YOUTH ATHLETES’ INTERPRETATIONS OF PUNISHMENT IN HOCKEY

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Science
Department of Exercise Sciences
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore competitive youth hockey athletes’ interpretations of punishment. Semi-structured interviews and concept maps were conducted with 12 (7 male and 5 female) hockey athletes between the ages of 11-13 years. All data were analyzed according to inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Results revealed that punishments reportedly occurred in competitive hockey frequently in the forms of benching, yelling, and forced physical conditioning; in addition, these methods appear to be normalized within the sport context, and reportedly have detrimental effects on athletes. The findings are interpreted according to various theoretical frameworks, which include: the sport ethic (Hughes & Coakley, 1991), cognitive-motivational-relational theory (Lazarus, 1999), psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968), and youth sport attrition (Weiss & Williams, 2004). Implications and recommendations for future research in this field of study are discussed.
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Finally, I would like to thank the youth athletes who participated in the study. With your help, I hope to educate sport culture on the necessary steps needed to make sport a more positive environment for youth athletes.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the years, researchers have provided evidence that sport and physical activity participation has beneficial outcomes for youth, including but not limited to: motor skill development, minimization of childhood obesity, enhanced self-competence, and positive social, emotional and cognitive development (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2014; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Hanna, 2012; Holt, 2008; Mulholland, 2008). Unfortunately, however, a dramatic decline in sport participation after 13 years of age has also been documented (Hunter, Grenier, & Brink, 2002) and as a result, few Canadian youth are reaping the potential benefits sport has to offer (Canadian-Heritage, 2013; Ifedi, 2008). Commonly cited reasons for youth sport attrition include negative experiences, such as “lack of fun” and “coach conflicts” (Weiss & Williams, 2004). A question posed by the present study is whether the use of punishment may contribute to these negative experiences.

There is a plethora of literature in psychology on the topic of punishment and its effects (e.g. Durrant, 2002; Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a). Surprisingly, there is a lack of empirical research on punishment in sport, despite anecdotal reports suggesting that it is used commonly in this domain. The few researchers who have examined punishment in sport indicate punishment is used frequently and may be normalized (Burak, Rosenthal, & Richardson, 2013; Richardson, Rosenthal, & Burak, 2012). More specifically, these preliminary findings, which involve physical education majors, teachers, and teacher-coaches, highlight supportive views regarding punishment tactics, thus potentially perpetuating its continued use (Burak et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2012). Other exploratory studies involving inter-university athletes however, reference detrimental outcomes as well as varied responses depending on the form of punishment (Battaglia, 2013; Gurgis, 2013).
To-date, researchers have not examined youth’s interpretations of punishment in sport. Could it be that the ways in which youth interpret or appraise their experiences of punishment affect their responses and therefore their continued sport participation? This study is informed by Lazarus’ (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory. This theory incorporates appraisals and emotions, which, according to Lazarus (1999), arise from three components: motivational, cognitive, and environmental factors. As a result, this theory may shed light on whether athletes view punishment as a harm/loss, threat, challenge, benefit, or irrelevant, if their perceptions change depending on the form of punishment, and the implications of punishment, which potentially encompass cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components. Although this framework has been applied to understand stress and coping in the sport psychology literature, it has never been used to examine punishment in sport.

The purpose of this study therefore, was to examine punishment in sport. More specifically, I was interested in understanding competitive youth hockey athletes’ interpretations of punishment. This is an important area of exploration, as a better understanding of punishment in sport may shed light on the nature and quality of young athletes’ experiences in sport.
Personal Reflection

This research for my Master’s Thesis has been inspired by previous sporting experiences, in addition to my undergraduate research project. Throughout my life I have been fortunate to have a variety of different experiences associated with sport including: grassroots and competitive athlete for baseball and hockey; player development coach for youth sports; secondary school teaching assistant for physical education and exercise science classes; recreational athlete in a multitude of sports; and undergraduate student in Kinesiology and Physical Education. All of these experiences have provided me with a wide range of learning opportunities and has further fuelled my interest in the field of sport psychology.

During my sporting career I have witnessed and actively engaged in all the highs and lows sport has to offer. For example, I have felt joyfulness after championship victories, as well as the bonds forged with teammates through years of sacrifice and practice. Sports have also allowed me to develop as a person, enhancing qualities, such as: discipline, time management, respect, and perseverance. On the other hand, I have also experienced the negative aspects of sports, such as losing and injuries. However, the most distinct negative experience that led to my topic of interest pertains to punishment tactics. Throughout my athletic career, three common forms of punishment were experienced: being benched, yelled at, and being directed to engage in physical conditioning. As I developed through the sporting ranks, punishment became a prominent occurrence during practices and games, so much so, that I could expect when and why punishment was going to occur (e.g. after a poor team performance). Despite punishment tactics being employed with the intention to correct undesirable behaviours, the negative experiences associated with being benched, yelled at, or directed to engage in physical conditioning exercises has resulted in an interest to contribute preliminary research on punishment to the field of sport psychology.
My experiences with punishment tactics come from the sports of baseball and hockey specifically. I played AAA baseball for over 10 years and as a result, I have witnessed and experienced punishment in a variety of circumstances. Tactics used in a baseball setting often consisted of being benched and yelled at and, to a lesser degree, being directed to engage in physical conditioning. In addition, other forms of punishment included: cleaning equipment and the leftover garbage around the field. However, through my personal experiences, I realized that being benched was the form of punishment I dreaded the most. Overall, punishment tactics had few beneficial effects on improving my performance. Instead I became apprehensive and anxious, constantly overthinking plays and in-game scenarios that often lead to more errors when I was on the field.

Similarly, I have played AAA hockey for 12 years. Often deemed a “man’s game,” it would seem more expected that punishment tactics occur in hockey, which is exactly what I experienced. Hockey is a sport driven by physical prowess, resulting in physical conditioning being frequently used as a form of punishment, in addition to being benched and yelled at. Interestingly, in hockey, being benched was also my most dreaded form of punishment and tended to affect me most negatively. Nonetheless, the effects of all forms of punishment on my hockey performance were rarely positive. For example, in an effort to avoid future repercussions, these methods limited the number of new skills or plays I was willing to attempt and caused me to become hesitant on the ice, instead of enhancing my development.

When I reflected upon my baseball and hockey experiences, I was unsure as to why my responses varied according to the form of punishment. More specifically, I was unaware of why benching made me feel awful, more so than being directed to engaging in conditioning exercises. Perhaps it was because I did not experience individual punishment often and I perceived benching to be a form of social exclusion. I was forced to not only watch my teammates engage in sport but was also left to contemplate my worth as an athlete, producing
negative emotions, such as: shame, guilt, worthlessness, and anxiety. On the other hand, although physical conditioning as punishment was not something I necessarily enjoyed, perhaps I did not mind this tactic because I rationalized beneficial outcomes, which included the team engaging in the punishment together and enhanced endurance.

Although my responses to the forms of punishment varied, the proceeding triggers for punishment use were congruent throughout baseball and hockey. For example, I often experienced punishment tactics because of poor team attitude, lackluster performance, repetitive losing, and arriving late to practice. However, punishment was also employed to instill coach dominance, as well as overarching “team philosophies” such as: discipline and respect.

Inevitably, through these experiences I began asking questions, such as: Are punishments commonly used in other sports? If so, is benching, physical conditioning, and being yelled at, the most common forms of punishment experienced? And why is punishment used in sport seemingly quite often when this is not the case in other settings, such as schools? Additionally, I wondered: Do other athletes also have varied perspectives or interpretations of punishment tactics? If so, what forms of punishment do they deem to be the worst?

Consequently, with these experiences and questions in mind I conducted an undergraduate research project assessing inter-university soccer athletes’ perspectives on the use of punishment in sport. Findings seemed to support my experiences, as athletes cited benching, yelling, and physical conditioning as the three common forms of punishment, as well as indicated a degree of normalization of these tactics in sport. Interestingly, findings suggested that similar to my varied perspectives regarding the different forms of punishment, inter-university athletes’ responses also varied, as they perceived being benched to be most detrimental compared to physical conditioning and yelling. As I perceived benching as a form of social exclusion, participant athletes perceived being benched as detrimental because it had the potential to hinder their athletic growth. On the other hand, physical conditioning was perceived
less as a form of punishment and more as something integral to the sport of soccer, having the potential to enable their athletic prowess (e.g. enhanced endurance).

My experiences with punishment, coupled with the findings of my undergraduate research, led to enhanced interests regarding the notion that responses vary or may vary according to the punishment tactic. As I learned about Lazarus’ (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational model, I became interested in the appraisal process. Accordingly, I wondered, did my perceptions and responses on the forms of punishment, along with those of the inter-university athletes I interviewed, vary because of how we appraised each event? Did I, along with the athletes, appraise being benched as harm/loss or the potential for threat, whereas physical conditioning was appraised as a challenge? These are the questions that now began to fuel my research interests.

Although I have transitioned out of active sport participation, I have become involved in sport through a coaching capacity, currently instructing training camps and player development workshops for local youth baseball and hockey teams. Despite my role in sport changing, my research interests have remained and unsurprisingly so has the use of punishment (at least from my point of view). I have witnessed the athletes I instruct being benched, yelled at, and directed to engage in conditioning exercises, amongst other things. Subsequently, I have also witnessed and listened to these youth athletes express negative effects (e.g. altered style of play and diminished self-esteem) associated with such tactics on their sporting experiences. Consequently, whether it is my undergraduate findings or my own experiences (coaching or playing), both have enabled my desire to continue to better understand athletes’ experiences and interpretations of punishment in sport.

Nevertheless, witnessing fellow athletes leave sport over the years, as well as being aware of increasing dropout rates, my interest in understanding athletes’ interpretations of punishment goes beyond past experiences or undergraduate findings and entails a desire to
potentially reduce sport attrition rates. As a result, I have begun wondering if it is possible that punishment may contribute to dropout rates. Furthermore, the lack of literature on punishment in sport further provided incentive to explore a topic, which thus far has been relatively overlooked.

Overall, I believe that understanding athletes’ interpretations of punishment is vital to addressing the misconception that punishment is an effective behavioural management method, in addition to fostering more positive sporting experiences and holistic athlete development. However, in doing so, it is also important to recognize how my own experiences as an athlete and an instructor may influence my perceptions of punishment and interpretations of the data. Ultimately, through this thesis I was attempting to expand on my curiosities and previous research findings.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature will begin by citing the documented benefits of physical activity and sport participation for youth. Subsequently, declining youth sport participation rates in Canada, as well as previously cited determinants of sport attrition, will be addressed. As punishment is proposed as a potential precursor to negative sport experiences, an in-depth analysis of the current punishment literature from developmental psychology and sport, are examined. Furthermore, Lazarus’ (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory is addressed as a framework for understanding youth’s interpretations of punishment use in sport.

Benefits of Sport and Physical Activity

Sport has traditionally been seen as something overwhelmingly positive (Coakley, 2001; David, 2005). While sport has been cited as a means to enable societies’ togetherness (Coakley, 2001), researchers have also documented numerous individual benefits for youth (American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance [AAHPERD], 2013; Bailey, 2006; Pate, Trost, Levin, & Dowda, 2000; Hanna, 2012; Ifedi, 2008). For example, physical activity derived through sport participation has been known to limit the likelihood of risk factors associated with health disorders, which include but are not limited to: heart disease, hypertension, and obesity (Bloom, Grant, & Watt, 2005; Surgeon General, 1996; Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006), while also improving motor skills and musculoskeletal health in youth (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2014; Hanna, 2012). Moreover, researchers have also noted that physical activity through sport enables benefits beyond physiological and physical health. For example, sport purportedly fosters psychological and social well-being (Holt, 2008) and instils values such as: respect, dignity, discipline and fair play (Alberts, 2003; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Further, sport has been cited as a potential avenue to foster positive youth experiences and development (Holt, 2008; Larson, 2000).
Sport Participation/Dropout

It is important to note that involvement in sport and physical activity does not produce health and developmental benefits automatically. For example, researchers have indicated that positive outcomes tend to depend on: 1) The manner in which sports are organized, 2) What occurs in a young person’s relationships with parents, peers and coaches, 3) The meaning that a young person gives to sport experiences and 4) The way a young person integrates sport experiences into other spheres of life (AAHPERD, 2013). Subsequently, researchers have also proposed that there is a growing disconnect between the positive benefits Canadians believe sport can provide for youth (e.g. helping children develop through play and building physical capacity and motor skills) and what they are actually experiencing (Mulholland, 2008).

As evidence of this discrepancy, participation rates have declined from 45% in 1992 to nearly 26% in 2010 in Canada, a trend that continues to-date (Canadian-Heritage, 2013; Ifedi, 2008). However, what is most alarming is that participation rates of young Canadians are declining faster than that of older Canadians (Canadian-Heritage, 2013; Ifedi, 2008). More specifically, 77% of young Canadians aged 15 to 19 participated in sports in 1992, compared to 54% in 2010-nearly a 25% decline over the past 18 years (Canadian-Heritage, 2013; Ifedi, 2008). In Canada, sport participation tends to peak at age 10-13, declining dramatically following these years (Hunter et al., 2002), particularly among adolescent girls, as dropout from sport tends to occur at greater rates compared to boys and at younger ages (Canadian-Heritage, 2010; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2000; Kane, LaVoi, Wiese-Bjornstal, Duncan, Nichols, Pettee, & Ainsworth, 2007). Only 7% of Canadian children and youth are achieving the recommended levels of activity needed to reap these potential benefits (Colley et al., 2011). Researchers have proposed that children are more likely to achieve these
recommended levels when participating in sport (Bloom et al., 2005; Colley et al., 2011; Mulholland, 2008).

Consequently, researchers have begun to assess the interaction of physical and psychosocial factors that may influence the decision making process to continue or withdraw from sport (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989; Weiss & Williams, 2004). Physical factors tend to include training patterns (e.g. early specialization and seriousness of the program) and level of maturation (e.g. relative age effect) (Dundink, 1994; Gould, Feltz, Horn, & Weiss, 1982). Psychosocial factors encompass parental involvement (e.g. parental pressure), coach interactions (e.g. controlling behaviours) and peer relationships (e.g. negative interactions) (Gould, Udry, Tuffey, & Loehr, 1996; Smith, 2003; Smoll & Smith, 2002).

Winning is not the most important factor for sport participation for youth; instead, “fun” is often cited as the most important requisite characteristic needed to foster youth sport involvement (David, 2005; English Sports Council, 1998; Hanna, 2012; Seefeldt & Ewing, 1993). In contrast, the most commonly cited reasons why young people leave sport include: conflicts of interests, in addition to negative experiences, such as: parental pressure, excessive training, lack of fun, coach conflicts, and lack of playing time (Gould, 2007; Hanna, 2012; Weiss & Williams, 2004). However, despite “lack of fun” and “coach conflicts” being cited by youth, previous research is limited regarding the precursors of these negative experiences. A guiding question of this study is whether punishment may contribute to a “lack of fun” and “coach conflicts.” The following section will address the concept of punishment.

**Punishment**

Punishment is a stimulus following a response that decreases the likelihood that the response will be repeated in the future (Skinner, 1974). Punishment is often confused with
reinforcement, however there is a distinguishable difference between the two concepts. While both terms are inherent in operant conditioning, reinforcement implies the intention to “increase” the likelihood of a behaviour occurring, while punishment refers to an intention to “decrease” the likelihood of a behaviour occurring (Gazzaniga, Heatherton, Heine, & McIntyre, 2007; Skinner, 1974). Punishment tactics are often imposed by authority figures (e.g. parent, teacher, or coach) (Locke, 1963) and can be differentiated further into positive and negative forms (Catania, 1968, 1979), concepts that will be described in the following section.

Positive and Negative Punishment

According to Catania (1968, 1979), punishment can also be dichotomized into positive and negative forms. The term ‘positive’ in this case does not refer to beneficial but instead is used to describe the direct application of an unpleasant or aversive stimulus in attempts to alter or change unfavourable behaviours (Catania, 1979; McConnell, 1990; Rachlin, 1970). For example, positive punishment tactics may include but are not limited to: spanking, forced kneeling on hard objects, and scolding a child after engaging in behaviours not in accordance with parental expectations or societal standards (Durant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a, 2002b; Larzelere, 2000). On the other hand, ‘negative’ punishment can be defined as the removal of a potentially rewarding stimulus in an effort to alter behaviour (Catania, 1979; McConnell, 1990; Rachlin, 1970). For example, negative punishment may encompass denying a child essential resources (e.g. food and water), or revoking their outdoor privileges after failing to complete their chores (Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a). Positive and negative forms of punishment can be further bifurcated into physical punishment and non-physical punishment (Appleton & Stanley, 2011; Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Stirling, 2009; Straus, 1994). These concepts will be further addressed in the following sections.
Physical Punishment

Physical punishment is defined as an “action intended to cause physical discomfort or pain to correct a child’s behaviour, to ‘teach a lesson’, or deter the child from repeating the behaviour…with the intended effect being a change in the child’s behaviour” (Durrant & Ensom, 2004, p. 1). Physical punishment is often differentiated into contact and non-contact tactics.

Contact physical punishment. Literature regarding contact physical punishment tends to focus on corporal punishment, which is “the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury for the purposes of correction or control of the child’s behaviour” (Straus, 1994, p. 4). In addition, contact punishment may not only be administered with the hand but also may involve the use of objects, such as rulers and belts (Durrant, 2002; Durrant & Ensom, 2004). Inherent in these descriptions is the “direct application” of aversive stimuli, which is indicative of positive punishment (Catania, 1979). Contact physical punishment or corporal punishment most often takes the form of spanking (Andero & Stewart, 2002; Benatar, 1998; Durant & Ensom, 2004; Baumrind, Larzelere, & Cowan, 2002).

