no one knew how to handle that situation. A big tragedy like that in hockey. But absolutely in hindsight, there should have been more done for us. -Tim Tisdale, player.

For those participants who identified as seriously affected, the perspective was similar. Several even found the question amusing, given its obvious conclusion.

Not one bit. Not one, right? And I'm gonna answer it honestly. Not one fucking way were we ever. No. -Bob Wilkie, player.

Looking back on it now, absolutely not in any way whatsoever. No. No. Absolutely, that's a hard no. No support whatsoever other than the support I sought through my teammates and some that was just kind of supplementary from some of the parents and families around, but absolutely zero support from the league, from the team. -Participant 2, player.

Good enough support to handle a life-changing thing though? Not even close, no. -Tracy Egeland, player.

I don't recall a whole lot of support. Not like it is today, because I think we've learned so much over the years, especially with mental health being such a big issue. I mean, there were a lot of us players back in those days that had their own issues and no real support system...where you felt comfortable, maybe talking to someone about personal issues you might have been dealing with. -Clark Polglase, player.

Of the participants, seven said they needed additional resources to recover, three did not, and one was unsure. Participants were asked about what they perceived to be the necessary social support or resources present in the aftermath of the bus accident. All participants mentioned counselling.

Well, definitely I think counsellors right after the accident. Traumatic ordeal. I think the counsellors should have – I mean there were counsellors back then. There's no question about it. But the coach being who he was and is, said, "No, wait, I don't think we need counsellors brought in." And looking back at the time you're thinking, "Wow. Okay, well if we don't need that, I guess we have to try and deal with this horrific situation on our own." And that's, I guess, what pushed us in that direction to go and try to deal with this whole thing on our own because we weren't allotted the professional help and we know the reasons for that. -Clark Polglase, player

Individual counselling should have been offered and a group counselling session as well. I think if we knew our teammates were having these conversations, it would have been a

much easier time to say, you know what? Hey, there is somebody that I would like to talk to. -Tim Tisdale, player.

Many participants recommended mandatory counselling as an ideal solution, both so that affected players could receive help and the stigmatization of mental health that existed within junior hockey's social environment would not present an obstacle to that help.

“I think as the season continued, I think we needed counsellors involved. I think we would have needed, you know, almost like a scheduled therapy for everybody. -Tracy Egeland, player.

Probably mandatory interviews, mandatory team discussions, mandatory individual interviews. Mandatory therapy sessions. If you want to play on this team, you need to go talk to someone about what you've experienced so we can make sure that you're okay as a person before you're back as a hockey player...anything that really had any substance to it was non-existent and I don't think any one of us would have reached out because it would have been seen as a sign of weakness. -Participant 2, player.

However, this widespread desire for mandatory counselling, while mentioned positively by almost all participants, did receive an objection from one interviewee.

Off the top of my head, I would say probably not forcing it. I don't know. It's pretty tough to force people into stuff like that. -Lonne Spink, player.

It sounded like you weathered the storm better than most. If you were lumped into some sort of a team therapy session, how do you think that would have worked for you? -

Interviewer

It wouldn't have – 100% I would have been angry about being forced to do it. But that's me, right? That's me. -Lonnie Spink, player.

When asked about what social supports participants would have wanted post-crash, participants also mentioned team doctors, an accreditation system for adult staff, a hotline, and a third-party trauma response team that ensured player well-being was paramount.

When I got into coaching, I saw the impact a good team doctor had on a team. It amazed me. They were almost like having a second father to some of them. I would say get everybody that's involved with your medical staff and stick them on the bus with the players, 'cause you know what? The first thing that's gonna do? They're gonna think they're safe. That's the first thing you need at the start from a tragic thing when you're a kid. You wanna feel safe again. And you put your doctors, your people that are surrounding your players all the time, put your doctors on that bus. I think that's the first step. -Tracy Egeland, player.

I sit on our national board for the Boys and Girls Club of Canada. They have to go through clarification boards. They are reviewed on meeting standards. Every Boys and Girls Club across Canada is reviewed through a peer process and the standards have to be met. When's the last time you saw a hockey team get reviewed for meeting a standard? First of all, where are the standards? And where is the review to meet that standard? So I guess as I talk, the answer to your question is an accreditation process. -Bob Harriman, billet.

Well obviously you should have some kind of hotline and some kind of support. Based on the situation there should always be some kind of help line. -Darren Kruger, affiliated player.

There should be a trauma response team in place, that's an external agency. Handles cases within the league, that would be my recommendation. You know someone that's prepared that might have hockey educated people in it, but that is prepared. You know when something happens, okay, they're going to come in and they have no affiliation or tie with Hockey Canada or anyone. It has to be unbiased and at arm's length. -Participant 2, player.

Oftentimes participants, even before they completed their response about the supports they needed, pointed to how some of those same solutions were unrealistic based on the structure and money involved in organized hockey.

Hockey Canada is the worst place you would go for that [change]. The absolute worst place because what are they? No matter what happens? What is Hockey Canada gonna do? Who's the first person, the first group of people they're going to go to? Lawyers...so Hockey Canada would be the last place I would like to have support – you know. Or the head of league. Because they're looking out for their own interests and what predominately are they interested in? They're interested in making money. -Participant 2, player.

A hockey team is in the business of hockey. And there are bottom lines and things that come along that might impact the bottom line are not going to happen. -Bob Harriman, billet

In general, all participants agreed that the business of hockey and the financial implications of changing the existing system were at the root of the lack of change.

After preferred sources of support and resources were identified which the participants, participants were asked if they would have used those resources in 1986-87. Only one player indicated that they would have utilized any type of mental health support or resources if it had been provided. The other participants all strongly believed they would have refused some resources, such as individual counselling, due to mental health stigmatization. In a group setting, or if they saw their teammates using resources, players suggest they would have been more likely to engage with tools of wellness.

Back then? Not in a million years because what would I have been doing? I would have been saying to somebody, I'm not okay, I can't handle this. I need help. That would have been my demise and my exit out of the WHL or that team and that would have been because no, well everyone else is here playing and you can't. What's wrong with you? Maybe you're not tough enough. So simple answer, not in a million years. If someone had said, '[Name] do you want to see a counsellor?' I would have probably said, 'No, why would I want to see a counsellor? I'm fine.' And then I'd proceed to go and cry myself to sleep for three months every night. -Participant 2, player.

If it would have been me and I'm the only one in the dressing room that's gonna use it, not a chance. But if I wasn't gonna be the only one, I would have. If everybody would have been doing it, I'd be right in there too. Yeah. -Tracy Egeland, player.

If we knew that the rest of our teammates were having those individual meetings and they sort of forced us to have this, and maybe forced isn't the right word, but to have those

individual conversations? I think it would have been nice to talk to a professional at that point that maybe could understand it better than we could, you know? We were 18, 19, 20. At the end of the day, we were kids. -Tim Tisdale, player.

I don't think I would have [utilized resources]. Plus, you're dealing with teenagers too, right? I'm not sure how in-depth any of them would have taken an offering for grief counselling. Like as a kid, you get angry and you withdraw, right? You're not reaching out...well maybe they [kids] do now. But back in the day, I'm not sure that many would have actually utilized it. -Lonnie Spink, player.

Another theme that emerged was the brief recess from hockey between the accident and return-to-play – just 10 days. The majority of players said that period was an acceptable timeframe and welcomed hockey as a return to normalcy and as a distraction from their grief.

I think most of the people felt that, hey, we need to get back on the ice as quick as we could, and to get on to what we are normally doing. Any time away I think was just giving us more opportunity to think about what happened. -Tim Tisdale, player.

My thoughts on it were: it was good that we got back on the ice because if you're not getting back eventually to what you're craft is, I think then you're spending more time thinking about – it helped us get our minds back into living life again, if that makes any sense. -Clark Polglase, player.

I was eager to get back playing, definitely. I'm sitting around and dwelling. I don't think that was the response that I wanted. I'm not sure what other people wanted. Maybe they felt they were rushed back, but I was definitely ready to go back...at least we got to play again. -Lonnie Spink, player.

The administrative personnel who made the decision about when to return to play did not do so without player input. The players were consulted, and unanimously stated their desire to continue the season, although it needs to be mentioned that players were not offered an alternative.

We met with the players and Graham said to me, 'do you want to go on or do you want to shut it down?' And I said, 'No, I want to go on.' And then we met with the players, and the players, to a person, wanted to go on. They felt it was best for them that they get back playing and get going. We did talk to them extensively about this, about moving on, and Graham certainly gave the players the option. -Lorne Frey, assistant coach.

However, the players were not in full agreement. Of the minority that disagreed with the previous statements, some were motivated by grief, others by confusion, and some by both.

I don't think 99% of the guys in that room honestly had even thought about playing yet. Like he's in there saying do we want to keep playing and I get there's a season and junior hockey is a big deal and you got teams that have home dates and want to make money and everything else, but there's no way I'd even thought about. I was more worried about how I'm getting to my best friend's funeral that's in Northern Alberta. -Tracy Egeland, player.

Well, we just had a bus accident here. Watched one of my friends and teammates die and a week later Graham's talking about we just got to get back on the horse and get out there and play a hockey game...10 days and he didn't care. He didn't care about anything. He just wanted to get back and play hockey and get it over with and get back to normal so people would stop fussing over and trying to stick their nose in. -Participant 2, player.

I remember raising my hand, you know, do you want to keep going? It's like yeah. Did I know if that was good for me or bad for me? No, I didn't. I mean the first game back in Moose Jaw, I remember we got out and warmed up. People were standing up, giving us a standing ovation. I had to leave the ice. I mean I was in tears. Everywhere we went people would do that. It's like, Jesus Christ, the last thing I want to be is to be celebrated for surviving. -Bob Wilkie, player.

While the team may have received support from the away crowds, and even from the opposing players, hockey still came first and the fierceness of competition took priority, not empathy or pity.

When we first went on the ice [first game back], it was supportive. They gave us a standing ovation type thing. And then, course, five minutes into the game, there's a line brawl out there. So that didn't last very long. -Gordie Hahn, trainer.

Two participants noted that other teams that played the Broncos following the accident were more physical, taking advantage of the death of one of the Broncos' most physical players, Chris Mantyka.

Seemed like some of the teams were just taking advantage of it. Brawling type of thing and that was just – but we hung in there. -Gordie Hahn, trainer.

Instrumental and Relational Outcomes

The final portion of questions was dedicated to the outcomes of the participants following the bus accident and the social support they received (or did not receive). Based on Holt and Hoar's 2006 model, there were a number of outcomes already identified, and several were added following the thematic analysis. There were three primary categories: positive outcomes,

negative outcomes, and coping strategies. Positive outcomes included the subcategories: motivation, satisfaction with athletic performance, team cohesion, stress/anxiety reduction, and positive affect. Negative outcomes included the subcategories: strain on existing relationships, injury, burnout, being labelled/seen as damaged goods, and negative affect. Coping strategies included two subcategories: substance abuse and the delayed addressing of issues caused by the bus crash.

There were some positive outcomes as a result of the social support that was present upon return to play which affected all participants. Concerning motivation, participants generally felt motivated to continue playing from the support of their teammates.

We absolutely provided support for each other. In what capacity is, you know, I mean I look at some of those guys still like brothers today. If I see any of those guys it's like we never skipped a beat. There's a connection, the brotherhood... You know, we bond in tragedy. But we also bonded in winning and we're proud of what we did, and we're also proud of the fact that we did it after we all went through that. -Participant 2, player.

We ended up making the playoffs that year with a core group, I think that the thing about it here, we had an atmosphere that was a lot of fun. I mean we made practices fun. We communicated with the kids, we had a lot of laughs, we just had it all. -Lorne Frey, assistant coach.

Team cohesion was the most mentioned positive outcome with six participants. This speaks both to the primary social support of many participants being teammates, and also the reliability of that support.

Guys you weren't as close with on the team, we were probably more driven together team-wise...after the accident had more people to talk to because we all went through the same thing. -Tracy Egeland, player.

It made me closer to those guys as far as having lifelong friends, right? There's a lot of them that I became very close with. -Lonnie Spink, player.