Substantial debates exist about whether or not corporal punishment can be distinguished from physical abuse. Gershoff (2002a) stated that physical abuse is considered to be an outcome of excessive corporal punishment. Behaviours that do not result in significant injury (e.g. spanking) are deemed to be corporal punishment, while behaviours that risk injury (e.g. punching and burning) are considered to be physical abuse (Gershoff, 2002a). On the other hand, The World Health Organization (WHO, 1999) defined physical abuse of the child as that which results in:

Actual or potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of an interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power
or trust...there may be a single or repeated incidents. (p. 15)

The WHO further perpetuates confusion between corporal punishment and physical abuse, as it highlights the actual or potential for harm, whereas, Gershoff (2002a) limited her explanation of corporal punishment and physical abuse only to the outcomes of the behaviour. Moreover, Durrant (2002) claimed there is no clear distinction between physical punishment and physical abuse, as attempts to distinguish them in terms of degree of force, parental intent or even extent of injury, have been unsuccessful. Regardless of the inability to draw a clear distinction between corporal punishment and abuse, both have been known to result in the potential for physical, as well as psychological harm (Dubanoski, Inaba, & Gerkewiez, 1983; Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a).

**Non-contact physical punishment.** Non-contact tactics do not involve direct physical force applied to the body (e.g. spanking) (Andero & Stewart, 2002; Durrant & Ensom, 2004). Examples of non-contact physical punishment may include: an adult forcing a child beyond physical exhaustion or forcing a child to hold an uncomfortable position for an extended period of time, and denying the child access to rest or needed resources such as water (Durrant, 2002; Durrant & Ensom, 2004; McConnell, 1990). Nevertheless, while the nature of non-contact tactics may differ, similar to contact physical punishment, the repercussions are clear, as these methods also result in physical discomfort or pain and have the potential for psychological harm (Baumrind & Black, 1967; Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Lasky, 1993).

**Non-Physical Punishment**

Absent in non-physical punishment tactics is the direct or indirect physical infliction of pain or discomfort imposed by the punitive authority figure on the body of the victim (Larzelere, 2000). Examples of non-physical punishments may include: threatening or scolding a child
immediately following his or her engagement in unfavourable behaviours and isolating or grounding of a child to remove him or her from a potentially rewarding stimulus (e.g. friend/family interactions) (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980; Larzelere, 2000). Non-physical punishment tactics have often been overlooked in the developmental psychology literature in comparison to the more visible physical punishment (see Gershoff, 2002a), however, this does not imply that these tactics are employed less frequently or without consequence. While the developmental psychology literature tends to focus on physical punishment, non-physical punishment tactics seem to share more similarities with concepts derived from the emotional maltreatment literature. More specifically, there are similarities between non-physical punishment and emotionally abusive and neglectful practices (see Stirling, 2009).

**Discipline**

Conceptual confusion also exists between punishment and discipline, which will be addressed in the current section. *The Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth* (Durrant & Ensom, 2004) recognized these concepts to be “distinctly” different, with the practice of physical punishment at odds with the concept of discipline. Discipline encompasses a wide range of philosophies and methods properly aimed at socializing, protecting and guiding children toward self-control, independence, and respect for oneself and others, whereas punishment intends to cause discomfort and does not teach about appropriate or expected behaviour (Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Holden, 2002; Paweł, 2013). In other words, discipline is recognized as a “guiding” method to help children learn from their mistakes, while punishment is depicted as an “unpleasant” method to indicate a behaviour is undesirable (Appleton & Stanley 2011; Paweł, 2013). For example, if a child engages in inappropriate behaviours (e.g. throwing toys), discipline may take the form of an authority figure (e.g. parent) explaining to the child what he or she has done wrong, why these behaviours are not appropriate and what more
suitable actions might be. Punishment, in contrast, may take the form of an authority figure spanking or yelling at the child immediately following his or her actions, providing no explanation or reasoning.

Similarly, Holden (2002) distinguished between discipline and punishment, proclaiming the difference also pertained to the notion that discipline “teaches” and “educates”, as opposed to punishment, which involves the infliction of negative consequences. As a result, Holden (2002) argued that many authors (e.g. Gershoff, 2002a) often considered these terms synonymously. Gershoff (2002b) offered a rebuttal clarifying that her intention was not to equate punishment and discipline, and instead stated, “punishment is a means of achieving discipline if (and a strong emphasis on the if) they are paired with parental induction and reasoning” (p. 603). As a result, it is not difficult to see why Holden (2002) argued that it appeared as though Gershoff (2002a) conflated punishment and discipline or why other non-scholarly individuals in a position of authority (e.g. parents and teachers) may misconstrue punishment as a disciplinary method (Dubanoski et al., 1983; Durrant & Ensom, 2004).

**Reasons For The Use of Punishment**

In the simplest form, punishment is used because of the belief that these tactics are an effective and easy tool for enabling intended behavioural modification or social order (Andero & Stewart, 2002; Baumrind, 1996a, 1996b, 1997; Larzelere, 1996, 2000). For example, some authors acknowledged that punishment is a time efficient method and stimulates learning via immediate/short-term compliance (Brisbane, 2004; Newsom, Flavell, & Rincover, 1983). More specifically, Benatar (1998) and Larzelere (1996) provided guidelines to ensure physical punishment is associated with beneficial or neutral outcomes rather than detrimental ones, including: being used less than weekly or, with a teenager, fewer than 10 times annually; used at non-abusive levels of severity; infrequently without injury; provide explanations when
punished; and used by parents who were not physically violent against family members.

Dubanoski et al. (1983) further addressed prevailing beliefs that perpetuate the use of punishment. For example, there is often a misconception that corporal punishment builds “character.” However, this belief is unfounded. Research highlights that warmth and supportive behaviours, as opposed to punishment, are influential in fostering moral development; in fact punishment is detrimental to this development (Dubanoski et al., 1983; Gershoff 2002a; Hoffman, 1983). Similarly, views that punishment teaches respect and the absence of punishment increases problematic behaviour are unsupported. For example, findings indicate punishment instils fear and anxiety rather than respect (Dubanoski et al., 1983; Durrant & Ensom, 2004), leads to increases in child aggressive behaviour (Becker, 1964; Patterson, 1982) and does not perpetuate an increase in problematic behaviour when not employed (Farley et al., 1978).

These misconceptions surrounding punishment seem to be a consequence of the inability to distinguish discipline from punishment. The notions that punishment fosters moral development, respect, and favourable behaviours are all outcomes inherent to discipline and not punishment (Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Holden, 2002). Regrettably, when a parent spanks a child after throwing his or her toys, it is often done with the belief that this tactic “teaches” the child that his or her actions are unacceptable. However, despite the parent believing he or she is employing disciplinary tactics, the parent is actually engaging in punishment. In this situation, discipline may involve a parent explaining to the child what was wrong with his or her behaviour and what would be expected instead. Although parents may feel that they are teaching children to learn from their mistakes, punishment, instead, teaches children that they cannot control themselves, hostility and aggression are acceptable, and those who have power can coerce others to engage in behaviours they deem favourable (Bettelheim, 1985; Dubanoski et al., 1983; McCord, 1996).
Moreover, researchers have also cited a lack of understanding regarding alternative behavioural management methods as a reason why punishment continues to be used (Dubanoski et al., 1983; Feshbach & Feshbach, 1975; Larzelere, 2000). Ultimately, the justifications for the use of punishment may be due, in part, to the misconceptions of punishment as a form of discipline, in addition to the limited knowledge regarding alternative methods. As a result, common fallacies regarding the benefits of punishment persist (Andero & Stewart, 2002; Bettelheim, 1985; Dubanoski et al., 1983).

**Theoretical explanations for the use of punishment.** The Cultural Spillover Theory considers behaviour to be learned through imitation of models and adoption of norms supported by groups with whom an individual associates (Straus, 1991). Consequently, according to this theory, individuals come to accept the use of violence and to be violent because they see violence as legitimized through its use by role models, and generalize behavioural norms to include illegitimate uses of violence (McCord, 1991; Straus, 1991). However, researchers have acknowledged certain flaws in this theory. For example, McCord (1991) notes that because individuals supposedly adopt norms displayed through physical punishment, then ultimately, the transmission of violence should be particularly effective under conditions that promote acceptance of other types of norms as well.

An alternative explanation called the Construct Theory has been proposed, which states “children learn what to do and what to believe in the process of learning how to use language and by constructing categories organized by the structure of language in their culture” (McCord, 1991, p. 172). As a result, each individual is unique, leading similar events to have different affective outcomes. Ultimately, if individuals categorize punishment as something important, it is likely that they will integrate punishment as an aspect of their life.

Another plausible reason for punishment use is captured by deterrence theory (Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002). Proponents of the deterrence theory believe that people
choose to obey or violate the law after calculating the gains and consequences of their actions (Tepperman, 2011). In other words, punishment of children by adults is thought to reduce undesirable behaviours because children are forced to contemplate the negative and positive consequences of their actions (the pain of the punishment supposedly outweighing the pleasure received from their actions) (Carlsmith et al., 2002; Tepperman, 2011). However, punishment as deterrence has been criticized because it teaches the individual being punishment what not to do or how to avoid punishment but fails to identify appropriate behaviours (Dubanoski et al., 1983; McCord, 1996; Tepperman, 2011). While researchers have acknowledged various plausible reasons for the use of punishment, researchers have also highlighted the well-documented negative effects of punishment use, which will be explored in the next section.

**Negative Effects of Punishment Use**

Punishment does not necessarily result in the learning of appropriate behaviours but instead results in the learning of how to avoid punitive situations (Dubanoski et al., 1983; McCord, 1996; Tepperman, 2011). In other words, punishment “teaches the child what not to do, but not what to do” (Dubanoski et al., 1983, p. 274). Researchers have indicated that children who are punished are more likely to become desensitized to these behaviours, display diminished consideration for others (e.g. antisocial behaviours), exhibit a greater tolerance of violence, and perceive giving pain as a legitimate way of expressing power (Gershoff, 2002a; McCord, 1996; Nunley, 1998; Straus, Sugarman, & Giles-Sims, 1997). Other negative consequences of punishment can include: a loss of self-esteem in the child; development of counter-productive behaviour; child avoidance of a punitive adult; increasing the risk of poorer child mental health; erosion of the parent-child relationship; and increased anxiety, anger, and fear (Andero & Stewart, 2002; Appelton & Stanley, 2011; Dubanoski et al., 1983; Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a, 2002b).
In addition, McCord (1996) acknowledged five unintended consequences that result from punishment use, including: 1. serving as an endorsement for giving pain; 2. reducing the probability of influencing a child by example or discussion; 3. making the forbidden more attractive; 4. diluting the messages parents would like to convey; and 5. egocentrism, making it particularly difficult to teach children to be considerate of others while using punishment in the process. In summary, punishment of children and youth poses risks to their development (Appleton & Stanley, 2011; Durrant, 2002; Durrant & Ensom, 2004).

Interestingly, these negative consequences likely result from the inability of punishment to facilitate moral internalization (Gershoff, 2002a; Gershoff, 2002b). Moral internalization is thought to enable the development of children’s emotional and social competence (Kochanska & Thompson, 1997). More specifically, Grusec and Goodnow (1994) defined moral internalization as, “taking over the values and attitudes of society as one’s own so that socially acceptable behaviour is motivated not by anticipation of external consequences but by intrinsic or internal factors” (p. 4). Unfortunately, unlike discipline, punishment does not teach/educate children about appropriate behaviours, nor foster children’s long-term development. Thus, moral internalization is not facilitated as punishment does not teach children the reasoning for behaving correctly and does not involve communication regarding the detrimental effects of children’s behaviours on others (Hoffman, 1983; Gershoff, 2002a; Grusec, 1983; Smetana, 1997). Nevertheless, as punishment is often employed by a person of authority (most notably parents), perhaps the most detrimental consequence of punishment use is the adverse effects on the parent-child relationship (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998; Durrant & Ensom, 2004), a topic that will be further addressed in the following section.
Parent-Child Relationship

The potential for parental punishment to disrupt the parent-child relationship is considered a main disadvantage of its use (Azrin, Hake, Holz, & Hutchinson, 1965; Azrin & Holz, 1966). Regrettably, parental punishment is still a prominent occurrence throughout all age groups (see Durrant & Ensom, 2004). Parents are most likely to punish young children (e.g. preschoolers), who are in a stage of high activity, exploration and drive for independence (Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Wauchope & Straus, 1990). Additionally, children in this age cohort are also likely to exhibit negativism, impulsivity, and a lack of understanding of harm and danger (Durrant & Ensom, 2004). Parents therefore punish children for behaviours that can harm themselves or others. However, despite caregivers having “good” intentions to prevent injury and teach children appropriate behaviours, the use of punishment actually puts children at harm and negatively impacts the parent-child relationship (Durrant, 1996; Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a). Understanding attachment theory can shed light on the ramifications of punishment use on the parent-child relationship.

According to attachment theory, early parent-child relationships lay the foundations for children’s later social, emotional, and cognitive functioning (Bowlby, 1982; Schaffer & Emerson, 1964). Within this theory there are different attachment styles that result from various parenting interactions, which include but are not limited to: secure, avoidant, and disorganized attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 2014; Bowlby, 1982). Secure attachments tend to develop from a supportive and positive parent-child relationship, increasing the likelihood of healthy social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural development (Ainsworth et al., 2014; Appleyard & Berlin, 2007). On the other hand, avoidant attachment styles result in child avoidance of the adult, which is likely a result of abusive and neglectful behaviours (Appleyard & Berlin, 2007; Schaffer & Emerson, 1964). Disorganized attachment styles results in mixed behaviours, as the child may see parents as a source of comfort, in addition to a source of fear
(Ainsworth et al., 2014; Appleyard & Berlin, 2007; Schaffer & Emerson, 1964). Unsurprisingly, researchers have indicated that poor parenting behaviours tend to produce these insecure attachment styles, resulting in antisocial behaviours and diminished emotional, social, and cognitive development (Appleyard & Berlin, 2007; Carlson, Sampson, & Sroufe, 2003).

Poor parenting behaviours, which often produce avoidant and disorganized attachment styles have been known to entail autocratic control and punitive tactics (Appleyard & Berlin, 2007; Carlson et al., 2003). The negative implications of these insecure attachment styles seem to be congruent with the well-documented negative effects in the punishment literature regarding the erosion of the parent-child relationship (e.g. Durrant & Ensom, 2004). For example, erosion of the parent-child relationship from punishment use decreases children’s motivation to internalize parents’ values and those of the society, which in turn results in low self-control (Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a; Hirschi, 1969; Kuczynski & Hildebrandt, 1997). More specifically, the negative emotions, such as anxiety, fear and anger evoked by punishment can be generalized to the parent (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Parke, 1977). Researchers have suggested that such outcomes interfere with creating a positive parent-child relationship by inciting children to be fearful and avoidant of the parent (Azrin & Holz, 1966; Bugental & Goodnow, 1998; Fletcher, 2012). Consequently, a parent-child relationship that encompasses punitive tactics can erode bonds of closeness and trust within the relationship that are needed to foster healthy development (Appleyard & Berlin, 2007; Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a; Holden, 2002; Kuczynski & Hildebrandt, 1997).

**Punishment in Sport**

To-date, a plethora of research on punishment exists within the child development and education literature. Surprisingly however, little research on punishment exists within the sport
context, in spite of the fact that sport is a highly populated youth domain. The few studies that have assessed punishment in sport seem to indicate that punishment is used in sport frequently. More specifically, a study conducted by Burak et al. (2013), assessing the perspectives of physical education majors, indicated that 90% of the participants reported that their previous coaches had used exercise as punishment. Richardson et al. (2012) reported that more than 60% of physical education teachers and teacher-coaches indicated that at some point they had used exercise as punishment. However, it is important to note that while these findings are compelling, the data pertain to perspectives of physical education participants and not necessarily athletes’ perspectives. Through the following sections, punishment in sport will be further addressed.

**Types of Punishment Used in Sport**

Similar to the developmental psychology literature (Skinner, 1974), punishment in sport intends to alter undesirable behaviours (Burak et al., 2013). However, unlike the developmental psychology literature (Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a), references to punishment in sport pertain to positive non-contact physical punishment methods primarily, which entail coaches directing athletes to engage in physical conditioning exercises (e.g. push-ups or sprints) (Burak et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2012; Rosenthal, Pagnano-Richardson, & Burak, 2010). The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES, 2013) defined physical punishment as:

Any activity or behaviour required as a consequence of poor sport performance or some other undesirable behaviour that causes an athlete physical pain, discomfort, or humiliation and is: 1. disconnected from, or not logically related to, the sport performance or behaviour it is intended to change; or 2. disconnected from, or not logically related to, improving performance in the sport; and 3. not consented to by the athlete (and/or their parent or guardian) engaged in such activity or behaviour. (p.1)
Nevertheless, similar to children being scolded for engaging in unfavourable behaviours (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980; Larzelere, 2000), athletes are also likely to be yelled at and ridiculed for making performance errors (non-physical punishment) (Battaglia, 2013). Moreover, athletes have reportedly also been denied rest and essential resources such as water (non-contact physical punishment), as well as being benched or having their playing time reduced (non-physical punishment) for engaging in unacceptable behaviour/play (Battaglia, 2013; Gurgis, 2013).

**Discipline in Sport**

The confusion pertaining to discipline and punishment is not limited to the developmental psychology literature, as the few studies that have addressed discipline and punishment in sport also seem to use the terms interchangeably. Seifried’s (2008) perspective of discipline conflated the two terms as he stated, “discipline is the submission to rules which may be those of what is learned, they may be those of the method of learning or they may be more general rules necessary for something to be learned” (p. 372). According to Seifried (2008), an example of discipline in a sports setting entails athletes showing obedience and deference to coaches as well as resiliently training and consistently learning information to improve efforts or performance. Thus, the difference between discipline and punishment revolves around the idea that punishment is a *special form* of discipline that traditionally surfaces as a moral concept associated with disobedience to authority and rules or issues concerning right and wrong (Seifried, 2008). As a result, the main purpose of punishment as a discipline construct is censuring wrongdoing and deterring future transgressions.