Stress/anxiety reduction was only alluded to by participants in the case of teammates. Several participants felt as though the collective experience of going through the same traumatic event made it easier for them to manage. Simply knowing that their teammates felt similarly following the stressor was of great help.

We didn't necessarily talk more, it more that you could look at somebody and knew that they were on the bus with you and shared that experience...that probably got a lot of us through that year. What was valuable to us is that when you're home by yourself that you knew there was other guys at home by themselves feeling the same thing too. I think that's a bit of a calming effect when you're on your own and getting no real support. - Tracy Egeland, player.

Positive affect was categorized as every outcome of social support received by the participants that did not fit into another category. All participants experienced some degree of this outcome, usually in small but still meaningful ways and that extended to those members of the team that were not on the bus the day of the crash.

Right after the game [when everyone found out about the bus accident], they [the team he was with at the time] just all came over. Kind of gave me a hug and a handshake and said anything we can do, we'll do it. They're awesome. -Gordie Hahn, trainer.

For one participant, the accident represented a paradigm shift of how they viewed their life. Existential thoughts were usually limited to a participant's survivor's guilt or post-traumatic stress disorder, yet for some there was a more positive mindset following the bus crash. A desire to shape the negatives of the accident into a positive was a common feeling shared by most of the participants.

Made me feel, even to this day, even that much more appreciative of my own luck to be here. The severity of that accident, I mean it could have been as bad as Humboldt where 14-15 kids and trainers and people, you know, passed on. That could have easily been us. Not to say we're lucky by any means, we had four young fellas that were killed. It could have been 10-15 of us. It could have been me. So that's basically how I felt. Looked at life differently in a sense that I'm lucky to be here, you know? -Clark Polglase, player.

I choose to take the positives, I even choose to turn the negative into a positive...the positives are the positives with sport and hockey, being a teammate, the comradery and the friendships, and just the passion for winning. We're lucky in Swift Current, we had a team that was rated the best junior hockey team in 100 years of the CHL...so I take all of those lessons and all of the hardships as a positive for sure. I mean I wouldn't have anything in my life today in terms of what I do have without hockey. -Participant 2, player.

The negative outcomes had significantly more code matches than positive outcomes. The first negative outcome, a strain on existing relationships, was primarily mentioned by only one participant. However, it was mentioned concerning every area of social support from billets, parents, teammates, and friends.

It was more awkwardness than anything, right? They didn't know what to say. I didn't want to talk about it, so a lot of the relationships became strained. -Bob Wilkie, player.

Several other participants noted that their relationships with certain parties (e.g. James) changed after the bus accident, but that this was less of a strain on the relationship and more of a complete breakdown. Injury was mentioned primarily in a mental capacity, with several participants formally diagnosed with conditions in later life, potentially linked to the accident (and attributed by the affected participants as being linked to the accident). Burnout was mentioned by four participants in relation to the accident, and several more with relation to hockey in general during their 20s. Such burnout was visible to the figures beyond the players themselves.

I daresay it [support/resources] would have made a difference. The Graham James of the world couldn't have been the predators they got to be if these mechanisms were in place from those times. I daresay [billeted player] wouldn't have drank himself into oblivion and his career – other hockey players would not be in this space they are in now. Some would, but majority wouldn't. -Bob Harriman, billet.

Several quit, right? One of my buddies [player], he went home and I heard he had joined the clergy, went right to the religion right away. -Bob Wilkie, player.

Four participants mentioned the outcome of being labelled by the social environment of hockey. These participants felt as though they had been branded by hockey community by the bus accident. In the hockey environment where a player's reputation is all-important to be drafted or acquired by NHL or CHL franchises, such labelling was devastating.

Damaged goods. This guy went through an accident, you know, what's he gonna do if he's in the NHL and hasn't scored a goal in 15 games. Is he gonna be able to pick himself out of that sort of thing. It followed us. -Tracy Egeland, player.

No doubt we were. The team was defined by it [the accident]. I really felt that once we won the Memorial Cup three years later that we could move on and maybe that was the definition of the team, how we were able to recover and move forward from a tragedy. - Tim Tisdale, player.

The final subcategory was negative affect, which similar to positive affect, were all the miscellaneous negative outcomes. Several participants (including those who went on to the NHL) felt as though their hockey careers suffered from the affects of the accident beyond being labelled by those in the hockey industry.

For myself, the skillset was high enough where even though I wasn't playing to my full capabilities and my full potential, I was still good enough to play and get by, and that's all I really did. Sad, but I don't blame anybody. It's just the truth. These are the issues and that's how much the mental side of the game is a huge deal. You got to have both if you're going to excel at your highest level. I didn't have it, right? And back then if the options were there to deal with [mental] issues I'd like to think that I would have been steered in a different direction. -Clark Polglase, player.

The other negative affect mentioned was shared by nearly all participants. It was the manifestation of trauma in a variety of forms, even 35 years later. While trauma was traditionally understood to be a short-term effect following a traumatic event, new understandings of mental health and the seriousness of its effects in the long-term are at the forefront of everything from

newspapers to government policy. This long-term effect of trauma certainly was present in the case of the 1986-87 Broncos.

Even to this day, I travelled with my kid's teams and did that [sit on a team bus]. I could not sit and relax on a bus at this point. And I don't think that's ever going to change. -
Tim Tisdale, player.

I think about it. When it comes up, it's very hard. It was very, very difficult. I think maybe once a year for the most part, um, you know, anniversary or whatever, I have my little cry. -Lorne Frey, assistant coach.

[The accident] affected me in every way. I was not the same person after that day." -Bob Wilkie, player.

The final area of outcomes that was investigated were the coping strategies embraced by the participants due to the lack of resources they received. Two primary subcategories were identified: substance abuse and the delayed addressing of issues. Four participants identified their past substance abuse as addiction. Two more participants identified that they used various substances (primarily alcohol) as a coping mechanism but did not feel that it met the standard of an addiction or dependency. Only two participants testified that they did not use substances after the accident as a way to cope. However, it also must be noted that substance abuse was pervasive in the social environment of hockey prior to the bus crash, although the players perceived that alcohol abuse was part of the post-crash coping strategy.

It [substance abuse] was cultural. I remember when I was playing in the AHL, that was the lifestyle. It was like you practice, go to the pub in the afternoon, shoot pool, drink beer, party all night, get up at 7AM, practice, sweat it out and you go do it again. I mean

the lifestyle and the whole idea of it is just a breeding ground for substance abuse. -

Participant 2, player.

Yeah, lots of alcohol. Lots of drug use back in those days...I felt more comfortable if I was high or if I was drunk. -Clark Polglase, player.

Alcohol for sure. We all did. I'm not gonna point a finger at anybody else, but did we drink heavily. And at 16! I look back and I think if my 16-year old boys drank like we did back then, that would be...yeah, that'd be tough. But yeah, there was definite alcohol abuse for sure. The rest of that year and right through the playoffs, yeah. -Tracy Egeland, player.

We all had our social circles that we would spend lots of time in people's basements. You know, whether it was crying or laughing. Definitely lots of boozing, numbing. But that's how we got through it together. -Bob Wilkie, player.

For the purposes of this study, substance abuse was not characterized as a negative outcome in the coding, primarily due to the feelings of one participant on the role that alcohol played in recovery from the bus accident. Despite acknowledgement of the long-term consequences of alcohol abuse, there was an element of appreciation for the role alcohol played in the coping strategy of the survivors.

Honestly— was it a negative? I don't know. Without that alcohol as a release, what could we have done with no help and nobody to talk to? If we couldn't go out and do that, I don't know what I would have done. Sat in my room all night and fallen into some state of depression? I don't know. We abused the alcohol, the partying we did, but at least we were all together. So was it a negative? Yeah, obviously, but was it a negative at the time

for those few months until we got through that year? Probably not the big negative like you would think. Probably led to more of a negative for a lot of us years down the road. But for that short two or three months? Probably not a negative. Yeah. And that's just me being honest. -Tracy Egeland, player.

The second subcategory of coping strategies was the delayed addressing of issues. All participants mentioned this factor.

In another sense, I think they did kind of bottle it up. -Gordie Hahn, trainer.

In a nutshell it took me until I was 40 years old to realize what I had gone through...and the fact that I needed help. Luckily, I was able to reach out at 40 years old and do some therapy and revisit a lot of the things that were just buried for 30 years. You know, being in fight or flight for 30 years from trauma. -Participant 2, player.

No [did not use mental health resources], not until I was 40 years old. So I was in my 40s, yeah. -Tracy Egeland, player.

I have talked to a couple of people over the years...couple counsellors...I think as you age, as you get older, you can maybe deal with things a little bit better. -Clark Polglase, player.

There were a variety of reasons for delays in personal mental health matters but an ignorance factored prominently. Stigmatization was very strong with the hockey environment and, therefore, represented a deterrent. Some abused substances in an attempt to dull their emotional struggle and only acknowledged their situation once the substance abuse ceased. One participant used hockey itself as a coping strategy.

Hockey was my way to deal with it...once I got out of the game I realized that I hadn't really dealt with a lot of things, and I knew I needed to go and talk to somebody...you know giving someone CPR wouldn't affect you but you can't chew gum and tie shoes at the same time. It's just crazy how once I got into my early 40s how that hits you. -Tracy Egeland, player.

A final theme that was revealed over the course of the thematic analysis was the desire of the participants to aid the next generation. This was linked with providing social support to others, often the social support that the participants wished they had had. While the participants often lacked substantive social support, most went out of their way to provide it to others, even in the days following the accident.

[Player] and I went because we were so upset about the bus driver and stuff, right? It was a complete accident. So, we went the next day and consoled the bus driver. He was just devastated. He was an older guy, went onto his farm and talked with him and told him it was an accident and tried to smooth things over with him. -Lonnie Spink, player.

Mum, it was hard for her. Anytime a mother whose son [passes] – I know it's hard on her, so because of my connection to my mother, I just really wanted to make sure that she was going to be okay before I [left]. -Darren Kruger, affiliated player.

It is noteworthy that the majority of the participants, and indeed the 1986-87 Broncos team overall found themselves in positions where they were able to support hockey players. Some were coaches, some general managers, others went into healthcare, some psychology specifically. In 2016, when the Humboldt bus accident took place, many of the participants tried to find ways to help.

Ragtag group of people kind of from the original Bronco bus accident, down to the hospital [where the Humboldt survivors were] we went...and the stories. I'm listening to stories these guys are sharing, started crying and, [player], you were what? You did what? The same thing with the other boys. They're bleeding their hearts out to these kids laying in hospital beds. And I've been in the business of trauma. I didn't see this side of trauma at all, even in my profession. -Bob Harriman, billet.

I did reach out to some people in Humboldt...I did go up to the hospital and visit some of the players, that's something that we didn't have because there was no one that had that experience to share and I wanted to be out there to say, you know what? I've been through this. If you need to talk, I'm available now. -Tim Tisdale, player.

In an extension of this theme, many participants participated in this project due to a feeling of responsibility to those who came after them.

For myself, like what I've expressed today, I don't just – I haven't really talked like that. I don't talk, I don't share things, not even with my own wife, to be honest...So I figured, I'm gonna rip the scab off and just expose everything. This is who I am and these are the issues that I have and maybe there's somebody out there that has similar things or similar thoughts or issues that I have and then maybe it can help them. -Clark Polglase, player.

Discussion

The results of this study were very clear, the 1986-87 Swift Current Broncos were provided with insufficient social support. Although elements of all dimensions of social support were present, the majority of players deemed it inadequate, short and long-term. Participants found that the structure of Canadian junior hockey created an environment that allowed

inadequate support to be provided and tolerated. A power imbalance that disadvantaged grief-stricken players existed and decision makers were not held to the appropriate scrutiny. A lack of social support forced under-resourced players to fend for themselves. Included in this effort was the attempt to address trauma in the hypermasculine social environment of hockey. Only poor outcomes could be the result. Traditional hockey norms of toughness and invulnerability directly oppose a preferred path to wellness to the point where even if the proper resources were offered, they might not have been utilized by image cautious players that feared reprisal for softness.