In contrast, Baribeau (2006) indicated that these concepts are distinctly different, citing discipline as:

Training that develops self-control, character, order, and efficiency...It is a process that
decides on rules for the mutual benefit of coach and players. It is a process that teaches about rules, cooperation, responsibility, and respect for authority...Discipline is guidance. (p.68)

Discipline is recognized as the guiding of player’s misbehaviours through a problem solving process, while punishment is a method of imposing a penalty or retribution (Baribeau, 2006). For example, in sport, discipline may encompass a coach having one-on-one meetings with his or her athletes, providing constructive feedback on their behaviours and play (Baribeau, 2006).

The conceptual confusion between discipline and punishment is further emphasized by recent exploratory findings. For example, Gurgis (2014) reported that coaches often struggled to differentiate punishment and discipline and tended to view these constructs synonymously. The coaches in Gurgis’ (2014) study maintained the view that punishment was necessary for learning right from wrong and fostering positive (athlete) development.

**Reasons For The Use of Punishment in Sport**

**Contextual influences.** The sporting movement developed under the principles of self-organization and self-regulation (David, 2005). As a result, sport and physical education programs were initially used as a means to military preparedness, as these programs were believed to instill necessary military attributes, such as: discipline, cooperation, motor skills, and mental toughness (Morrow & Wamsley, 2005; O’Hanlon, 1982). Despite sport having shifted away from military preparedness and towards performance excellence, remnants of military influence still persist in sport, in the form of regimented training drills and more importantly, punishment tactics (Hughes & Coakley, 1991; O’Hanlon, 1982). Over the years, the sporting environment has maintained its image as inherently positive, enabling sport to maintain self-regulating status (Brackenridge, 2004; Chappelet, 2010; David, 2005). According to David
(2005), these notions are perfectly acceptable as long as a sport association’s internal rules and practices are defined and applied in conformity with national and international law. However, this is often not the case, as sport has remained at arms-length from adhering to government regulations and wider human rights initiatives (Chappelet, 2010; Rhind, Cook & Kim, 2013). In doing so, sport avoids formal scrutiny and addressing pertinent issues, such as the continued use of punishment in sport (David, 2005).

**Emphasis on winning.** Several scholars have claimed that the culture of sport, even for young athletes, has shifted focus away from athlete development and towards performance excellence (e.g. winning) (Coakley, 2001; David, 2005). Being a domain that focuses on winning as the ultimate objective makes athletes vulnerable to being treated as an expendable subject (“means”) that needs to be manipulated in any manner (i.e. punishment), to reach performance excellence (“ends”) (Burke, 2001; David, 2005; Donnelly, 1993). It is possible that coaches learn to use methods of punishment as a way to promote the outcome of winning.

Furthermore, a coach’s worth is often determined by number of wins and championships (Burke, 2001; Coakley, 2001; Stirling & Kerr, 2007). Richardson et al. (2012) wrote, “the pressure to win and to maintain their coaching jobs if they lose may contribute to coaches’ use of exercise as punishment, especially if they feel that ‘important others’ want them to use it” (p. 362). Subsequently, a cycle is created: sport culture’s emphasis on winning results in fickle security status for coaches (Burke, 2001; Coakley, 2001); the desperation to achieve success in accordance with these standards then may cause coaches to resort to controlling methods, such as punishment (Bandealy, 2012; Battaglia, 2013); unfortunately, the athletes who are punished may become acclimated to these practices, view these methods as beneficial, and may continue to use punishment when they become coaches (Burak et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2012). Individuals who hold “more positive attitudes towards exercise as punishment may be inculcated into a sport culture that values punishment as part of sport and the management of
sport teams” (Richardson et. al, 2012, p.362).

Power of the coach. The coach-athlete relationship is one of the most influential and important relationships experienced by youth athletes (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thogersen-Ntoumani, 2009; Gervis & Dunn, 2004). As such, a coach plays a major role in shaping the quality of the experiences athletes derive from their sport participation (Burke, 2001; Clarke, Smith, & Thibault, 1994; Smoll & Smith, 2002). Ultimately, the coach is entrusted with fostering holistic athlete development in a safe and appropriate manner (Kerr & Stirling, 2013). However, the coach-athlete relationship has been shown to be unbalanced, with the coach having power over the athlete by virtue of his or her age, expertise, decision-making authority, and access to resources (Burke, 2001; Hartill, 2009; Stirling & Kerr, 2009; Tomlinson & Strachan, 1996). In fact, as the coach is often considered a gatekeeper to athletic success, athletes develop a degree of dependency on their coaches (Palframan, 1994; Stirling & Kerr, 2009). The autonomous nature of sport, as well as an emphasis on performance excellence perpetuates the unbalanced nature of the coach-athlete dynamic (Burke, 2001; David, 2005). As shown in the maltreatment literature, the coach can engage in questionable or controlling practices, which may include punishment, not only in the pursuit of attaining performance excellence for the athlete, but also because the coach’s worth is based on his or her athletes’ accomplishments (Burke, 2001; Stirling & Kerr, 2009; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997).

Considering the importance of the coach in athletic development, the implications of punishment use become apparent. A positive coach-athlete relationship, similar to a parent-child relationship is necessary for positive athlete development (Gervis & Dunn, 2004). For example, researchers have showed that task-oriented climates, which entail positive coach-athlete interactions (e.g. instructive feedback) and focus on athlete development, are positively related to increased intrinsic motivation, increased locus of control, perceived competence, and self-esteem (Barkoukis, Thogersen-Ntoumani, Ntoumanis, & Nikitaras, 2007; Ferrer-Caja & Weiss,
Contrastingly, ego-oriented climates, which entail negative coach-athlete interactions (i.e. controlling and autocratic), punish players for errors, and focuses on competition and social comparison, have been known to result in stress, negative feelings and non-enjoyment (Newton, Duda, & Yin, 2000; Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, & Briere, 2001; Smith, Fry, Ethington, & Li, 2005; Waldron, & Krane, 2005). Consequently, a coach who employs punishment tactics has the potential to hinder the coach-athlete dynamic, an influential component needed to foster athlete development and positive sport experiences (Gervis & Dunn, 2004).

Belief in effectiveness of punishment. Comparable to the developmental psychology literature (see Andero & Stewart, 2002; Brisbane, 2004; Skinner, 1974), punishment is also used in sport because it is seen as an effective and efficient method towards behavioural management (Burak et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2012). For example, findings have suggested that individuals who implement punishment often believe that it will teach sports participants that there are consequences to their actions, something more than 93% of respondents deemed important or very important when attempting to deter athletes from undesirable behaviours (Burak et al., 2013). Punishment is also likely used because it is perceived to enable coach authority, a characteristic, which is supposedly needed when controlling a large group of athletes at once (Burak et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 2010).

Moreover, similar to the beliefs held by teachers and parents for implementing punishment (see Dubanoski et al., 1983; Durrant & Ensom, 2004), authority figures in sport also believe that punishment can improve attitudes and foster respect (Burak et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2012). Interestingly, findings have also indicated that punishment is used because of the beliefs that it improves fitness and mental toughness among sport participants (Burak et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 2010).

Seifried (2008) claimed that punishment is necessary in sport because it allows offenders
a chance for reflection on their behaviour and gives them a chance to repent and ask for forgiveness. More importantly, as punishment motivates offenders to demonstrate their repentance, it allows others to accept offenders’ forgiveness and acknowledge that no one individual is superior to others, a requirement for re-entering society as a whole person in the eyes of others and oneself (Seifried, 2008, 2010). According to Seifried (2008, 2010), a coach or authority figure in sport may impose punishment because it is an appropriate method to help athletes alleviate a sense of guilt or shame, as well as restore balance between victims, offenders, and the team or organization.

**Lack of alternatives.** Another potential reason for using punishment in sport pertains to a lack of knowledge regarding alternative behavioural management methods. For example, preliminary findings indicate that most teachers and teacher-coaches reportedly used exercise as punishment (61%), however few actually ‘intended’ to use this strategy (21%) (Richardson et al., 2012). It is possible that despite not wanting to punish their athletes, these respondents resorted to punishment due to a lack of awareness of other behavioural management methods (Richardson et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 2010). As long as punishment, and specifically exercise as punishment, is perceived as positive and necessary, the pursuit of alternative methods may be stalled (Rosenthal et al., 2010).

Recently, some authors (e.g. Baribeau, 2006; Richardson et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 2010) have proposed reduced playing time, otherwise known as benching, as a more suitable method for modifying behaviour. The belief is that “reducing playing time in a game and/or taking away a starting position for a game can send a clear message to athletes that their behaviour is unacceptable” (Richardson et al., 2012, p. 363). For this practice to be a positive learning experience:

It is important for the coach to be clear with the athlete about why playing time is being withheld and to communicate this to the athlete before the contest. In addition, the coach
needs to communicate specific expectations to the athletes about the effort and attitude required to earn playing time. (Rosenthal et. al, 2010, p.47)

However, according to preliminary unpublished findings that assessed inter-university athletes’ perspectives of punishment in sport, benching may not be a viable alternative, as it is perceived to be the most detrimental form of punishment (Battaglia, 2013; Gurgis, 2013). The negative effects of punishment use in sport will be explored in the following section.

**Negative Effects of Punishment Use in Sport**

Albrecht (2009) argued against the use of exercise as punishment based upon potential consequences of: damaging the coach-athlete relationship, inducing a fear of failure and reduced risk-taking, increasing performance anxiety, and reinforcing the lowest level of moral development. Similarly, the CCES (2013) and Ensom and Durrant (2009) suggested that enforcing conditioning exercises as punishment is an illogical response to poor performance and other undesirable athlete behaviours, often resulting in hindered performance and athlete welfare. These propositions are also consistent with consequences cited in developmental psychology research (see Dubanoski et al., 1983; Durrant & Ensom 2004; Gershoff, 2002a).

Another issue pertaining to the use of exercise as punishment is that it “risks creating negative associations with physical activity in the minds of young people” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 1997, p. 12). In other words, using conditioning as a form of punishment teaches the student or athlete that an activity that is intended to be healthy and positive is actually humiliating and painful and thus something to be avoided (Albrecht, 2009; McCarthy & Jones, 2007; Richardson et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 2010). Consequently, this form of punishment may also contribute “to both dropout of sport and subsequent lack of enjoyment of physical activity” (Richardson et al., 2010, p.361). Moreover, athletes who remain in sport and experience harmful exercise loads resulting from this form of punishment are at
increased risk of severe injury (Burak et al., 2013; Springer & Clarkson, 2003).

The reduction of playing time has been put forward as an alternative method of behavioural modification (Richardson et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 2010). However, exploratory, unpublished work (Battaglia, 2013; Gurgis, 2013) suggests that the reported negative consequences of this tactic appear to be similar to those recognized for exercise as punishment (Albrecht, 2009; CCES, 2013), as well as the punishment findings in the developmental psychology literature (Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a).

Accordingly, several authors have proposed that punishment tactics have the potential to be emotionally and psychologically harmful to athletes, both in the short-term and the long-term (CCES, 2013; McCarthy & Jones, 2007; Rosenthal et al., 2010), although these claims have not been tested empirically. Suggestions have also been made that punishment has detrimental effects on the coach-athlete relationship, which will be discussed in the following section.

**Coach-athlete relationship.** Numerous researchers have cited the damaging effects of controlling coaching behaviours on the relationship between coach and athlete, as athletes often respond to these behaviours with increased anxiety, fear, resentment, and diminished self-worth, which can be directed to the coach (Bartholomew et al., 2009; Baker, Côté, & Hawes, 2000; Gould, Wilson, Tuffey, & Lochbaum, 1993; Martens, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2013). More specifically, controlling coaching behaviours, which may include punishment can result in diminished intrinsic and increased extrinsic motivation for engaging in sport (Bartholomew et al., 2009; Stirling & Kerr, 2013).

Instead of a coach being a guiding and nurturing figure for athletes; he or she may become the root of negative experiences for athletes and someone they avoid (Baker et al., 2000; Smoll & Smith, 2002; Stirling & Kerr, 2007). This notion is most alarming when considering coaches are acknowledged as influential figures who have the potential to maintain athlete participation, as well as perpetuate dropout rates (Barnett, Smoll, & Smith, 1992; Weiss
Consequently, just as parents’ early interactions shape the experiences of children later in life (see Bowlby, 1982; Schaffer & Emerson, 1964), coaches’ interactions with athletes shape the nature and quality of their sport experiences (Burke, 2001). Based upon previous research of controlling coaching behaviours (e.g. Bartholomew et al., 2009; Stirling & Kerr, 2013), it is speculated that punishment may tarnish the coach-athlete relationship, a vital determinant of positive sport experiences, as well as continued sport participation.

**Potential Normalization of Punishment in Sport**

Despite the apparent negative consequences associated with punishment, preliminary research suggests that it occurs and may be normalized in sport. Sport is often referenced as a culture where niche traits, such as mental and physical toughness are not only expected but also needed to excel (Coakley, 2001; Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Pronger, 1990). In the relentless pursuit of performance excellence (i.e. the sport ethic), youth sport culture has moved away from athlete development, defining success according to wins vs. loss ratios, medal counts, and sponsorships (Coakley, 2001; David, 2005). Rooted in the sport ethic, are masculine values, such as “win-at-all-cost mentalities” and “self-sacrifice” (Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Coakley, 2001). Subsequently, athletes are put in a position of vulnerability, where they must learn to subject themselves to anything that may assist in the pursuit of medals (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2007). Exploratory data suggest that although athletes may not necessarily like punishment, they often perceive these tactics (specifically exercise as punishment) to be an integral aspect of sport (Burak, et al., 2013). More specifically, athletes often perceive the masculine values inherent in sport, as emphasizing competitiveness (Pronger, 1990), requiring them to be able to “deal with it” or “suck it up” if they wish to be successful in the sport domain, thus contributing to the normalization of punishment (Hughes & Coakley, 1991).
The adage that sport builds “character” has been challenged by scholars. Rudd (2005), for example, argued that there are two types of character: the first, defines character with social values such as teamwork, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and perseverance, which is indicative of “social character”; the second, defines character with moral values such as honesty, fairness, responsibility, compassion, and respect, which is indicative of “moral character.” According to Rudd (2005), in an era where sporting cultures promote self-sacrifice and “win-at-all-cost mentalities,” it appears as though there is a predominance of social values (e.g. team first and ‘no pain - no gain’) being emphasized in sport compared to moral values (e.g. honesty and fair play). As a result, it is possible to see how punishment tactics fall under the promotion of social values and social character, further enabling the normalization of punishment in sport.

If the punishment permitted in sport occurred outside the sporting environment, it would be deemed a breach of human rights legislations, as cited by Article 19, which entails the protection from all forms of physical and mental punishment/abuse (Durrant & Ensom, 2004). However, sport is an autonomous, self-regulating entity, with its own rules, values and practices, distinct from other youth-dominated domains, such as education. The context of youth sport therefore may help to explain potential normalization of punishment in sport (Hughes & Coakley, 1991; David, 2005).

**Summary**

Although there is a paucity of empirical research on punishment in sport, preliminary findings suggest it is a practice used in sport. Further, despite the well-documented negative consequences associated with punishment use, some teachers, coaches, and athletes still tend to perceive beneficial outcomes of punishment and thus advocate its continued use, whereas, other teachers, coaches, and athletes do not (see Burak et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2012). Perhaps responses to punishment vary because of the ways in which individuals interpret or appraise
punishment. For athletes specifically, perhaps those who normalize punishment and advocate its continued use appraise punishment as a challenge and therefore are likely to maintain sport participation, whereas, athletes who appraise punishment as negative, harmful or threatening, may be those who withdraw from sport participation. A model that may potentially explain these differences is Lazarus’ (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory, which will be discussed in the next section.


Throughout the general psychology literature, Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) stress, appraisal and coping model has provided the most commonly used conceptual framework in the study of stressful events. Similarly, this model has been supported explicitly or adopted by numerous sport psychology researchers (e.g. Anshel, 2001; Holt, 2003; Nicholls & Polman, 2007), in attempts to provide a framework for understanding stress and coping in sport. More recently, Lazarus (1999) updated this theory, emphasizing the importance and integration of emotions, resulting in the emergence of the cognitive-motivational-relational theory. This perspective is often referred to as the process or transactional approach, which acknowledges that stress, emotions, and coping, are dynamic and recursive processes that involves the interactions between a person’s internal (i.e. beliefs about self and goals) and external (i.e. situational) environment (Lazarus, 1999; Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Emotions arise when events are appraised as having either positive or negative significance for well-being (relational meaning) in relation to goals (Lazarus, 1999; Thatcher, Jones, & Lavallee, 2012). Motivational aspects (e.g. goals), cognitive appraisals (e.g. primary and secondary), and coping mediate the person-environment interaction, resulting in these components being identified as crucial constructs in the stress, emotion, and coping relationship (Lazarus, 1999). As Lazarus’ (1999)
updated cognitive-motivational-relational theory was used in a general sense to inform part of the interview guide of the current study, it will be discussed further.

**Primary Appraisal**

According to Lazarus (1999), primary appraisals are exemplified through the questions: “Do I have a goal at stake, or are any of my core values engaged or threatened? And if there is a goal at stake, am I in trouble or being benefited, now or in the future, and in what way?” In other words, primary appraisals decipher whether what is happening is perceived as relevant to goal commitment, beliefs, values, and situational intentions (Lazarus, 1999; Thatcher et al., 2012). There are three identified components of primary appraisal: 1) goal relevance (is there anything at stake?), 2) goal congruence or incongruence (is the stimulus beneficial or harmful?) and 3) goal content (the type of ego involvement) (Lazarus, 1999; Thatcher et al., 2012). The important principle in primary appraisal is goal commitment because “if there is not goal commitment, there is nothing of importance at stake in an encounter to arouse a stress reaction…without a stake in one’s well-being in any given transaction, stress and emotions will not occur” (Lazarus 1999, p. 76).