Players were isolated from their families, friends, and local communities, which limited existing social support, consistent with what was found by Culp et al. (2007). Player age was a strong factor in negative outcomes and not just as it related to their vulnerability within the hockey system. Results show a clear delay in when players began to address possible mental health outcomes, often when they neared the age of 40 or had transitioned out of competitive hockey. This finding is consistent to the concern raised by Bruner (2002) regarding the youth of CHL players, and negatively affected psychological development. While Bruner (2002) noticed positive psychological development that resulted from positive billet and hockey organization experience, the mismanaged post-crash circumstances by both the authority figures and the participants themselves limited most beneficial outcomes. While the existing literature identified peer leaders as key following a traumatic event (Buchko, 2005), that leadership aspect was not expressed by the participants in this project. However, the literature's expectation that their peers would provide social support (Kavanagh et al., 2017) was found. Found in conjunction was the reality that these peers were in a poor position themselves to provide such support, given their lack of expertise and relying on intuition alone (Rees & Hardy, 2000). Nevertheless, the results

proved that the social support given by teammates, however ill-prepared they were to provide it, was positively received, aligning with findings of Buchko (2005). The reaction of the community was similarly perceived, with participants describing how the community made themselves helpful in the ways they could, similar to the dynamic described by Timm et al. (2017), Brown (2004), and Kennedy et al. (2019), yet by the same token often commented how the community was ill-prepared to offer meaningful assistance, attributing this to the ignorance of mental health during the 1980s.

Furthermore, the participants of this study were hesitant to turn to their hockey organization for help, which supports the findings of Buchko (2005), Kavanagh et al. (2007), as well as other affected parties in the world of junior hockey described by Kennedy and Grainger (2007) and Grygar (2013). The experience of the surviving Broncos aligned with more recent studies that showed CHL players felt their social environment they were in was not positive (Grygar, 2013). It is also very troublesome, given the negative outcomes from 1986-87, that CHL players within the last decade have had similar negative experiences with regard to their social environments; it suggests that perhaps things have not drastically changed in the intervening years. The so-called warrior code in Canadian hockey described by Allain (2008) and Gee (2009) was also evident in the testimony provided by participants. Players embodied this ideal even when they experienced considerable negative mental health outcomes, fearful they would appear weak and, thus, expendable to junior hockey's powerful decision-makers – the ones who ultimately determined their hockey careers and dreams. Not until they were well outside of this environment and no longer bound by the obligations of any hockey code did many seek help, often not until middle-age. This finding adds to those of Allain (2008), Gee (2009), Anderson (2018), and Rankainen & Ryba (2017), who described that in this hockey

environment, weakness was unacceptable and dictated the behaviour of players. Gulliver et. al (2012) argued that athletes refused to seek mental health assistance for fear of stigmatization, a notion that was identified by Culp et al. (2012) in the 1986-87 Broncos and reinforced by these results. Similarly to Gulliver et al. (2012), the participants in these results feared that seeking out help would lead to a lack of playing time or other negative consequences. It is also worth noting, however, that the majority of the participants believed this stigma had somewhat lessened over time for modern-day junior hockey players.

Regarding support networks, Dubé et al. (2007) described how there were four key sources of social support for junior hockey athletes in remote regions: coaches, friends on the team, teachers, and the community. All of these factors were present in the Broncos' structural social support network, but only friends on the team (teammates) represented a strong source of perceived social support for the participants of this study. In this study, these four sources were entirely unequipped or able to deal with the stressors of a bus accident or sexual abuse – challenges much greater than living away from home, which was also the reality for a good many on the team. Such findings suggest the need for additional assistance to be present following traumatic incidents, something discussed by Vernacchia et al. (1997), who described the positive effect of bringing in psychological services to collegiate athletes following the sudden death of a teammate. Vernaccia et al. went on to describe seven stages of grief and loss experienced with those collegiate athletes: 1) shock, confusion, and denial; 2) performance resolve; 3) realization of loss; 4) glorification and memorialization; 5) closure and relief; 6) avoidance and debriefing; and 7) re-entry and acceptance. However, our participants did not grieve together with outside help (clinical psychologists) in a strong network of social support (team coaches and sport medicine staff) as in Vernaccia et al.'s research. As a result, the steps

were not coherent and different for every participant, some who did not reach steps 5 or 7 until middle age, and not even then for others. Given this contrast, it can be understood that prolonged struggle of some Broncos survivors could have lessened had they had access to enhanced resources.

The results of this project confirmed the findings in previous studies that contended peer-to-peer support was preferred and abundant while coaches were relied upon less and organizational support was met with suspicion. Participants believed hockey's governing bodies were at least somewhat responsible for the quality and level of care provided towards junior hockey players. Participant frustration aimed at the inaction of hockey institutions was evident and was also found by Anderson (2018), Austin (2019), and Johnston (2019). Participants reasoned that institutional inaction prevailed since governing bodies, such as Hockey Canada, were comfortable with the status quo, even if improvements were possible through a rigorous re-examination of the system. As an example, Hockey Canada invested in a fund designed to settle sexual abuse lawsuits, but made little effort to fix the systemic problems that led to the lawsuits (Yousif, 2022). Perhaps with comments from the Canadian Prime Minister about how Hockey Canada "needs a real reckoning" (Yousif, 2022) will force organizational change, but for an organization that has been historically resistant to change, actions will be needed before belief in words is given.

At times, consensus opinions were elusive and that speaks to the nuance of the situation – team members all experienced loss but their individual circumstances and views are unique. For example, there was considerable variation in everything from the personal connection to those who had died, their proximity to the deaths, and the social support present in the lives of each individual participant. All these factors (and countless others) shaped the experience of the crash

and influenced both the short and long-term outcomes. It is to that the survivors did not experience the crash similarly, nor did they have identical experiences throughout the next 35 years of their lives. There is no monolith, despite sometimes striking similarities. Accordingly, everything from the answers given, to the tone of the interviews themselves, had a degree of variance. This variance was undoubtedly valuable to the study, as it enabled the researchers to collect and analyze data that likely more accurately can be used for understanding why the Broncos experienced different short and long-term reactions and outcomes to traumatic events. Holt and Hoar's (2006) framework helped decipher this nuance. The timelapse dimension of this study allowed the researcher to see the long view and how participants lived through challenges and traumas. Few remedies can be put forth without qualification or exception. Adding to this complication in obtaining unanimous solutions was the discussion around what timeframe such potential solutions should be applied. Multiple participants found success dealing with their mental health challenges later in life, utilizing methods that they would have been unwilling to undergo at the time. Even mandatory counselling lack unanimity. All participants but one agreed that such an effort would have aided their recovery (some remarking it was the only way they would have seen a counsellor). The dissenting voice stated he would have felt anger at being forced into psychological support.

The barriers experienced by elite athletes towards receiving professional aid outlined by Gulliver et al. (2012), Purcell et al. (2019), Rice et al. (2016), and Gavrilova and Donohue (2018), were fully present for the Broncos within their sporting environment. It is beyond the purview of this study to suggest changes in Canadian junior hockey as a result of the negative outcomes experienced by one team over 35 years ago. It is not, however, beyond the scope of this study *and* the existing literature *and* the revelations in the news as it relates to Hockey

Canada to understand some adjustments must be made to the structure and operations of Canadian hockey. Based on the findings within this project and the existing literature, several recommendations can be made. The general implementation of mental health resources into the Canadian hockey landscape, which according to some participants has already begun, albeit with mixed results with regard to participation, should be continued and encouraged. Any effort to reduce the stigma of mental health should be paramount in the oppressive social environment of hockey. The suggestion of one participant to implement an accreditation system similar to those found in other youth organizations across Canada, such as the Boys and Girls Club of Canada, would be a way of instituting an outside review of every hockey organization in the country, hopefully limiting opportunities for abuse and neglect within the hockey environment. Certainly, the establishment of *any* standard that is related to the well-being of athletes as opposed to the on-ice performance is overdue. More research is needed to specifically identify which actions should be taken by Canadian hockey organizations to ensure the health and well-being of its athletes. Nevertheless, if this study should be a clarion call that more needs to be done to support and resource Canadian youths in organized hockey.

UPDATE – November 7th, 2022:

Following the completion of interviews and data analysis, but prior to defense, a large scandal rocked Hockey Canada. At the time of writing, things were moving quickly, and in the time since, much has occurred. Prime Minister Trudeau was quoted as saying, “it boggles the mind that Hockey Canada continues to dig in its heels” and lambasted Hockey Canada for refusing to take the situation seriously, while the organization was busy telling the public that it had “an excellent reputation” (Tunney, 2022). While Hockey Canada may have believed that then, public opinion eventually brought them back to reality. Public feelings notwithstanding, private

sponsors such as Tim Hortons, Canadian Tire, and Scotiabank all cancelled their sponsorships stating their views directly: “Hockey Canada continues to resist meaningful change and we can no longer confidently move forward together” (Nivison, 2022). With the money cut off, Hockey Canada had little choice but to acquiesce to both public and private demands. Following four objectively weak public relations statements released over two months, the organization finally saw the writing on the wall and the Chair of the Board, Michael Brind’Amour, stepped down (Hockey Canada, 2022). Many, including the Prime Minister, saw this as a sacrificial lamb and continued to lobby for organizational change, which Hockey Canada eventually submitted to by requesting an independent governance review by a former Supreme Court Justice: Thomas Cromwell. This report was nearly entirely focused on the process and actions of the individuals at the top of Hockey Canada and did not take into consideration the widespread cultural issues identified by this project and similar research (Cromwell, 2022). With all due respect to the new action plan, 221 pages on organizational structure and behavior are only scratching the surface of the issues present within Canadian hockey. Dictating “member perception” and “best practices for risk management” are frankly insulting to anyone who has any degree of understanding of the problem. It once again speaks to what one of our own participants saw within Hockey Canada, that the organization would speak to lawyers first and affected parties second. All of this aside, it is noteworthy that the public and our elected officials continue to demand better actions to repair the culture of hockey in the Canadian landscape. That, if nothing else, represents the best hope for genuine change.

Conclusion

This project attempted to identify the short and long-term outcomes of the 1986-87 Swift Current Broncos, and if these outcomes were the result of insufficient social support following

their tragically fatal bus accident. From an incredibly rich qualitative data set that included hours-long interviews with survivors, it is possible to conclude that a significant number of the players on the team experienced negative outcomes, and that the barriers to the supports which would have resulted in more positive outcomes were based in the social environmental factors of Canadian hockey. A power imbalance between those who needed help and those who were in a position to provide help was identified as the key reason as to why the survivors received insufficient social support. This research illustrates the necessity of a re-thinking in how to reduce the vulnerability of junior hockey players who are suffering from a lack of social support and feel as though their access to resources that would aid in their positive development is blocked. It is the opinion of these researchers that this re-thinking should happen as soon as possible, before more young athletes are negatively affected.

The implications of this study are far-reaching and go into the dressing room and office of every hockey team and organization in Canada. These results support the existing literature by showing how a Canadian junior hockey team can fall victim to many cases of ignorance and one case of malice through a power imbalance that enables criminal behaviour. It is known in the existing literature that 2-8% of adolescent and child athletes are sexually abused in the United States (Parent & El Hlimi, 2012), and a greater number experience more generalized abuse (Kavanagh et.al, 2017) No such research has been as comprehensively done in Canada, but given the similarity between the countries, it stands to reason that a similar number of child athletes experience such crimes in Canada. While these studies showed how athletes individual sports were particularly susceptible, this project proved that such tendencies were equally possible in a team sport context. Stirling & Kerr (2008) identified how a critical relationship between an individual and a caregiver (e.g. a young athlete and a coach) leaves athletes vulnerable to abuse.

The results in this project demonstrate how an adult in an authoritative position over a minor (e.g. James) in a critical relationship with athletes is able to create a sphere of control and aura that prevented accountability and outside influence. It is imperative to note that the hierarchical structure of Canadian junior hockey in 1986-87 was absolutely culpable in this sphere of control and bears a degree of responsibility to enabling a sexual predator essentially unrestricted access to minors without any oversight. So long as the prioritization of a successful hockey team is placed above the safety and well-being of the young boys and men who make up its players, a new generation of unqualified and unscrupulous leaders will impart the same negative outcomes on young hockey players in Canada. The Swift Current Broncos of this era represented a worthy team to study for this reason, as they were, by all accounts, successful on the ice, all while their coach and general manager acted in his own self-interest. The toll of his misdeeds are not limited to the players with whom he sexually abused, but should also include those players harmed by denied essential resources as they struggled with their post-crash healing journeys.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Guides

Interview Guide: Players

General Probes: Used throughout

- You mentioned x, tell me more about that
- Can you describe how that made you feel?
- What happened next?