Irrelevant appraisals are characterized by an encounter with the environment that carries no implication for the individual’s well-being (Lazarus, 1999). In a sense, the individual has no investment in the possible outcomes (i.e. impinges on no value or commitment) (Lazarus, 1999). For example, in the sporting environment, an irrelevant appraisal may entail athletes or coaches failing to recognize or care who the best team and players in another state are, as they will never face them in league play.

**Stressful appraisals.** When stressful appraisals do occur they can be further differentiated into: harm/loss, threat, challenge, and benefit appraisals (Lazarus, 1999, 2000). Harm/loss appraisals consist of damage that has already occurred (Lazarus, 1999). For example,
harm/loss appraisals may encompass a loss of self-esteem/self-confidence when a coach punishes an athlete for making a performance error. Threat appraisals are defined by an expectation of future harm/loss (Lazarus, 1999). In addition, they are often characterized by negative emotions, such as fear, shame, and guilt (Lazarus, 1999, 2000; Murphy & Jenkins, 2013; Thatcher et al., 2012). For example, an athlete may feel that having a coach who is not willing to accept him making a learning mistake, and therefore punishes unfavourable performance or behaviour, has the potential to diminish self-confidence, elicit negative emotions, and hinder athletic growth. Challenge appraisals are defined as the opportunity for mastery and growth, as well as being characterized by positive emotions, such as excitement and eagerness (Lazarus, 1999, 2000; Murphy & Jenkins, 2013; Thatcher et al., 2012). For example, although an athlete may not like physical conditioning as punishment, he or she may perceive this tactic as beneficial because it has the potential to enable superior endurance.

More recently, Lazarus (1999) acknowledged another component of stressful appraisal, entitled benefit appraisals. Benefit appraisals are opposite of harm/loss appraisals. While harm/loss appraisals emphasize that detrimental outcomes have already occurred, benefit appraisals acknowledge that some positive outcomes have already occurred. Accordingly, benefit appraisals allows for the encompassing of positively toned emotions, as well as the negatively toned ones that result from stressful experiences (Lazarus, 1999). For example, a benefit appraisal may take the form of an athlete feeling tremendous happiness after scoring the game-winning goal, while also perceiving increased pressure to continue such successful performances.

Secondary Appraisal

While primary appraisal concerns itself with deciphering how a situation will impact one’s well-being, secondary appraisal asks questions that include but are not limited to: “Do I
need to act? Should I act? What if anything can be done about it? What are the costs and benefits of acting?” (Lazarus, 1999). As a result, secondary appraisal is the cognitive-evaluative process that focuses on what can be done about a stressful person-environment relationship, particularly with respect to choice of emotion (Lazarus, 1999). Aspects of secondary appraisal include blame or credit (can responsibility for harm or benefit be determined?), coping potential (is it possible to influence the person-environment relationship for the better?) and future expectations (will things improve or worsen?) (Lazarus, 1999; Murphy & Jenkins, 2013; Thatcher et al., 2012). For example, after an athlete is punished for making a performance error by a coach, he or she can take responsibility for the occurrence or blame oneself for the error or the coach for being unreasonable (i.e. blame/credit). At the same time, athletes must determine whether their coping resources will enable them to continue playing and maintain focus (i.e. coping potential), as well as determine how the punishment will impact their perception of themselves, their coach, and sport (i.e. future expectations). Subsequently, control over being able to reduce or eliminate the source of stress is highly related to all three components, as secondary appraisal is often dependent on perceived controllability (Lazarus, 1999, 2000). Secondary appraisal is not actual coping, but the instance where individuals decide how they are going to cope (i.e. the cognitive underpinning of coping) (Lazarus, 1999).

**Coping**

Within Lazarus’ (1999) model, coping is also a dynamic and recursive process. Individuals constantly appraise and reappraise situations, influencing how they cope (Nicholls & Polman, 2007). As a result, coping is defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). Within this framework, coping is identified as: process-oriented; requiring deliberate mobilization of coping
resources, excluding automatized behaviours; and “efforts” to manage instead of “outcomes” (Lazarus, 1999). According to Lazarus (1999, 2000), coping and the appraisals that underlie it, influence which emotion will occur, in addition to how emotions change, with this influence beginning at the outset of the process when emotions are aroused. As a result, similar to appraisal, coping is a mediator of emotional reaction (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus, 2000). Within this framework, coping responses are usually identified as being problem-focused which entails efforts intended to directly deal with the problem or emotion-focused coping, which entails efforts attempting to regulate one’s feelings and emotions (Lazarus, 1999). Furthermore, events appraised as controllable are associated with coping efforts aimed at resolving the situation (i.e., problem-focused coping), while events perceived as outside of one’s control usually require coping efforts intended to alter one’s reactions or interpretations of the situation (i.e. emotion-focused coping) (Lazarus, 1999).

**Emotions**

Within Lazarus (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory, emotions are emphasized. Emotions occur when events are appraised as having either positive or negative significance for well-being (relational meaning) in relation to goals (Lazarus, 1999; Thatcher et al., 2012). Accordingly, emotions are an inherent part of the changing person-environment relationship (Lazarus, 1999, 2000). Three components vital to this process include motivation, appraisal, and coping (Lazarus, 1999; Thatcher et al., 2012). Although emotional encounters may never be identical, “they often share a common relational meaning, such as a particular harm, threat, challenge or benefit and what might be done to cope” (Lazarus, 2000, p. 233). Appraisals and the meanings generated from them are always relational, as they must simultaneously take into consideration personal factors and environmental demands, constraints and opportunities (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus, 2000). Consequently, Lazarus (1999) identified core
relational themes, which express a synthesis of the whole relational meaning (e.g. diverse appraisal components) that underlie each emotion (see Lazarus 1999 for complete table). Overall, “the constructs-motivation, appraisal, coping, stress and emotion-are conjoined in nature, and should be separated for only the purpose of analysis and discourse” (Lazarus, 1999, p. 101).

Although Lazarus’ model has been applied in sport to better understand athletes’ experiences of stress and coping, to-date it has not been used to explore athletes’ interpretations of the use of punishment. It is speculated that this model may be helpful in understanding idiosyncratic interpretations of punishment experiences.

**Purpose of Study**

Given the lack of empirical research on punishment within the sport literature, this study sought to investigate competitive youth hockey athletes’ interpretations of punishment use. To examine this topic, three overarching research questions are proposed:

1) What do youth athletes’ experiences of punishment look like?

2) How do youth athletes appraise punishment (e.g. harm/loss) within the sport context and do their perceptions change depending on the form of punishment?

3) How do youth athletes react/respond to punishment in sport (cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally)?

The first question intends to assess descriptive data, such as: forms of punishment, frequency of use, and perceived reasons for punishment use. The second question intends to address potential normalization of punishment in sport via understanding the extent to which athletes view punishment practices as integral to sport. Finally, the third question explores the athletes’ responses to punishment, including cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components. Addressing these questions may provide insight pertaining to potential detrimental effects
(negative sport experiences) associated with punishment tactics. Additionally, understanding youth’s interpretations of punishment in sport may shed light on punishment as a potential contributor to youth sport attrition.

**Rationale for the Study**

Despite a plethora of research on punishment in other domains such as education (Dubanoski et al., 1983) and parenting (Durrant & Ensom, 2004), there remains a lack of empirical research on punishment in sport. The few studies that have assessed punishment in sport pertain specifically to exercise as punishment; despite negative repercussions associated with this tactic, it is still used in sport frequently (Burak et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2012). In fact, findings suggest that punishment may be a normative practice that is accepted by athletes and coaches (Burak et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2012). More recently, exploratory findings indicate that punishment in sport extends to being benched and yelled at (Battaglia, 2013; Gurgis, 2013).

To-date, there are no existing studies examining youth athletes’ interpretations of punishment use. This is an important line of inquiry because of potential relationships between punishment use, negative sport experiences, and dropout rates. Consistently cited reasons for sport attrition are “lack of fun” and “coach conflicts” (Weiss & Williams, 2004) although the precursors to these experiences have not yet been identified. Is it possible that “lack of fun” and “coach conflicts” arise from the use of punishment? Examining athletes’ interpretations of punishment in sport may provide insight into this question, deciphering whether such tactics contribute to youth’s negative sporting experiences (e.g. lack of fun) and thus contribute to sport attrition.
Understanding the implications of punishment use may have the most significant implications at the youth level, as the quality of early sporting experiences influence healthy youth development and continued participation in sport (Holt, 2008).
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY & METHODS

Methodology

A qualitative research design was implemented to obtain data for this thesis study. Qualitative inquiry argues that evidence must go beyond mere facts and singular truths, advocating multiple interpretations of knowledge and deeper meaning (Morse & Richards, 2002). More specifically, qualitative research focuses less on an orderly world, subject to measurement, reproducibility and confirmation, and more on seeking descriptions and interpretations of phenomena, acknowledging that reality is highly specific to time and place (i.e. punishment in sport) (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008; Hoff, 2011). Consequently, these notions embody purposiveness in qualitative research that I was interested in addressing. For example, I wanted to understand an area where little was known or understanding was inadequate (e.g. punishment in sport), as well as learn from participants to gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of phenomena (i.e. uncovering knowledge regarding how youth athletes think and feel about punishment) (Agee, 2009; Charmaz, 2004; Morse & Richards, 2002). Therefore, a qualitative approach was chosen, as the research aim-unearthing athletes’ interpretations of punishment in sport-required it (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Paradigmatic Position

Sport is a domain that encompasses intimate interactions (e.g. between coaches and athletes), as well as the application of stratagems (e.g. coaching methods/behaviours) in order to promote “successful” sporting experiences (Bartholomew et al., 2009; Burke, 2001). Accordingly, this qualitative research design embraced a social constructivism paradigmatic position, as it allowed me to address a scarcely researched topic area (e.g. punishment in sport) and to gain insight through participant responses regarding the complexities of athletes’ subjective interpretations of punishment (e.g. appraisals and feelings) (Agee, 2009; Morse &
Richards, 2002). Ontologically, constructivism focuses less on seeking objective truths but instead realizes that there are a multitude of (complex) realities, where meanings and representations of lived experiences vary between participants (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). More specifically, constructivism seeks to better understand the multiple subjective meanings of an individual’s experiences (Creswell, 2012). Often, subjective meanings and representations are not “imprinted” but socially constructed within each individual (Creswell, 2012). Epistemologically, within a constructivist perspective knowledge is co-constructed between the participant and the researcher (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), notions that will be further discussed in the following section. Ultimately, through this research I was interested in a holistic perspective or the “processes of interaction among individuals” (Creswell, 2012, p. 25), via building a complex and complete understanding of the underlying values and contexts of participants’ subjective interpretations of punishment (Morse & Richards, 2002; Morse, Swanson, & Kuzel, 2001).

Role of the researcher. Within a constructivist approach to qualitative work, it is important to recognize the influential role of the researcher. For example, interpretations or meanings of the data are co-constructed between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2012). More specifically, the researcher positions himself or herself in the research acknowledging how past experiences, personal beliefs, values, commitments, and so on, inform the perspectives to which he or she views the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Consequently, researchers rarely enter any project with a blank slate, but rather “with the general perspectives of their discipline; with their own research interests and biographies; and with certain philosophical, theoretical, substantive and methodological orientations” (Sandelowski, 1993, p. 216). As a result, it is important for the researcher to acknowledge his or her experiences and perspectives prior to the examination of a phenomenon.
Accordingly, the concept of reflexivity arises, which entails thoughtful, conscious self-awareness, as one considers him or herself in relation to the social context (Doyle 2013; Finlay, 2002). Despite the potential for researchers to view a phenomenon in accordance with previous inclinations, they must engage in reflexive thinking, allowing deeper engagement in and understanding of the area of interest. In doing so, the researcher acknowledges “the idea that qualitative inquiry as a reflective process underscores the strengths of qualitative research” (Agee, 2009, p. 431). In approaching this research study, I have tried to acknowledge the presence of myself by addressing my own personal experiences of punishment in sport (see personal reflection). In addition, I attempted to minimize the distance between myself, the researcher, and the youth athletes, the participants, by explaining to them my own background with hockey and identifying our shared interests with the sport.

Methods

Participants

The sample consisted of 12 (7 male and 5 female) youth hockey athletes, 11-13 years of age. All participants played in the Greater Toronto Hockey League (GTHL). No more than three participants were recruited from the same team. When the athletes took part in the study, they were all playing at the highest levels of competition for their respective age and gender.

Inclusion Criteria:

Individuals who met the following criteria were eligible for participation in this study:

1. Male and female youth athletes aged 11 to 13 who volunteered to participate
2. Current participation in the highest levels of competitive hockey for their respective age and gender
3. Adequate English communication skills
4. Signed Letter of Consent from parents or guardian
5. Signed Letter of Assent by the athlete

Exclusion Criteria:

Any participant comprising one or more of the following exclusion criteria was not included in the study:

1. Athletes who do not fall in the required age range (11-13 years old)
2. Athletes who were not participating in the highest levels of competitive hockey for their respective age and gender
3. No more than three athletes per club team
4. Athletes who do not have the Letter of Consent signed by their parent or guardian
5. Athletes who do not provide a signed Letter of Assent

**Rationale for participant inclusion criteria.** The rationale for participant inclusion criteria pertained to the fact that sport participation peaks around 10-13 years of age, followed by a dramatic decline thereafter (Hunter et al., 2002). Commonly cited reasons for sport attrition include “lack of fun” and “coach conflicts,” however, the precursors of these reasons have not been previously studied (Weiss & Williams, 2004). Consequently, I wanted to assess youth’s interpretations of punishment in sport, as I speculated that the punishment strategies used by coaches to motivate and discipline young participants may contribute to negative experiences or what youth refer to as a “lack of fun” and “coach conflicts.” Additionally, researchers have indicated that at competitive levels of sport, displays of performance excellence are a prominent source of athlete, coach, and organizational stress (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Sagar, Lavallee, & Spray, 2007; Thelwell, Weston, Greenless, & Hutchings, 2008). Therefore, youth athletes who were playing at the highest levels of competitive hockey were chosen, as I speculated that pressures to win at higher levels of competition may be associated with more frequent use of punishment strategies. The perspectives of hockey athletes were examined because currently
there is a paucity of research in sport psychology literature examining hockey (see Nicholls & Polman, 2007).

Being cognizant of sample biases, I selected participants who maximized sample diversity, in attempts to gain multiple perspectives (Charmaz, 2004; Doyle, 2013; Finlay, 2002). A maximum of three male or female athletes per hockey team was thought to enhance diversity within the sample. As female youth tend to dropout of sport at greater rates than male youth (Canadian-Heritage, 2010; CDC, 2000; Ifedi, 2008; Kane et al., 2007), the gender diversity was thought to provide insight into potential discrepancies pertaining to male and female athletes’ interpretations of punishment.

Measures

For the purpose of this study, semi-structured interviews (Appendix A) and concept maps (Appendix B) were employed as the qualitative measures. The theoretical importance of these measures will be briefly discussed in the following sections.

Interviews. Interviews are the most commonly used method of data collection for qualitative inquires, as they have been linked to the notion of trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). When referring specifically to semi-structured interviews, open-ended questions are often utilized, as they allow for rich data via participants’ interpretations (Roulston, 2010; Warren & Karner, 2005). Although the researcher maintains control of the interview, he or she must identify a proper balance of structure and flexibility, through the timing of questions and probes, which stimulate in-depth responses and guide participants to provide answers in accordance with the purpose of the study (Sorrell & Redmond, 1995; Swanson-Kauffman, 1986).

Developing rapport with participants becomes an essential component of qualitative methods often achieved through interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Developing
rapport “involves trust and a respect for the interviewee and the information he or she shares…it is also the means of establishing a safe and comfortable environment for sharing the interviewee’s personal experiences and attitudes as they actually occurred” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). It is through this connection that enables interviewers to gather rich data about participant experiences.

**Concept Maps.** Concept maps are node-like diagrams that represent concepts or relationships between variables (Novak & Gowin, 1984). The rationale for the use of concept maps included ease of completion for young participants, providing flexibility to answer questions at their own discretion, and extending participant contributions beyond verbal forms (Nicholls & Ntoumanis, 2010). In the sport psychology literature, researchers (e.g. Holt & Mandigo, 2004; Nicholls, Polman, Levy, Taylor, & Cobley, 2007) have used concept maps to examine stressors and coping among athletes. In the current study, concept maps were used as an open-ended questionnaire technique that examined youth hockey athletes’ positive and negative sport experiences and further explored their interpretations of punishment in sport (i.e. reactions and responses). This measure was thought to provide youth athletes with an opportunity to articulate their punishment experiences more fully than through the interviews.

**Procedures**

**Pilot Interviews and Concept Maps**

Prior to the beginning of this thesis study, I conducted a series of pilot interviews and concept maps with youth hockey athletes. The purpose of these trials was to test the appropriateness of language used, as well as the comprehension and thoroughness of the interview guide and concept maps. In addition, the pilot study provided an opportunity to gain experience interacting with youth athletes in the same age range of my thesis participants.

Pilot participants included two competitive AA male hockey athletes, 13 years of age. Consent was obtained for the pilot testing through a Letter of Assent signed by the athlete, in
addition to a Letter of Consent signed by the participant’s parent/guardian. Interviews lasted about 60 minutes. To assess the homework concept maps (see Phase 2 in Data Collection), athletes were given time immediately following the interview to complete these tasks. Overall, interviews and subsequent concept maps were well received by the pilot participants. Participant feedback was taken into consideration and used to improve the interview guide and delivery of concept maps. For example, throughout the pilot trials it became apparent that a brief follow-up discussion seeking clarification regarding concept map responses would be beneficial to better understanding the athletes’ interpretations of punishment. The data generated from pilot testing was not used for this thesis study.

**Recruitment**

Recruitment is of great importance in qualitative research, as it is fundamental to understanding the validity of qualitative inquiry (Curtis, Gesler, Smith, & Washburn, 2000). Purposive (i.e. selective) sampling, which entails recruiting participants (competitive youth hockey athletes), who are believed to produce the most viable data relating to the research purpose (youth athletes’ interpretations of punishment use in sport) was used (Curtis et al., 2000; Miles & Huberman, 2004).

To recruit participants, I began by gathering contact information for the coaches of 11-13 year old male and female hockey teams in the GTHL. Contact information was found via team and league websites (www.gthlcanada.com). Once the names and contact information had been gathered, ten coaches were contacted via email (Appendix C). Upon contact with the youth hockey coaches, I explained the purpose of my study, and in doing so, addressed the increasing dropout rates of youth in sport, as well as my willingness to better understand negative youth sport experiences that may contribute to sport withdrawal. Subsequently, I asked the coaches if they might provide me with a few moments before or after practice to speak with parents and
athletes of their club team. Of the ten coaches who were contacted, only five agreed to provide me with this opportunity.

Following coach approval, I then provided the coaches with letters of recruitment (Appendix D) as well as the Letter of Consent and Letter of Assent (see Appendix E, F) to be distributed to the parents and children of their club team before my presentation. This provided the youth athletes and their parents with ample opportunity to read and understand the study purpose and requirements, formulate any questions they might have, and decide for themselves if they were interested in participation. After a convenient timeslot was scheduled, I met with the parents and athletes at their practice arenas and delivered a presentation that further described the study and invited questions.

After the presentation, interested participants were asked to provide their contact information. A follow-up email was then sent to the athletes and their parents to confirm study participation. Permitting verbal and written consent from each youth athlete and his or her parents/guardians, convenient times to schedule interviews and subsequent meetings were arranged. The locations of the interviews and follow-up concept map discussions were chosen by the athletes and their parents/guardians (e.g. local coffee shops or their home).

Data Collection

Data collection proceeded in two phases. Phase one consisted of individual semi-structured interviews with each participant. This part of the data collection was followed by Phase 2, which consisted of concept maps and a brief follow-up discussion regarding participants’ responses upon completion.

**Phase one - interviews.** The semi-structured interview with the athlete only included a list of approximately 20 open-ended questions (Appendix A). All interviews were conducted face-to-face at locations of the athletes and/or their parents/guardians choosing (e.g. their
house). With the permission of participants, the interviews were audio recorded. Interviews ranged from 45-80 minutes in duration. Considering there has been no empirical research done on youth athletes’ interpretation of punishment in sport, questions were created to enhance opinion-based answers. In doing so, the intention was to allow participants an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings, gaining insight on areas of interests such as: extent to which punishment is used in sport, the forms it takes and perceived reasons for its use, in addition to athlete responses and reactions to punishment use (Sorrell & Redmond, 1995; Warren & Karner, 2005).

Considering the young age of the study participants, developing a trusting relationship was of great importance so that the youth athletes would not be reluctant or hesitant to share revealing and personal information (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). As a result, I began to build rapport with the athlete from the initial meeting explaining my sport background/experiences and the study, as well as giving them a chance to ask any questions. Moreover, each interview began with introductory questions that were designed to not only gain background information on the participants but also make them feel comfortable with me and the interview process. These questions included:

- What/who made you want to get involved in hockey? How long have you been playing hockey?
- If you were to rate hockey on a scale between 1-10 with other important aspects of your life such as school, family and other sports you may play, where would hockey fall? How important is hockey to you?

In addition to introductory questions, concept maps were first integrated into the interview process, in attempts to acclimate athletes with this form of data collection, as well as provide them an opportunity to visually express their sport experiences. As the first concept maps pertained to the Positive and Negative Hockey Experiences category, they contained the
seed statements “Experiences in hockey that made me feel good” and “Experiences in hockey that made me feel not-so-good” (see Appendix B). Participants were instructed to think about and remember experiences that actually happened.

After the participants felt comfortable, I asked more specific questions pertaining to punishment in sport, such as:

- Have you ever seen a teammate being benched/yelled at/or forced to engage in conditioning exercises by a coach after doing something wrong?
- When you were (form of punishment), what were the first things that went through your mind? Did you think one method was worse than another?

The complete interview guide with probes can be found in Appendix A.

**Phase two - concept maps.** Concept maps were used as a supplemental form of data collection to build on the data that were generated through interviews. The concept maps were divided into four main categories: 1) *Positive and Negative Hockey Experiences*, which, as mentioned, were administered during the interview process, 2) *Thoughts and Cognitions*, 3) *Emotional Reactions* and 4) *Behaviours* (see Appendix B).

Upon completion of the initial interview, concept maps were given as homework tasks for the athletes to complete and return at a later date. The first set of homework concept maps pertained to the *Thoughts and Cognitions* category and thus contained the seed statements “Things I was thinking when I was benched, yelled at, or forced to do conditioning exercises.” The second set of homework concept maps pertained to the *Emotional Reactions* category and thus contained the seed statements “How I felt when I was benched, yelled at, or forced to do conditioning exercises.” Finally, the third set of homework concept maps pertained to the *Behaviours* category and thus contained the seed statements, “Things I did when I was benched, yelled at, or forced to do conditioning exercises.” Participants were asked to recall their actual experiences and describe how they responded to punishment tactics (e.g. cognitive, emotional,
and behavioural components). It is important to note that if athletes expressed experiencing a particular punishment tactic to a lesser extent (e.g. yelling), to help formulate responses, they were asked to put themselves in a situation where punishment was likely to occur and then express their subsequent reactions and responses accordingly.

Following completion of the concept maps, an informal, unstructured discussion was scheduled. The purpose of this meeting was merely to seek clarification regarding participants’ concept map responses, as well as to highlight and ask participants about any existing similarities or differences between their interview and concept map responses. For example, probes included but were not limited to: “What do you mean by…?”; “Can you give an example of…”; and “Tell me more about your concept maps.” This follow-up discussion was thought to provide me with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of participants’ interpretations of punishment in sport.

**Data Analysis**

Upon completion of each interview and the concept maps, data were transcribed verbatim. Participant confidentiality and anonymity was maintained as all personal identifiers were removed and pseudonyms were used at the point of transcription and during the interpretation of results.

Considering there is a lack of empirical research on punishment in sport, an inductive thematic analysis approach was used to understand youth athletes’ interpretations of punishment (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Thomas, 2006). An inductive analysis approach is “intended to aid an understanding of meaning in complex data through the development of summary themes or categories from the raw data (“data reduction”)” (Thomas, 2006, p. 3). In other words, inductive thematic analysis allows categories and themes to be identified from the athletes’ responses, highlighting similarities and differences throughout the data, rather than being assigned into
predetermined categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 1990). Therefore, during the inductive thematic analysis process, I engaged in a “bottom up” approach, organizing and interpreting the data retrieved through participant interviews and concept maps into meaning units, categories, and themes pertaining to punishment (e.g. forms of punishment, perceived effectiveness, reactions and responses) (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Thomas, 2006).

The collected data were analyzed through the six phases of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first phase is immersion, which entails the researcher familiarizing oneself with the data. This was exemplified by transcribing all interview and concept map data, as well as repeated reading of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Generating initial codes is the second phase, which refers to producing a list of codes across the data set and beginning to organize the data into meaningful groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). For example, some initial categories identified included but were not limited to: tactics employed, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. The third, fourth, and fifth phases consist of searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). These phases are interpretation driven, as the researcher focuses on sorting/identifying relationships between initially coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). More specifically, these phases involve “refining and defining” previous codes in an effort to develop overall concepts or identify core variables (overarching themes) (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). These phases of data analysis were embodied by collating the initial categories of tactics employed, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours into preliminary themes, which entailed forms of punishment, as well as negative and positive perceptions of the self. As the analysis progressed, overarching themes across the data sets, one of which included athletes’ reactions and responses, as well as appropriate sub-themes, such as the psychological self were identified. The final phase of data analysis consists of writing the report, as the researcher is tasked with adequately representing the various themes via providing a clear interpretation of
the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This study represented themes by providing a multitude of rich data extracts, as well as situating the data for interpretation within various theoretical frameworks, in accordance with the previously identified research questions.

**Ethical Considerations**

**Risks and Benefits**

Research on the topic of punishment involves the potential for participants to feel stressed, uncomfortable, embarrassed, or angry during their recollection of sporting experiences. If the participants indicated distress during the interview, I reminded them that they may decline from answering any questions, they may take a break from the interview, they may reschedule the interview for another time, or they may withdraw from the study without penalty. The participants were also reminded that the study was confidential and would not affect their standing on their current club team. As all participants were under 18 years of age, I as the researcher, had an obligation to report any disclosures of maltreatment to the authorities. In the event that an interviewee did indicate abuse or unlawful treatment, he or she would have also been given referral information to local counseling and psychological facilities to help deal with such issues.

There were no direct benefits to participants for their involvement in this study. However, the following study had the potential to have applied implications by informing sport authorities regarding the use and effects of punishment tactics, as well as informing those involved in coach education about ways to maximize youth sport experiences. Moreover, the scholarly and sports community benefit from such a study since there has been a lack of empirical research examining punishment in sport, despite anecdotal reports suggesting that it is commonly used in the sport context. More specifically, this study produced preliminary evidence-based findings regarding athletes’ interpretations of punishment in sport. Finally, this
research was also thought to give critical theoretical attention to understanding punishment in sport, by bridging the gap between the fields of developmental and sport psychology, as theoretical frameworks of developmental psychology informed the research questions and interpretation of results. In appreciation for the time commitment required for this study, the participants were provided with a $20.00 gift card to Hockey Life.

**Informed Consent and Assent**

Prior to participation in this study, participants were informed about topics, which included but were not limited to: the study purpose, research design, benefits and risks of participation, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of their participation. As participants were under the age of 18, parental consent for each participant was required (see Appendix E). In addition to receiving parental consent, the participants were required to read and sign a letter of assent (see Appendix F), indicating their willingness to voluntarily participate in the research study.

**Privacy/Confidentiality**

In the Letter of Consent and Assent (Appendix E, F), as well as prior to study commencement, participants were assured that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained throughout the research process. Only my supervisor and I had access to audio recording, transcripts, and consent forms. Hard copy files were stored in a locked office at the University of Toronto, while electronic files were secured via password-protected computer. Each interview and follow-up concept map discussion was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. All identifiable information (e.g. name, city, hockey team) was removed from the labeling/storage of recordings and transcripts and each participant was given a pseudonym. As all interviews and follow-up concept map discussions were transcribed verbatim, audio files
were destroyed once transcription was completed. However, all other data produced from the study (e.g. transcripts), were retained for a maximum of 12 months following study completion.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The following chapter is organized into two main sections. In the first section, I briefly highlight the participant demographics. In the second section, which consists of the majority of this chapter, I detail the findings from the data analysis.

Study Participants

In total, 12 (7 male and 5 female) youth hockey athletes participated in this study. All participants had a male coach and at the time of the study were playing at the highest levels of competition for their respective age and gender (e.g. AA/A for females and AAA/AA for males). A summary of the demographic characteristics of the participants is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Competition Level</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Joey</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>AAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>AAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cass</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>AAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tania</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Alyssa</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>AAA</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>AAA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings

As mentioned previously, the purpose of this study was to better understand competitive youth athletes’ interpretations of punishment in hockey. In other words, I was interested in unearthing descriptive data pertaining to punishment such as forms, perceived reasons for use, and perceived effectiveness; how athletes understood punishments in the context of sport...
culture; and athletes’ reactions and responses to punishment tactics, which entailed cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components.

To examine this area of interest I collected interview and concept map data. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted that ranged from 45 to 80 minutes. Concept maps were employed as a supplemental form of data collection and upon completion were followed by a brief discussion intended to seek clarification regarding concept map responses. In accordance with inductive thematic analysis, interview and concept map data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed into meaning units. Meaning units were then grouped and categorized with regards to similar themes and sub-themes pertaining to punishment in sport (Braun & Clarke, 2006). More specifically, as relationships were determined between a variety of categories and sub-categories, themes were developed through the six phases of thematic analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

From the data analysis the following categories were interpreted: the nature of punishment, athletes’ conceptualization of punishment in sport culture, and athletes’ reactions and responses to punishment. Unfortunately, it is important to note that while concept maps were thought to provide additional sources of rich data (specifically those addressing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components), responses did not yield any new findings; instead responses merely corroborated what was already articulated throughout the interview process (see Appendix G for an example of a completed concept map). As a result, participant responses referenced throughout the results will pertain to the interview data only. Interpreted themes, as well as sub-themes will be further explored in the following section.

Nature of Punishment

This theme was interpreted as the youth athletes were asked about particular punishment strategies frequently used in hockey. More specifically, their responses revealed descriptive data
on: forms of punishment, frequency of punishment use, perceived reasons for use, and perceived effectiveness; each sub-theme will be further discussed below.

**Forms of Punishment**

**Benching, yelling, and forced conditioning.** All participants identified the coaching strategies of benching, yelling, and being directed to engage in physical conditioning exercises (e.g. suicides, bag skating, and push-ups), as normative forms of punishment. For example, Jordan stated, “If you get benched, yelled at, or bag skated, these are just the consequences…these are the punishments. You can’t keep doing something wrong.”

Interestingly, the athletes articulated that forced conditioning exercises and yelling were often forms employed at the team rather than the individual level. For example, Mike stated, “These are the three main punishments, but for skating it’s not just the one player who has to skate, maybe sometimes but usually it’s the whole team…so when this punishment happens it’s kind of a group thing.” On the other hand, Dean supported the same notions when referring to yelling, “I’ve seen players get ripped into by our coach but that’s when it’s really bad, most of the time we all get a good ripping together.”

Participants mentioned two additional forms of punishment outside these norms. For example, a few athletes mentioned having to stay behind and pick-up the equipment after practice. David stated, “In practice, the losing team has to clean up or the coach will choose a line to clean up the pucks if they weren’t working hard. That’s the punishment but we don’t really do that often.” Whereas one participant, Joey, described being forced to change positions mid-season as a form of punishment:

I was D and I wasn’t doing well, so he moved me to forward and then back to defense and then back to forward permanently. Having to play a completely different position than what I have played my whole life is my punishment for not playing well at the D-position.
Frequency

**Witnessing and experiencing.** According to the athletes, witnessing a teammate being benched, yelling at, and forced to engage in conditioning exercises, as well as experiencing these tactics oneself, were common practice in the hockey setting. For example, Mike explained, “Almost like every game or practice someone gets benched or gets called out in front of the team, or we are forced to skate. It’s pretty much a constant thing.” When identifying one’s own experience with these forms of punishment, Lauren indicated, “Yes, I have experienced being benched, yelled at by a coach, and forced to do suicides. They happen often that’s just hockey.” Similarly, Stephen stated, “[Punishments] can happen, any time…game or practice, win or lose so obviously I have experienced all those things, but so does everyone else.”

Interestingly, of the three forms of punishment, participants noted that witnessing and experiencing yelling occurred less frequently than benching or forced conditioning exercises. For example, Megan commented, “The coach may yell to instruct plays but that’s different than yelling at us for a punishment because we did something wrong…it happens for sure, but a bit less than the other two [benching and forced conditioning].”

**Perceived Reasons for Use**

Athletes’ perceived reasons for the administration of punishment by the coach varied, although the most frequently cited reasons included performance and behavioural transgressions. More specifically, punishment for performance reasons was comprised of errors/poor play, lack of effort, and the need to win. For example, David highlighted lack of effort combined with specific performance-related events when stating, “Make a bad pass on the ice that ends up in the net because you’re lollygagging or playing like garbage, you better believe you’re getting benched, yelled at, or even bag skated next practice.” In addition, participants noted that punishment was also dependent on winning. For example, Ben commented, “The coach wants to win and we want to win. Even when players try their hardest
but still make mistakes and play poorly, that ruins our chances of winning…they will be punished…you can’t have that type of performance.”

Athletes perceived behavioural transgressions to consist of tardiness, fooling around, and lack of attention. For example, Ben claimed, “Coming late to the game or practice, that’s a pretty good sign that you’re not focused—that’s unacceptable behaviour…for that, players will have to sit or get yelled at.” Other athletes cited fooling around and failing to pay attention to the coach as unacceptable behaviours.

There are certain things you can’t do. You can’t be yelling and just fooling around on the ice or in the room. When you come to the rink you’re expected to focus. That means no shooting after the whistle or talking when the coach is talking and another big one is NEVER EVER take off your equipment when the coach is talking to you, they hate that. If you do these things expect skating next practice or benching next game. (Mike)

Athletes also cited respect, control, mental toughness, reflection, team bonding, and fear and intimidation, as perceived reasons for punishment use. For example, some athletes perceived punishment was employed to promote respect within the coach-athlete relationship. Others perceived punishment was administrated in an effort to control athletes, as Dean described, “By punishing, the coach is telling you what not to do. This is how they control that message…STOP making mistakes.” Moreover, some athletes mentioned mental toughness, as Cass explained, “Punishments let you know how much you can handle…there will always be ups and downs so from those experiences coaches may be pushing you to get mentally stronger and achieve bigger tasks." Others believed punishment was used to enable reflection, allowing them to “review” what they did wrong in order to adapt and improve. Another participant believed punishment (specifically forced conditioning) was used to foster team bonding, as it became the team’s responsibility to help the player who caused the punishment, in order to avoid future team punishment. In more severe cases, athletes highlighted fear and intimidation.
At times I think they do it to intimidate players. I guess the way they look at it…if we are afraid of the coach or fear the punishments we will try our best to limit mistakes because we don’t want to go through it again. (Stephen)

Perceived Effectiveness

**Fix behaviour.** Athletes varied in their views about the effectiveness of punishment for altering unfavourable behaviours (e.g. a bad pass). Interestingly, each athlete often provided multiple interpretations regarding punishment effectiveness. For example, Cass acknowledged, “For me, the punishments worked. I personally don’t like skating, being yelled at, or sitting so I feel like those things tell me to work harder to fix my mistakes, like making bad plays.” However, Cass went on to explain the potential uncertainty of punishment effectiveness:

Sometimes depending on how they are used like if we are benched or yelled at for no reason, then I don’t think they fix mistakes because I don’t know what I did wrong. That would make me not have as much confidence and play worse.