Objective 1: Build rapport

1) How did you come to play junior hockey?

Probes:

- Who were the key people involved in the decision-making process that made you a WHL player?
- What was your personal goal or objective playing in the WHL?

2) What was a typical day like for you (in junior hockey)?

Probes:

- How much time was spent on hockey a day?
- How much time was spent outside hockey during a normal day?
- Where did you live and what was that like? (Per Joe's oral history research)

3) How impactful or unimpactful do you see hockey factoring into your life?

Probes:

- What about back then?
- What about now?

Objective 2: Determine social support

Questions:

4) Prior to the accident, what were your primary sources of support? (define social support if necessary)

Probes:

-What was it about this source that made it so significant?

-How would you rank the sources in order of significance to you?

5) After the accident, what were your primary sources of support?

Probes:

-What was it about this source that made it so significant?

-How would you rank the sources in order of significance to you?

On the condition of there being no/little change:

-Do you think that you should have received additional social support following the accident?

-Does it matter to you that the primary sources of support are the same?

6) Overall, did you feel supported in the immediate aftermath of the bus crash?

Probes:

-What sources made you feel this support?

-What made you feel as though you lacked support?

Objective 3: Determine resources

7) Do you believe you required or did not require mental health resources in order to recover from the bus crash?

8)What resources were provided to you by the WHL/Swift Current Broncos to recover from any potential mental health challenges from any and all trauma experienced during your time in junior hockey?

Probes:

- What were the resources specifically?
- How did you come to learn about the resources?
- Who was involved in their application/distribution?

9) Were any additional resources provided specifically because of the accident?

Probes:

- If yes, which ones? Why do you think they were provided? Did you use them?
- If no, why not? Why do you think they were not provided?

10) Did the WHL/Swift Current Broncos offer you sufficient or insufficient resources to recover from any potential mental health challenges relating to any and all trauma experienced over the course of your time in junior hockey?

Probes:

- What was it about the resources you had makes you deem them sufficient/insufficient?
- [Going through the resources listed from the interviewee in the previous question] what makes these individual resources useful or not useful?

11) Were any mental health resources provided to you from groups/people outside of the WHL?

Probes:

- Did family or friends make themselves available?
- Did your billets make themselves available?

-Did your high school provide any mental health resources to your knowledge?

12) What resources were made available to you (from any source) in the years following the accident?

Probes:

-If provided: why was x resource not made available to you right away? Do you believe it would have been beneficial or not beneficial to have this resource right away?

-If none provided: why?

13) Do you believe that the resources from all sources were sufficient or insufficient to help you recover from any and all mental health challenges/trauma from all sources received during your time playing junior hockey?

Probes:

-Why?

-Why not?

14) What resources do you believe should have been provided to you?

Probes:

-Which organization should have offered these resources?

-Why do you believe x resource should have been provided to you?

15) Which of the resources that you believe should have been provided would you have used following the accident?

Probes:

-Why x resources, or why all resources?

-Why not x resources, or why no resources?

-Do you believe that your younger self properly appreciated the value of x resource?

Objective 4: Barriers

16) Why do you think that resources you believed should have been provided were not provided?

Probes:

-Norms of junior hockey?

17) Do you believe there are systemic barriers in place across Canadian junior hockey that prevent access to mental health resources?

Probes:

18) Do you believe that the situation with regard to mental health in junior hockey has improved, not improved, or gotten worse in the 35 years since the accident?

Probes:

If yes: did the Swift Current scenario impact or not impact this improvement?

If no, why? What are the barriers to this improvement?

If gotten worse, why? What are the drivers of the downward trend?

Objective 5: Outcomes

19) How did being a passenger on the bus that day change your life?

Probes:

-What would have been different?

20) Did you provide support to your teammates involved in the crash?

Probes:

-If yes, how did the team respond?

-If yes, what mechanisms did you use? (e.g. humor)

-If not, did you feel as though you were not in a position to provide support given your own circumstances?

21) Did you abuse any substances (alcohol, etc) following the accident?

Probes:

-Which substances?

-How much?

-How long?

-If now recovered, how did the substance abuse stop?

Objective 6: Conclusion

22) Is there anything we have not discussed so far today that you believe would be of use to us in our research on this topic?

Interview Guide: Billets

1) Tell us about your billet experience prior to the 1986-87 bus crash.

-Why did you decide to become a billet family?

2) What was a typical day for your billet?

-How often did you see/interact with them?

3) How would you describe your billets post-crash status and well-being?

-Physically injured?

-Emotional state?

-What did they share with you?

4) Prior to the accident, which sources of social support did you provide to your billet?

5) After the accident, did you provide any additional social sources of support to your billet?

-Do you believe that this social support was sufficient/insufficient?

- 6) Did you provide any support to the other players beyond your billet?
- 7) Did you receive any additional resources from any source that helped in your support of your billet following the tragedy?
- If provided: why was x resource not make available right away? Do you believe it would have been beneficial to have this resource right away? What benefit did it play?
 - If none provided: why?
- 8) Do you believe any resources should have been provided to you to help with your support of your billet? If yes, which ones?
- What organization should have offered these resources?
 - Why do you believe x resources should have been provided to you?
- 9) Do you believe that there are systemic barriers in place across Canadian junior hockey that prevents access to social support resources?
- Do clubs and leagues have the resources and will to support their players?
 - Are there hockey culture issues that prevent resources from being sought and distributed?
- 10) Do you believe that the situation with regard to junior hockey has improved, not improved, or gotten worse in the 35 years since in the accident?
- If yes: did the Swift Current scenario impact or not impact this involvement?
 - If no: why? What are the barriers to this improvement?
 - If gotten worse, why? What are the drivers of this downward trend?
- 11) Is there information or insights you wish to add?

Interview Guide: Coaches

- 1) Tell us about your experience in coaching leading up to the 1986 tragedy?
- Why did you decide to become a coach?