Similarly, Mike identified multiple perspectives on whether punishment altered behaviour when commenting:

I think they do have the potential to work to a certain point because you don’t want to be missing shifts or bag skating all practice so you’ll listen and fix your mistakes…But other times NO…maybe not at all. If players keep getting benched, yelled at, and bag skated until they drop, then at that point they don’t work to fix mistakes because kids aren’t going to want to come to hockey.

**Better athlete.** Athletes’ responses regarding the influence of punishment on athletic development varied between believing punishment fostered athletic growth, inhibited athletic growth, and to a certain extent, fostered athletic growth. Athletes who believed that experiencing punishment fostered athletic growth often referred to the realization of one’s mistakes and motivation for future improvement, as Lauren stated, “Maybe I thought what I was
doing was good, but when you’re punished you realize that’s not the case. You are more aware and that pushes you to try harder and focus more, becoming better.” More specifically, some participants provided detail regarding the perceived effectiveness when addressing each form of punishment as fostering an aspect of athletic growth.

Yelling can lead to mental toughness like tough skin so it can make you better…the forced skating can help with the endurance, it’s probably not the best in the moment but after it pays off. And being benched or pulled pushes you to get better; I think it gives you that fire to want to play the next game. (Ben)

On the contrary, other athletes found benching, yelling, and forced conditioning as inhibiting athletic growth. Stephen stated, “I don’t think they make me a better athlete…if I’m always benched or whatever it doesn’t really improve my skills. I would think talking to a player is best, then you know how to improve instead of feeling bad.” Similarly, Tania stated:

Punishment doesn’t encourage me. If coaches just bench you or yell at you…you can’t get better if your skates never touch the ice or if you’re afraid to try new things. You want to know what you did wrong but you also want to know the good things…just punishing, I don’t think accomplishes that.

Despite some athletes being able to identify punishment as potentially fostering or hindering athletic growth, responses were often less than definitive, expressing uncertainty regarding punishment effectiveness. For example, Jordan noted:

I don’t really know…it’s hard to say. For conditioning it can be bad, you can get super tired but then the positive things are endurance and stamina. Yelling, I don’t think that works the best but from the yelling maybe he tells you something important so you take it and get better…and with benching it makes you realize you made a mistake so you start to improve but you’re also limited in the chances you get to improve so you can lose confidence and become worse.
**Ranking the different forms of punishment.** It is important to note that while the athletes were able to rank the punishments in order of effectiveness, the extent to which they perceived punishments as working were often unfavourable. This notion is best expressed by Mike, who commented, “Punishments can work…sometimes or maybe to a certain point but the negatives probably outweigh the positives…60/40 or 70/30…so more bad than good.”

Although the athletes often questioned the effectiveness of punishment, benching was most frequently perceived as the most effective form of punishment. Given that ice time was reported as the most important element of hockey engagement, participants argued that benching acts as a catalyst to alter behaviour and foster athletic growth.

Benching can maybe make you feel bad, lose confidence, and lower your play but I think it works the best because you will work harder. No one wants to ever lose ice time and then feel like they aren’t good. Players are going to do everything in their power to avoid that punishment and all the bad things that come with it. By putting in all this effort you will fix mistakes and become a better athlete. (David)

Athletes who did not recognize benching as the most effective form of punishment often acknowledged forced conditioning to be most effective. Although participants may have acknowledged the difficulty and tedious nature of this punishment as an enabler to altering unfavourable behaviour, this was a rare occurrence. When athletes perceived forced conditioning as “most effective” they often did so because of the reported benefits to athletic prowess. Jordan explained, “Conditioning may not tell you exactly what you did wrong to fix the mistake but overall I think it’s most effective because technically it helps you skate better and have better stamina.”

Interestingly, some participants had contrary views of benching. For example, Alyssa commented:
Benching out of the three is least effective…I just think there are too many bad things that could happen from sitting a player and taking away something they love [playing]. It makes your self-esteem go really low, you think you suck, and you can’t focus…it’s just a really strong punishment.

Furthermore, yelling was perceived to be the least effective form of punishment and reportedly produced negative consequences. In addition, athletes often acknowledged a feasible alternative to yelling.

Players don’t really react well to yelling…it has the same negatives as benching besides the loss of playing time so it doesn’t really work. The coach can be more effective in getting his message across and helping us improve by talking in the first place. (Tania)

**Summary**

In summary, athletes indicated that the coaching strategies of benching, yelling, and forced conditioning were considered normative forms of punishment. All athletes reported that witnessing a teammate endure punishment or experiencing punishment oneself were common occurrences in competitive youth hockey. Perceived reasons for punishment employment varied, with the athletes most frequently citing performance and behavioural transgressions. Athletes’ responses highlighted mixed perspectives on whether punishments altered unfavourable behaviours and fostered athletic growth.

**Athletes’ Conceptualization of Punishment in Sport Culture**

This theme was interpreted as a result of the athletes’ understanding regarding the use of benching, yelling, and forced conditioning in sport. Athletes’ perceptions of the sport culture produced responses that exemplified the reported normalization of punishment in competitive youth hockey. These notions are addressed through the following sub-components: tolerance or
acceptance of punishment, part of the game, the dichotomy between school versus sport, and perceived lack of alternatives to punishment.

**Tolerance or Acceptance of Punishment**

Despite the athletes’ overwhelming dislike towards punishment, responses frequently indicated a tolerance for punishment. A perceived inability to alter the course of punishment use was often a determinant of tolerance, as Tania explained, “I deal with punishment because I have to, not because I think they’re okay or I like them. I don’t really have a choice, I have to go along with them.” Participants also cited tolerance, despite highlighting more effective alternative coaching practices. Stephen explained, “I don’t really like punishment, I don’t think they work as good as other strategies like talking to players or instructing players so they can improve…but these are the strategies coaches always use, that won’t change.” Furthermore, even in extreme cases where athletes noted punishment might have perpetuated withdrawal from hockey, a tolerance mentality still persisted.

There have been times where I really don’t agree with a coach using them. For a coach to drive a player away by constantly benching, yelling or whatever, that’s not okay. Everyone pays good money and that isn’t fair for them to go through that…it’s not right, but what can I do, either I leave too or I just put my head down and go along with it. (David)

In a few cases, athletes moved beyond just tolerating punishment and mentioned accepting these tactics even though they did not like them.

I accept them but I don’t like them. Sometimes they are okay. If I personally need to fix something that I have been told before and it costs our team, then I accept that punishments need to happen. At the end of the day, sports are about competition so whether or not I like the punishments doesn’t really matter…you need to realize you have to compete and win and if you don’t there are consequences. (Lauren)
Part of the Game

Moving beyond tolerance and acceptance, all participants perceived punishment as a normative aspect of sport. Dean explained, “Punishments are part of hockey, every coach uses them, they’re the standard coaching tactics.” Punishments come with the territory of playing hockey and if athletes cannot handle it then they will likely transition out of the sport, as Cass explained:

If you don’t want to be in an intense environment, then you can play another sport. A lot of players quit hockey because they don’t want to be punished, they just want to always have fun. That’s not going to happen, unless you have a nice coach.

Although all participants labeled punishment as “part of the game,” the degree to which they perceived punishment as an integral component of sport varied. For example, some participants recognized punishment as a necessity for future sport excellence. Jordan stated, “If you want to make it to the NHL, there are going to be some tough parts like punishments—it’s just part of being a competitive athlete…you’re not going to become a superstar without facing some challenges.”

Athletes also rationalized punishment as an important “part of the game” because these methods reportedly acted as a buffer or “reality check” that no one is perfect and there is always room for improvement. According to Joey, “You need punishments because if you don’t then you will think you’re some superstar when you’re really not…don’t get a big head. How are you ever supposed to get better if you already think you’re the best?”

Additionally, athletes argued that the form of punishment and the level of competition can be unique elements that determine how engrained punishment is in hockey. Superior endurance was often referenced as an attribute needed for hockey, and thus the extent to which forced conditioning was perceived as integral was greater compared to benching and yelling. Stephen stated, “Conditioning exercises are more a part of the game…it’s an endurance sport
and an endurance punishment…it will give me better stamina.” Similarly, Dean commented on the level of competition:

Playing AAA is a high level so if you want to stay you have to deal with punishments, it’s just a part of the sport… if you don’t want a coach to yell at you, you can go play A or AA. AAA coaches will do these things more just because it’s so competitive and to get through to you because it’s the highest level.

Despite agreeing that punishments are a part of hockey, some athletes refused to acknowledge these tactics as necessities. For example, Ben noted, “They do happen, don’t get me wrong. I just don’t think that you need to be punished to be good. Practicing new plays helps you more than if you get punished for making a mistake…practice, practice, practice.” Moreover, other athletes referenced punishment as “part of the game” and not because it acts as a tool to sport excellence or a “reality check.” Lauren referenced punishment as inevitable experiences, “You can’t truly have a ‘hockey experience’ if you haven’t been punished. Even the really good players I’m sure have experienced one of those punishments.”

**School versus Sport**

**Teacher versus coach.** Athletes described broadly the difference in roles between a teacher and a coach, an element they perceived as having the potential to enable more frequent punishment use in sport. According to some athletes, a teacher is limited in behavioural management strategies because he or she has certain guidelines to follow, unlike a coach who has more freedom. Jordan described, “There are different procedures teachers can follow…send them to the office, use conduct reports or suspensions. In hockey, there is no set way for a coach to deal with mistakes or bad behaviour so they can just punish.”

Responses also indicated that athletes perceived prospective expectations of a teacher and a coach, in relation to their respective cultures, as a reason why punishment may be more “okay” in sport.
The important thing in hockey is trying to win and being the best team, that’s the coach’s job. Also maybe they want to coach a higher level so they will punish because it will give the team a better chance to win. Teachers aren’t really trying to go to higher levels or win. The job of the teacher is to help us learn. They may want their class to have the highest marks but the most important thing is learning, so a teacher will do that by explaining better and having more notes. (David)

Athletes also emphasized that teaching is a full-time job; whereas, youth hockey coaches often volunteered. Thus, punishments may be seen as more unacceptable when employed by teachers because of the implications on job status and future earnings.

I don’t think that a teacher can force me to do laps or yell at me like a coach. Parents would be upset, they are paying them to teach us, and then the teacher can get fired and lose all the money…the hockey coach is a volunteer so they can get away with using punishment more, they don’t have to be nice all the time. They have another job if they get fired; a teacher has more at stake, they have to behave. (Megan)

Interestingly, athletes reported that even at higher levels where coaches get paid, the expectations of the coach in relation to sport culture minimizes the threat to job status and future earnings, enabling punishment use. Cass described, “At higher levels in hockey coaches are paid but you can’t fire a coach for benching kids. Everyone knows they’re expected to do whatever it takes to win. A teacher doesn’t have that option…they can’t risk losing everything.”

**Team oriented versus individual.** According to athletes’ responses, another plausible reason as to why punishment is more common in hockey pertains to the team environment; whereas, school often focused solely on the individual. The individuality associated with students in school makes punishment an unfavourable tool. On the other hand, in sport, since the team is considered one unit, their collective belief and needs will always be similar making the wide spread use of punishment more applicable.
School has different kids, with different needs. Some kids may be good in math but not gym so punishments are not for everyone. In hockey everyone’s on the same page. Yeah, some kids are better than others but they’re all there for the same reason, there’s one way to be an athlete so punishments can work for all. (Dean)

Additionally, athletes claimed that because team needs are put before the individual in sport, as opposed to school, the employment of punishment is a more appropriate tactic.

School you can always reach out for help, you can go to the teacher, that’s what they’re there for. You can have one-on-one time and they won’t punish you for trying to learn. In hockey you can’t really ask for this one-on-one time to learn because it’s not just about how you are doing, but the team and winning. To meet these goals punishments can be used. (Lauren)

Other athletes believed that because sport was “team-oriented” there was a greater responsibility and more at stake if one person made an error, as it would affect not only the individual who made the mistake but the surrounding players. Alyssa commented:

In school you are just doing work that will help you learn and you’re almost by yourself. You have friends in the class but it’s not like their marks affect you or your marks affect them, so you really only have to worry about yourself. In hockey it’s a team thing, if one person makes a mistake it affects everyone and the whole team loses so everyone will get punished…we are one unit.

Compulsory versus voluntary. Athletes often cited sport as an “extra” or an “add-on” to daily activities. Athletes believed that since school was a mandatory requirement and sport was essentially a choice, punishments could be implemented because if a player cannot deal with these tactics they have the option of leaving. Mike stated, “Hockey you are choosing to play and you can always leave at any point. So then when you’re signing up it's like punishments are okay because at the end of the day I chose this.” Similarly, Lauren expressed:
In school, you don’t have a choice…you have to go. Teachers try and make it an accepting environment so punishments can’t really be used because then you will hate it. In hockey, you have a choice, you choose to play and you can choose to leave without getting in trouble, so then punishments are okay because you have options. You want hockey to always be fun but it doesn’t have to be because it’s not mandatory…it’s extra. Athletes often hinted that because hockey is deemed an “extra” activity, certain expectations likely come with this choice (i.e. dealing with punishment) that are not present in school.

Because you can choose to leave or be a part of hockey, maybe when you sign up you’re expected to be able to deal with punishments if you want to be an athlete. School you HAVE to go…you can’t choose whether you want to be a student, so you’re not expected to deal with that stuff. (Tania)

**Values and expectations.** Responses indicated that athletes perceived different value systems and expectations existing between the sporting and school environment (i.e. athlete vs. student) that likely fostered punishment use in sport. Athletes argued sport is primarily concerned with performance excellence, which took the form of competitiveness and winning; whereas, the school environment valued learning and development. Mike commented:

Sport values competitiveness, school values learning, being fair and everyone getting a turn. Players who are always competing are seen as performing well so the best get the privileges. Whoever is not being aggressive and competitive would get punishments because that’s not seen as an acceptable performance.

Subsequently, athletes believed that associated with these values were requisite expectations for an athlete such as being competitive (i.e. a winner) and tough, compared to a student who was expected to try hard and be willing to learn, notions which reportedly further
enabled punishment employment. Tania explained the need to outcompete others and the repercussion that follow if you fail:

School you don’t really need to be super competitive so a teacher isn’t going to bench you or yell at you if one kid does better but in hockey you need to fight against other teams and be better than the other players…that’s what’s expected. For example, if you lose the puck and it ends up in your net then you have to be benched…it sends the message you have to be better…compete and be a winner.

Additionally, athletes’ responses highlighted that performance success is determined even more so by wins versus loss ratios. They argued that the emphasis on winning present in sport compared to school further perpetuated punishment use because “anything goes.” Stephen stated, “School you go to learn and get smart, there’s no winning. In hockey, you learn but you also have to be the best all the time. Because winning is the most important, punishments are okay. It’s about being first not last.”

Accordingly, in an effort to ‘win-at-all-costs,’ participants emphasized the physical expectations needed from a hockey player.

You’re dealing with hard body checks and puck shots, doing whatever it takes to win. If we are expected to handle that, punishments are just another thing. In school you don’t need to be tough or dive in front of shots, so it would be weird for punishments to happen, you’re just expected to put in effort and learn. (Ben)

Furthermore, some participants highlighted a time element associated with these respective values and expectations that also reportedly fostered more frequent punishment use in sport. For example, sport values and requires constant displays of performance excellence (i.e. competitiveness and winning), as opposed to the slow progressive nature adopted and expected by school with regards to learning and growth.
When you are learning in school you can mess up a bunch of times, like doing bad on tests. As long as you’re trying to learn a teacher doesn’t really yell at you or punish you. In hockey you can’t make the same mistake over and over again, you need to fix it fast. If you need more time then you have to go to lower levels because you’re not performing. Since there’s no time for mistakes like school, hockey coaches know that they can punish you. (Dean)

**Lack of Alternatives to Punishment**

When the athletes were asked if they would like to change something about their coaches, only a few mentioned limiting punishment use. For example, Cass expressed her desire for a less punitive coach and thus one who views the sport through an athlete’s perspective:

> For coaches I just wish they weren’t so uptight and gave us more opportunities to make mistakes and learn from it ourselves. I wish that they would look at it from a player’s eyes because if they were the player they wouldn’t want to get punished, they would want a chance but if you’re the coach you think it’s fine. If they thought about how we felt and realized that we are trying then I don’t think they would punish as often.

Accordingly, when the athletes were asked about how they would handle their own players if they were coaches, they also mentioned employing similar alternatives that encompassed a more positive approach and focused on communication, explanation, and encouragement. For example, Lauren expressed, “I would provide feedback and review sessions but in a positive way that is encouraging and helps them understand how to achieve goals. This will show them I care about their improvements.”

The athletes never explicitly indicated a desire for their coaches to completely abandon punishment use. In fact, the majority of the athletes expressed a preference for a stricter coach. For example, David articulated, “A tough coach is sometimes better than a nicer coach…because even though the mean coachpunishes, they help shape you and make sure you
don’t make mistakes. The nicer coach may just be soft and not care.” Most athletes rationalized punishment use by their coach if an explanation as to why punishment occurred was provided.

It’s not really the punishments that are the problem. We just wish that when they punish us they would explain the mistake that caused it, so we know and can learn how to fix it. I think that’s the real problem, we never know for sure what the mistake was and we HATE that. (Joey)

Unsurprisingly, the athletes admitted, regardless of their efforts to be a positive oriented coach, they would also never entirely abandon the use of punishment.

You can try to find other ways before punishment BUT I don’t think you can never ever use punishments, not even once…so even if I was a coach I would still use punishment. Every coach uses them and they do get certain messages across …even though it’s hard to tell when is too much. (Megan)

Some of the athletes pinpointed certain times, when, if they were to coach punishment would be the only option. For example, Ben mentioned, “Sometimes you have no choice but to skate, yell, and bench the players that aren’t great. That may take away some confidence but hockey is a competitive sport. There are consequences for not competing or winning.” Likewise, Dean commented, “Effort is HUGE. If the effort isn’t there I’d punish them. I’ll let mistakes happen once or twice but there is no excuse for a lack of effort!”

Furthermore, out of the three punishments, the athletes expressed a degree of contentment with being forced to engage in conditioning exercises, and thus indicated that this tactic would be used most frequently when they became coaches. Forced conditioning reportedly produced fewer negative repercussions and was seen as an integral part of hockey. Joey expressed, “Being forced to skate is fine…it’s a part of hockey, you don’t really lose confidence and it helps with endurance, which is super important…so I would use conditioning when I coach too, it seems like the right way.”
Summary

In summary, despite athletes reporting a dislike towards punishment use, they frequently reported tolerance, and in rare cases, acceptance. Punishments were consistently deemed “part of the game,” however, the extent to which punishments were perceived as integral aspects of hockey varied. According to the athletes, the perceived differences between school and sport (e.g. team versus individual) perpetuated an environment conducive to punishment use. Furthermore, despite few athletes wishing for less use of punishment by coaches, responses often indicated a preference for a strict coach; they also expressed an intent to employ punishment should they become a coach in the future.

Athletes’ Reactions and Responses to Punishment

Athletes’ reactions and responses to punishment consisted of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components although it is important to note that these components are not mutually exclusive; instead they overlap and influence one another. Across these components, sub-themes were interpreted from interview data and corroborating concept map responses, relating to the psychological self, relationships, and the sport experience. The following sections will further explore these results.

Psychological Self

This theme was interpreted as the athletes identified cognitions, emotional responses, and behaviours associated with punishments that impacted or had the potential to impact the self. More specifically, athletes’ reactions and responses often encompassed negative and positive perceptions of the self, perceived expectations of others that negatively influenced the self, and intentions to minimize negative or enhance positive notions of the self. The following topics will be further discussed below.
Negative Perceptions of Self

**Current self.** After the employment of punishment, specifically benching and yelling, athletes often thought negatively about the self. One of the ways in which the athletes embodied negative perceptions of the self was through blaming themselves when punishment occurred. For example, Jordan thought, “You screwed up, you could’ve fixed that, it’s all your fault and now you’re getting blasted. I’ve been playing hockey for five years - I can’t be screwing up. I have no one to blame but myself.” Likewise, David acknowledged, “I was angry and frustrated at myself that I made a bad play. I have high expectations, I’m just disappointed that I put myself in a position where I got punished in front of the team.”

Since athletes believed that experiencing benching, yelling, and on more rare occurrences, conditioning, was solely their fault, they also engaged in cognitive and emotional processes that degraded their athletic abilities. Athletes often referred to “not being good enough,” as Dean described when being benched:

I’m embarrassed because I’m supposed to be a good player but I’m not on the ice. I also feel really ashamed, it’s like a punch in the gut …I feel so low. Benching makes me think I’m not good enough and can only make mistakes. I’m a terrible hockey player.

Likewise, Tania perpetuated these self-debilitating perceptions of the self, acknowledging public shaming, when she described her experiences with being yelled at:

I can’t help but feel embarrassed because it’s like YOU are the one out of everyone that is getting yelled at. YOU are the one that screwed up. I feel shame too because it makes me feel like I did something so bad…I’m the worst.

Additionally, negative perceptions about one’s abilities were often made through comparisons to other teammates when experiencing benching and yelling. As a result, athletes recognized thoughts and feelings of inadequacy, such as worthlessness and uselessness.
After I get punished I start to think that compared to other players I’m not that good…I’m not a good player! I feel like I have nothing to contribute. Good players don’t get punished…so if I do, that means I suck and I’m not needed, just the extra player.

(Stephen)

Benching seemed to stimulate the most negative cognitions and feelings about one’s abilities. Experiencing yelling as a punishment still allowed the athletes to engage in play; however, the loss of ice time associated with benching reportedly acted as a confirmation of their negative perspectives about the self. For example, Cass explained:

Am I so bad that I can’t even go on for a shift? I can’t earn any ice time, but somehow I earned a spot on the bench. Everyone else is getting ice but I’m sitting here like a loser…benching brings me to a dark place.

Similarly, Mike stated:

You’re off the ice and sitting on the bench, you have no chance to play and redeem yourself and no chance to stop how you are feeling. You’re physically not part of the game. You feel a bunch of things…embarrassed that you have to sit…ashamed because you think and feel that you aren’t good enough to play. Realizing you have been removed from the situation [the game] makes you feel so low…you’re literally just taking up space.

Data indicated that benching or “pulling” for goalies reportedly had even greater implications on the game, and thus the self.

For goalies play literally stops and it’s just me. Once I get pulled that’s it I can’t go back…not like a player. The skate over to the bench is the worst. It felt shameful…like I was walking on a path of shame. I felt like an awful player. In that moment I just realized that the team can’t win with me in net. I played so bad that the game had to actually stop so I could be replaced. I no longer matter to the game or the team. (Alyssa)
Although blaming the self and questioning one’s ability were most commonly associated with experiencing benching and yelling, these perspectives were at times also reported when the athletes identified themselves as responsible for forced conditioning employment. For example David stated, “I’d be mad and frustrated with myself if I caused skating for the team, especially for something dumb like missing a shot. I’d feel embarrassed and maybe a little shame because I’m better than that.”

**Future self.** According to athletes’ responses, cognitions and feelings associated with punishment were not limited to the current self, but also referenced the future self. Once again, these responses primarily resulted from benching and yelling, as the athletes questioned their hockey ability and hockey future. More specifically, athletes questioned their future place in hockey with regards to potentially having to go to a lower level, changing teams, and even contemplating leaving the sport. For example, Joey mentioned:

I’m going to get kicked off the team and I’m not going to have a career. My reputation is going to be so bad and no one will want to play me anymore. I will drop back to A, AA or even house league! If I suck that bad, maybe I’ll even quit.

Participants further highlighted these negative notions about the future self, when mentioning emotional responses, which included but were not limited to uselessness and worthlessness.

You feel like you suck and can’t do anything right to help the team. These feelings go away a little but they’re always there, and will be there even more if you keep getting punished. I had friends who left because they didn’t want to feel badly about themselves, it was too much…sometimes I feel the same. (Stephen)

Athletes also articulated the impact of how thoughts and feelings of embarrassment and shame lingered, perpetuating negative perceptions about the future self when commenting on the “next time:”
Whenever you get benched or yelled at those feelings of shame and embarrassment stick with you in the back of your mind. Knowing how bad you can feel makes you worry about the next time…you start to always think about those things before punishment even happens. Sooner or later you won’t be able to deal with feeling like that. (Mike)

Furthermore, athletes’ perceptions of the future self were influenced by the prospective use of punishment. Knowing a coach will punish often consumed athletes with negative thoughts, as well as feelings of anxiety about their subsequent performances and overall hockey future.

Knowing that I may be benched or yelled at would constantly be in my head, making me feel nervous and shaky while I play. I’m thinking of not making a dumb move so I’ll just pass it to another player because I don’t want to take that risk and get punished…but that also worries me because if I ice the puck, I would be giving up an opportunity. Worrying about that stuff before it even happens makes me lose confidence…I’ll probably even think about whether I should be playing hockey. (Megan)

The negative implications for the future self that were anticipated with continued punishment use included thoughts about removing themselves from specific situations that were likely to result in more punishment. Lauren stated, “Sometimes I didn’t want to go to games or practices or even want to go on the ice. I knew yelling could happen or worse benching and I just didn’t want to think or feel badly about myself.”

Positive Perceptions of Self

While reported less frequently, experiencing punishment contributed to positive cognitions and feelings about the self. As mentioned previously, athletes at times might have perceived benching and yelling as potentially fostering athletic growth. However, this category pertained solely to positive perceptions about the self that occurred in accordance with
experiencing forced conditioning exercises. Athletes’ responses demonstrated notions regarding athletic prowess. Joey stated, “When I’m forced to skate, I see some good things…stronger legs and better strides. So I try and see this punishment as giving me more speed.” Accordingly, few athletes explained that being forced to engage in conditioning exercises made them push themselves, exemplifying perseverance, pride, and accomplishment. For example, Alyssa reported, “It’s tough, I’m pushing myself to not give in and be the last one, so I give it my all and when I finish I know I worked my hardest.”

Interestingly, other athletes were able to identify positive future oriented perceptions about the self only after forced conditioning exercises were completed. For example, Cass explained:

When you’re in the moment, you’re so tired and your legs are jelly. It’s hard to think positively, but right after I realize that it helps me because most of the time when the other teams are fading in the game I stay strong, so this is good for me.

Likewise, some athletes mentioned positive feelings of accomplishment and relief. Relief was framed in a positive aspect, as the athletes expressed that although this punishment had pushed them to the limit, they were able to endure with limited negative consequences to the self. For example, David stated:

The 30 minutes of skating sucks, but after it’s over with, you’re kind of happy. Everyone just drops and is thankful the punishment is over…we are exhausted but we made it and we are okay. Now we can work on other stuff and get better…the worst has past. You are still standing…maybe even stronger.

**Others’ Expectations**

Negative cognitive and emotional responses about the self were also perpetuated by the athletes’ perceived expectations of others, such as coaches, parents, and teammates. Lauren
emphasized negative thoughts coaches and teammates might have about the self when benched or yelled at:

When teammates see me get benched or yelled at they’re probably thinking ‘she’s getting punished because she’s a crappier player.’ And near the end of the season other coaches may come to see you play and if they see you sitting or your coach yelling at you, it doesn’t look good and they’ll be thinking, ‘I don’t want a player who sucks.’ Accordingly, athletes often acknowledged emotional reactions that resulted in embarrassment, shame, worthlessness, and uselessness. The athletes explicitly stated these feelings arose because of what they believed the coach, teammates, and parents’ expectations of them were.

I feel really bad about myself. I’m embarrassed because everyone, even parents can see what is happening to me…but also ashamed I guess because by benching or even yelling at me maybe the coach is saying I’m not good enough for the team and can only make mistakes. When my teammates see me sitting there, they’re probably thinking the same and look at me as an example of what not to do, which makes me feel even lower.

(Dean)

The athletes also frequently reported thoughts and feelings of guilt, when benched or yelled at, as they believed they were not living up to perceived expectations of others, and thus were to blame for negative occurrences in sport. For example, Tania emphasized, “I feel responsible…I’m not living up to what the coach and teammates expect me to do on the ice and that’s why I’m getting punished. Maybe they think it’s all my fault. Maybe my parents think that too.”

Negative beliefs about how others might have perceived the self were once again most apparent for benching, as ice time or lack thereof informed others of one’s worth as a player. Mike commented, "The more you play, the more it tells everyone that you’re a star. When
everyone sees you sitting it’s clear that you’re not worthy of playing time, which makes you feel ashamed because everyone knows you’re a crappy player.”

More specifically, the negative implications of the perceived expectations of coaches, teammates, and parents seemed most apparent for goalies when being pulled.

Everyone always says goalies are the last line of defense, so when teams lose or play bad goalies are always blamed. When I’m pulled I feel humiliated. All I think about is how my teammates, coaches, people in the stands, and even the other team knows it’s 100% my fault…I can’t escape…they can see me. I have to be removed…this makes me feel terrible. (Jordan)

Furthermore, in rare cases where the athletes recognized themselves as the reason for the team engaging in forced conditioning, they mentioned negative thoughts and feelings the coach and teammates might have about the self. For example, Stephen stated, “I feel bad for messing up the drill, something that the coach and team probably think was easy…I feel a little ashamed because they are probably thinking ‘this kid can’t even follow simple instructions.’”

**Behavioural Responses Related to the Self**

Athletes reported engaging in passive or effortful behaviours that were intended to limit the negative perceptions of the self or enhance perceptions of the self, as a result of experiencing benching, yelling, or forced conditioning exercises. With regards to passive behaviours, athletes mentioned simply tolerating the punishment and moving forward, limiting the time available to think negatively about one’s self. For example, Dean commented, “I would just suck it up and go along with it. Try not to make it a bigger deal than it is or else I’ll start to feel like crap.”

A few athletes also mentioned emotional outbursts as another passive behaviour that reportedly limited the negative impact caused by punishment experiences on the self. Experiencing punishment can result in pent-up emotions, as Cass explained, “After a while,
whether it’s benching, yelling, or skating I’m just so mad that I will yell, but not at anyone just to the side to let out all the negatives…it makes me feel better.”

On the other hand, athletes more frequently referenced engaging in effortful behaviours (cognitive and physical). Effortful cognitive behaviours included self-talk and blocking out. Self-talk behaviours were often encouraging and instructional. For example, Lauren emphasized, “I tell myself ‘you know that you are better than this and that you can do better. Just keep practicing, mistakes happen…this won’t be forever.’ Sometimes you just have to think of it in a different way.” However, not all athletes engaged in positive self-talk behaviours after punishment. Jordan engaged in negative self-talk as he commented, “When I get benched, I just say to myself ‘c’mon you had that, you screwed up!’ The rest of the game I would just be thinking that could be me in net if I didn’t make those stupid mistakes.”

Athletes also engaged in blocking or distraction behaviours. For example, Tania described:

If I get benched or yelled at, to avoid thinking bad about myself I try and block it all out and think of random things. I would just try and count the dots or bumps on the floor to keep me busy and pass the time. Same goes with skating, I’ll count the hash marks and the lines on the ice…that takes my mind away from thinking bad things.

Additionally, athletes engaged in effortful physical behaviours that were intended to limit negative perceptions or enhance the self. These behaviours included practicing and working harder to fix mistakes that resulted in punishment. Ben stated, “Whatever the punishment is, next time I would give 110%. I would work harder so I get stronger and just keep practicing to fix the mistakes. I will be better and limit the amount of punishments in the future.”
After being benched, yelled at, or forced to do conditioning exercises, athletes engaged in the physical behaviour of altering their style of play. This behaviour reportedly allowed athletes to avoid situations that would result in belittling of the self.

I would change the way I played the game. I wouldn’t really want to take chances in the game or practice because what if from my rush they go back and score, then it’s all my fault and I get benched. I would play safer so that there’s little chance I can get punished and then have to feel bad about myself. (Stephen)

Summary

As evidenced by the athletes’ testimonies, punishments impacted the psychological self. Unfortunately, the way in which punishments, specifically benching and yelling, reportedly impacted the psychological self were often negative in nature. Athletes frequently reported negative thoughts and feelings about the self in relation to their athletic abilities, hockey future, and expectations of others. However, out of the three forms of punishment, forced conditioning appeared to stimulate positive thoughts and feelings about the self. Behaviours were passive or effortful and were intended to minimize negative perceptions of the self or enhance the self.

Relationships

This theme was interpreted as the athletes identified cognitions, emotional responses, and behaviours associated with punishments that impacted or had the potential to impact their relationships with others. More specifically, athletes’ reactions and responses often encompassed the coach-athlete relationship and the teammate-teammate relationship. These topics will be further addressed in the following sections.

Coach-Athlete Relationship

Athletes had numerous cognitions and emotional responses directed towards the coach after experiencing punishment. Athletes’ thoughts and feelings included questioning the coach’s methods, as well as the overall worth of the coach. For example, Cass commented,
“Punishments are just annoying, they can be inconsistent like one mistake is okay but then something else happens and it’s the end of the world...It just makes me feel like I’m over it, I’m so over him.” More specifically, questioning was frequently associated with being forced to engage in conditioning exercises as a team. David indicated, “When one person makes a mistake and everyone has to skate or do push-ups, I question the coach and wonder how good of a coach he is. Does he not see how dumb it is to punish everyone else?”

In addition, most athletes disliked the coach. These notions commonly occurred after experiencing benching and yelling. Dean expressed, “I’m so mad when the coach benches me or yells, all I’m thinking is ‘this coach sucks, screw him...this coach is an ass, I hate him, it’s not fair, I don’t even want to look at him.’” More specifically, athletes often disliked the coach, as they identified him as the person responsible for making them think and feel negatively about themselves.

Let’s say I get benched or whatever, all the negative feelings I have about myself, I would blame that on the coach. I would put all of my thoughts and emotions on him…I wanted to kill my coach, I hated him for making me think and feel that way. (Alyssa)

Athletes further emphasized the negative impact that disliking the coach had on the coach-athlete relationship, after experiencing benching and yelling, when they highlighted future interactions with the coach and tarnished aspects of their relationship. For example, perceptions of dislike towards the coach often perpetuated lack of trust and lack of respect.

When a coach benches or even yells, I start to not like him. Then when he tries to give me advice I’m not going to want to listen, I’m like ‘get away from me, how am I supposed to trust you when you do those things?’ I didn’t really respect him; I kind of just rebelled. I just wanted to ignore and avoid him. (Mike)

Despite athletes identifying perceptions associated with questioning the coach after experiencing forced conditioning, this punishment often did not result in thoughts and feelings
about disliking the coach. Athletes believed the teammate who made the mistake was more at fault, as Ben described, “I’m a little upset with the coach because he can handle a mistake differently, but I would be more mad at the player. The coach is just enforcing rules, the player shouldn’t be doing something they aren’t supposed to.”