- 2) What was a typical day like for you as a coach (player interaction)?
 - How often did you interact with the players each day?
- 3) How would you describe the status and well-being of the players post-crash?
 - Physically injured?
 - Emotional state?
 - What did they share with you?
- 4) Prior to the accident, which sources of social support did you provide to your players?
- 5) After the accident, did you provide any additional sources of social support to your players?
 - Do you believe that this social support was sufficient/insufficient?
- 6) Did you provide team-wide support to the players?
- 7) Did you receive any additional resources from any source that helped in your support of your players following the tragedy?
 - If provided: why was x resource not make available right away? Do you believe it would have been beneficial to have this resource right away? What benefit did it play?
- 8) Do you believe any resources should have been provided to you to help with your support of your players? If yes, which ones?
 - What organization should have offered these resources?
 - Why do you believe x resources should have been provided to you?
- 9) Do you believe that there are systemic barriers in place across Canadian junior hockey that prevents access to social support resources?
 - Do clubs and leagues have the resources and will to support their players?
 - Are there hockey culture issues that prevent resources from being sought and distributed?

10) Do you believe that the situation with regard to junior hockey has improved, not improved, or gotten worse in the 35 years since in the accident?

-If yes: did the Swift Current scenario impact or not impact this involvement?

-If no: why? What are the barriers to this improvement?

-If gotten worse, why? What are the drivers of this downward trend?

11) Is there information or insights you wish to add?

Interview Guide: Parents

1) Tell us about your experience being the parent of a junior hockey player prior to the 1986 bus crash.

2) How much interaction did you have with your child while they were with the team?

3) How would you describe the status and well-being of your son post-crash?

-Physically injured?

-Emotional state?

-What did they share with you?

4) Prior to the accident, how did you support your child during his WHL experience?

5) After the accident, did you provide any additional sources of social support to your son?

-Do you believe that this social support was sufficient/insufficient?

6) Did you provide team-wide social support to the players beyond your own child?

7) Did you receive any additional resources from any source that helped you support of your son following the crash?

-If provided: why was x resource not make available right away? Do you believe it would have been beneficial to have this resource right away? What benefit did it play?

8) Do you believe any resources should have been provided to you to help with your support of your son? If yes, which ones?

-What organization should have offered these resources?

-Why do you believe x resources should have been provided to you?

9) Are there any systemic barriers in Canadian junior hockey that prevent access to social support resources?

-Do clubs and leagues have the resources and will to support their players?

-Are there hockey culture issues that prevent resources from being sought and distributed?

10) Do you believe that the situation with regard to junior hockey has improved, not improved, or gotten worse in the 35 years since in the accident?

-If yes: did the Swift Current scenario impact or not impact this involvement?

-If no: why? What are the barriers to this improvement?

-If gotten worse, why? What are the drivers of this downward trend?

11) Is there information or insights you wish to add?

Appendix B

TCPS Certificates of Completion





Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Craig Greenham

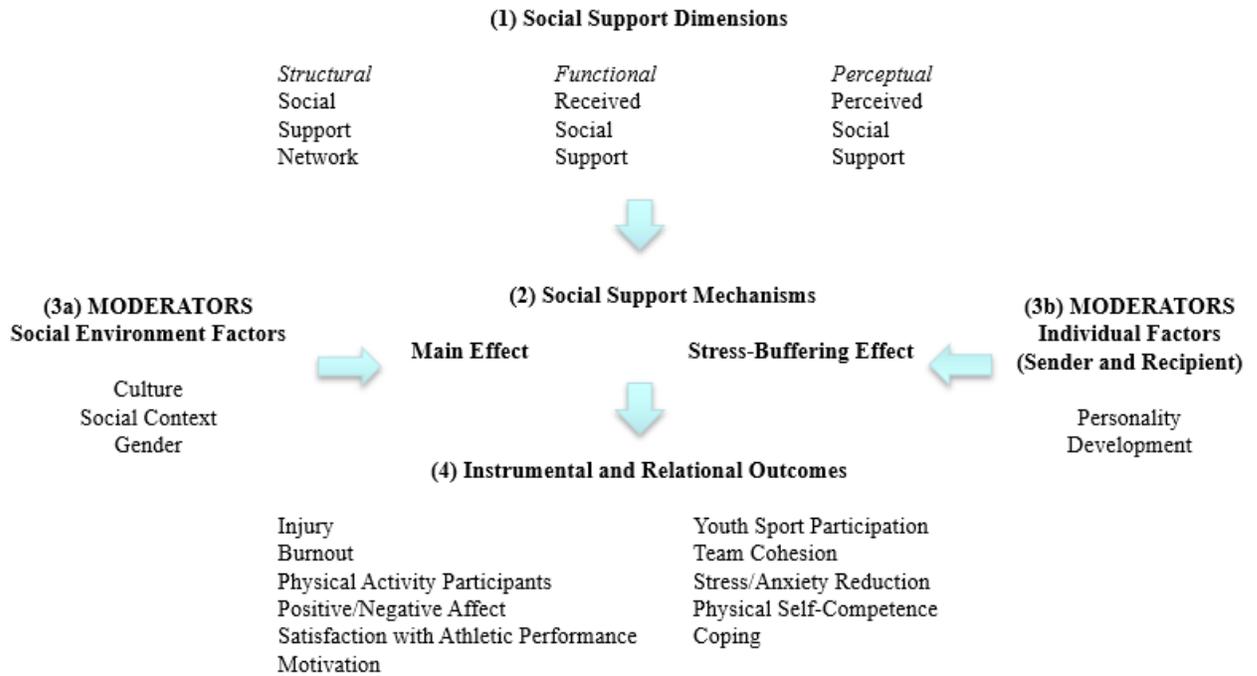
*has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)*

Date of Issue: **5 March, 2019**

Appendix C

Holt and Hoar Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Framework of Social Support in Sport (Holt & Hoar)



Vita Auctoris

Shaun Smith was born in 1997 in Schenectady, New York. He obtained a B.H.K. degree from the University of Windsor in 2020 and is currently a candidate for the Master's degree in Kinesiology at the University of Windsor and is scheduled to graduate in 2023.