Furthermore, after benching and yelling, athletes reportedly questioned their relationship status with their coach. For example, Tania commented, “Why is he doing this to me? The coach doesn’t even like me for his team. He hates me right now. The coach likes other players more than me... maybe we don’t really have a good relationship.” The uncertainty of the player’s relationship status with the coach sometimes resulted in fearing the coach and the potential unknown future consequences, as Stephen noted, “Players become scared and intimidated by the coach because they’re so intense when they punish. I just wonder what he might do to me…I try to do everything he wants so I don’t make another mistake.”

**Teammate-Teammate Relationship**

Unlike thoughts and feelings associated with coach-athlete interactions, which occurred after benching and yelling, athletes indicated conditioning was a team-oriented punishment that resulted directly from the actions of other players, stimulating negative perceptions of the teammate-teammate relationship. The athletes often mentioned thoughts and feelings, which embodied anger and hate towards the player who they perceived caused the punishment. For example, Ben described, “You’re such an idiot for not paying attention, now everyone has to skate. I was so pissed off at the player who caused it…I just wanted to yell and say ‘you’re so stupid.’” Similarly, Lauren commented:

> When I got benched, I was thinking, ‘this is my fault’ and I felt bad about myself. When we are forced to skate this wasn’t my fault it was somebody else’s. Now we all have to suffer because of that player. I felt angry and hated the player so much.
More specifically, athletes recognized that thoughts and feelings of dislike towards the teammate who caused the punishment was often a result of the time their teammate had taken away from allowing them to develop new skills. Dean stated, “I was just so frustrated, I was annoyed with the player…sometimes even hated him for that moment because now we have to skate for their mistake and I don’t get to practice skills I need to work on.” Unsurprisingly, athletes recognized that if they were the individuals who caused forced conditioning for the whole team, they believed their teammates would have similar thoughts and emotional responses of dislike. For example, Stephen noted, “I would try not to feel super negative towards the player who caused the punishment because if it was my fault I wouldn’t want my friends to hate me and make me feel bad about myself.”

On the other hand, some athletes recognized that hockey is a “team sport” with important friendships-notions that reportedly limited negative perceptions of the teammate–teammate relationship associated with being forced to engage in conditioning exercises. Alyssa emphasized the importance of this collective belief to minimize a divide within the team, when she commented, “I think the player should just do it but then I realize we are a team, we need to be together, a team makes sacrifices for each other. If one person messes up that means everyone messes up.” Similarly, Tania explained, “I’d be angry and definitely wouldn’t be the biggest fan of that player in the moment because of what they did, but I wouldn’t feel like this about them forever because they are my friends and we are a team.” However, not all athletes emphasized this collective belief in a positive manner as David commented, “Why should I be punished for someone else’s mistake? I’ve never seen why it’s fair for everyone to be skated for one person’s mistake, it’s like someone murdering somebody and you being put in jail for doing nothing.”
Although rare, benching and yelling at times fostered thoughts and feelings that involved the teammate-teammate relationship. For example, few athletes mentioned perceptions of being alone and isolated, which were directly influenced by teammate interactions or lack thereof.

Being benched makes you feel alone, I had no one to talk to. The team knows I’m there but they just kept going by me and were focused more on the game. They didn’t say anything to me and if they did it kind of wouldn’t mean anything because they weren’t experiencing what I was going through. It’s the same when you get yelled at by yourself, you’re alone there’s no one going through it with you to talk to…it’s like when I’m home alone…just by myself. (Lauren)

Likewise, a few athletes indicated that cognitions and feelings of embarrassment, shame, uselessness, and worthlessness associated with benching and yelling were also influenced by teammate-teammate interactions.

When I’m benched my teammates know but they still ask if I’m going on and I have to tell them no, which is embarrassing…or when I get yelled at and they can hear but they ask and it doesn’t make me feel good. I know that I’m being punished and they know that I’m punished but they still ask, not because they care but to be nosy…I just wonder if they’re really my friends and I keep thinking about the fact that I am obviously the one person on the team who can’t do anything right. (Mike)

Even fewer athletes indicated that teammate interactions associated with benching or yelling enabled positive perceptions, as Alyssa stated, “Sometimes my teammates will motivate me and remind me that benching and yelling happens, this makes me think they really care about me and they’re my friends because I wasn’t in it alone.”

**Behavioural Responses Related to Relationships**

Athletes’ responses exemplified a dichotomy regarding reported behaviours directed towards the coach and teammates, resulting from punishment employment. For example, when
athletes experienced being yelled at, benched, or forced to engage in conditioning exercises, they would often distance themselves from the coach in an effort to avoid future repercussions. Stephen commented, “When the coach punishes me or the team you want to avoid him at all costs, you try not to look at him. Everyone would get out of the dressing room as fast as possible to avoid more consequences.” Similarly, Lauren explained, “I would avoid talking to the coach or asking questions because that could result in more punishments and also at that moment I may hear something that I don’t want to, which would make me feel even worse.”

There were times, after punishment occurred, when the athletes advocated engaging in conversation with the coach. For example, in situations where punishments were unclear, it was appropriate to talk with the coach to gain feedback.

If I wasn’t sure why I am being punished I would go talk to the coach to understand what I did wrong, so that I could fix the problems and then the next time I can go out and do better. If you don’t know what you did, how are you supposed to fix it? You’ll just keep making the mistake. (Joey)

Nevertheless, these behavioural responses were often rare, as most athletes, such as Cass expressed, “I’d want to talk to the coach and maybe ask why I’m punished but most of the time I don’t have the nerve to do those things because it might get worse.”

Compared to the reported behaviours associated with the coach, athletes’ behaviours directed towards teammates more often involved seeking interaction after punishment experiences, as opposed to avoidance. Athletes referenced engaging with teammates after punishment, citing apparent social support, as David noted, “Talking to my D partner helps me understand how I can improve and they make me feel a bit better because they say ‘don’t worry it happens.’” Athletes also mentioned talking with teammates and providing them with instructions on how to improve after punishment occurred. This was an interaction that was specific to being forced to do conditioning exercises, as this punishment was often team-
oriented. Athletes’ responses exemplified a responsibility to help the individual who caused the punishment. For example, Jordan stated, “It’s important we talk to our players and tell them how to improve because if we don’t, then we’ll all continue to skate…we win as a team and we lose as a team…it’s not an individual thing.”

In other situations, fewer athletes emphasized a need to avoid talking to teammates after experiencing punishment. Instead of social support, they perceived their teammates would “make the situation bigger than what it was” and “feel sorry for them,” responses they did not consider favourable. Interestingly, the athletes were selective in who they interacted with after experiencing punishment.

I would only talk to my best friends on the team and avoid the others. Sometimes the other players will be sneaky and go tell the coach what you said to get you in more trouble, so you can’t really trust everyone. Also if you’re being benched or yelled at, the other players may pretend to care but really they’re happy because it makes them look better, so I can’t talk to those players.” (Tania)

Summary

Overall, punishments reportedly stimulated cognitions, emotional responses, and behaviours that impacted or had the potential to impact the athletes’ relationships with the coach and teammates. Experiencing benching and yelling often prompted negative thoughts and feelings towards the coach, whereas forced conditioning stimulated perceptions towards their teammates that were mostly negative. However, at times, athletes also indicated that benching, yelling, and forced conditioning fostered thoughts and feelings that had the potential to positively impact or reduce the negative impact on their teammate relationships. Behavioural responses involving the athletes’ relationships with teammates and the coach embodied a dichotomy between seeking interaction and avoidance. Athletes sought interactions from
(specific) teammates but frequently engaged in avoidance behaviours with the coach after punishment experiences.

**Sport Experience**

This theme was interpreted as the athletes identified cognitions, emotional responses, and behaviours associated with punishments that impacted or had the potential to impact the broader sport experience. More specifically, athletes questioned punishment and acknowledged the influence of punishment on perceived fun or lack thereof in hockey. These topics will be discussed below.

**Questioning Punishment**

Unlike previous sections, where the athletes questioned the coach and his methods, this section consisted of cognitions and feelings athletes had pertaining to the overall punishment experience—‘why was punishment occurring?’ and ‘what did they do wrong to experience punishment?’ More specifically, as the athletes reported that the reasons for punishment use were often unclear, they identified reactions and responses, which included: confusion, frustration, and annoyance. These perceptions were consistent across every form of punishment. For example, Cass stated her thoughts and feelings about experiencing yelling, “I was caught off guard; I didn’t really know what was going on or why. I was just annoyed thinking, ‘really, yelling has to happen, really?’” Similarly, when being forced to engage in conditioning exercises, Stephen stated, “I thought in my head ‘we already did five laps as a warm-up, why do we have to skate again?’…I didn’t think anything was wrong.” Accordingly, the athletes also often referenced the unpleasant physical fatigue associated with this punishment, which further perpetuated negative perceptions of their sport experience. Dean commented, “I’m just dead tired…my knees are about to blow. And then what bothers me is we are expected to put a full effort into the practice, which is so stupid because we are drained…it’s not a good feeling.”
In addition, the athletes questioned the punishment experience when they acknowledged thoughts and feelings pertaining to “better ways” of handling situations, which may have fostered more positive sport experiences. For example, Lauren indicated, “I don’t get it sometimes - it’s annoying because punishments aren’t always right, there are better ways that may not make you hate what’s happening…like instead of benching do short shifts, that’s less harsh.” Similarly, when being yelled at, athletes such as Joey mentioned, “I’m annoyed and frustrated. How loud someone’s voice is doesn’t help me get it better. I just want it to be explained slowly so I know what to do and where to go.” When referring to conditioning as punishment, the athletes at times also exhibited perspectives regarding altering this sport experience, as they mentioned implementing “competitive drills” that “challenged players to work on skills,” instead of skating up and down the ice.

Fun in Sport

Athletes overwhelmingly identified punishment as fostering cognitions and feelings regarding a lack of fun or enjoyment in sport. Athletes reported perceived physical and mental engagement in hockey as one of the most important aspects of fun; however, punishment hindered this involvement, and thus fun. Stephen described, “What I really look forward to is being on the ice, working on skills, thinking of ways to improve, and just playing and being involved. Punishments take away from that and make me think hockey isn’t fun anymore.” Other athletes, such as Ben identified punishment or the prospective use of punishment as hindering involvement, and thus fun when he stated:

It just wouldn’t make me pumped to play. How fun is it when you have to worry about punishments? This takes away from you focusing on playing and makes you just go through the motions because it’s not fun anymore and you don’t want to be there. It’s like you’re skating and moving but you’re not really in it.
Accordingly, athletes reported that punishment not only produced cognitions that inhibited involvement and perceived fun but also stimulated corresponding feelings, which included but were not limited to isolation, shame, worthlessness, and uselessness.

I look forward to hockey and if I get yelled at or benched or whatever, it completely changes how I feel. I’m definitely not having fun…I feel bad about myself. It’s like I’m not a part of the team…I suck…I’m just the player they sign to fill the roster. I wish I could fast forward to the end of the season. (Joey)

Athletes also identified notions of limited involvement through expressing boredom, specifically when referring to being forced to engage in conditioning exercises. For example, Tania mentioned, “This sucks, it doesn’t make me enjoy hockey because it’s so boring skating up and down the ice. I want to handle the puck or go one-on-one…fun drills.” According to the athletes, physical conditioning exercises were often considered mundane tasks that limited sport engagement (i.e. hindered interest or skill development), resulting in notions of boredom and thus lack of fun or enjoyment.

Interestingly, athletes’ perceptions regarding a lack of mental and physical involvement, and thus their experiences of fun were most negatively affected by benching.

Not only are you not on the ice, which is the fun part but you’re also not having fun because you’re just watching your team. I hated what was happening and I just felt useless to my team. I wasn’t playing, I was alone, and I felt like I didn’t really belong there. In that moment I wasn’t enjoying hockey. It’s like being a parent in the stands watching your kids. You’re there but you’re not really there because you can’t do anything…there’s no fun in that. I want to play! (David)

Athletes also expanded on the previously mentioned negative notions about the self. For example, while athletes said experiencing benching and yelling made them think and feel
negatively about themselves, these responses also limited perceptions of fun in hockey and were associated with intentions to discontinue participation.

When you’re getting yelled and benched you’re not going to be looking forward to coming to hockey. Instead of thinking positive thoughts you’re going to think you’re garbage and shouldn’t be playing. You’re not having fun when you’re thinking bad about yourself and when you’re feeling bad about yourself you’re not going to want to play hockey anymore. I’ve seen teammates leave half way through the year because it wasn’t fun for them - they had enough of the punishments. (Mike)

Likewise, Lauren acknowledged, “You feel shamed and embarrassed from benching and yelling because they tell everyone there is something wrong with you. When you become that kid it’s hard to think hockey’s fun, these things hurt and make you want to leave.”

Furthermore, athletes expanded on previously mentioned negative thoughts and feelings pertaining to a tarnished coach-athlete relationship, which resulted from benching and yelling. For example, athletes recognized the importance of the coach-athlete relationship as influential in “making” or “breaking” their hockey experience.

Coaches can make you think hockey is the best but they can also make you think it’s the worst. The coach is supposed to encourage everyone and be there for players but by punishing it makes you think less of the coach. Then because the coach is around a lot and you don’t think you have a good relationship, hockey isn’t fun. Sometimes you wonder if other coaches will be like this too because if they are you will think of quitting…you want to have fun. (Ben)

Likewise, athletes indicated that as the coach became someone they disliked and wanted to avoid, their perceptions of fun in hockey decreased and they thought more about discontinuing participation in hockey.
Punishments change the way I looked at him…more bad than good. He goes from someone I liked to be around to someone who I hate and made me feel negative things. And because I didn’t want to deal with him, I didn’t want to deal with hockey. Something that is supposed to make me happy and feel like the most fun isn’t anymore when he punishes…I didn’t feel like playing anymore. (Cass)

In a few instances, athletes indicated that whether or not experiences of punishment stimulated perceptions of hockey as “not fun” was irrelevant because fun was not perceived to be the most important aspect of hockey participation. Instead, their responses reflected an emphasis on winning. For example, Dean commented:

Punishments can make hockey less fun, but you can’t be thinking it’s all-fun…go down a level for that. In AAA it’s about competing with the best players in hockey. We need to win…we have to win…it’s a have to win game. First think about hard work and then you can worry about fun.

**Behavioural Responses Related to the Sport Experience**

Athletes reported engaging in behaviours that encompassed questioning punishment occurrences and altering fun in hockey, in attempts to influence their overall sport experiences. According to athletes’ responses, behaviours pertaining to questioning the punishment experience often entailed tolerance. While the athletes previously emphasized “going along” with punishment as a behaviour intended to limit negative implications for the self; athletes also articulated “just taking” the punishment as a behaviour that reportedly limited the negative impact on their overall sport experience. Stephen explained, “Just take it. Be quiet and go with it. I would try not to do things that may cause more problems or make things worse…the less punishments the better.”

Additionally, athletes reported behaviours that exemplified a more subtle or indirect way to question punishment, and thus influence their sport experiences, as opposed to more overt
methods. For example, some athletes emphasized the importance of maintaining the appearance of “going along” with punishment employment when actually engaging in defiant behaviour.

It’s hard to stand up to punishments, so we just pretend to go along with them. When a coach yells at you and benches you half the time we just nod our heads and zone off making it look like we get what they are saying but really we are on another planet…or if we are forced to skate we will pump our arms so it looks like we are skating hard but really we’re slacking. To the coaches it looks good but for us it’s just our way of pretending to go along with it. (Tania)

Athlete behaviours were also directed towards altering their perceived level of fun in hockey. One of these behaviours included reframing or highlighting the positive aspects of punishment as opposed to the negative aspects. For example, Joey reframed his experiences with benching when he explained, “Being benched I try to think of that more as a break for myself to recharge and refocus than something bad. It gives me time to reflect so when I go back on the ice I can have fun.” Athletes also reframed forced conditioning in a fun manner, perceiving this experience as a competition and an activity that would help them skate faster, instead of merely a punishment. Stephen explained, “I try to see this as a fun competition…to beat everyone else. It gives you a chance to get faster and to show everyone who’s the fastest or has the best endurance on the team.”

Furthermore, while a variety of athletes emphasized altered style of play as a behaviour that was intended to limit negative perceptions of the self, a number of participants also highlighted this behaviour as influencing their overall sport experience. Athletes reported that engaging in an altered style of play was intended to minimize their perceptions of hockey as “not fun” by decreasing the opportunities for punishment employment.
Play safe…don’t take a big rush and screw up because then I will be benched.

Punishments aren’t fun! The best thing I can do is take fewer risks and pass it to another player. At least then, I can still go on, have a little fun and not worry too much. (Cass)

Summary

As evidenced by the athletes’ responses, punishments influenced how they thought and felt about their sport experiences. The athletes questioned punishment and identified alternative methods that would likely be associated with more positive experiences. Behaviours mentioned did not overtly question punishment experiences but instead embodied tolerance and a more subtle defiance of punishment use.

Furthermore, athletes’ negative perceptions about the self often left no room for positive thoughts and feelings about hockey (i.e. fun or enjoyment), while their negative perceptions about the coach-athlete dynamic often generalized to their hockey experience and limited perceived fun. As a result, hockey reportedly became a place to avoid and even caused the athletes to consider withdrawal. Accordingly, athletes engaged in behaviours, such as cognitive reframing that reportedly minimized the negative implications of punishment and allowed them to preserve positive perceptions of sport (i.e. fun in hockey).
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Given the lack of empirical research on punishment in sport, particularly in relation to other domains such as education and parenting (Durrant, 2002; Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a), the purpose of this study was to understand competitive youth hockey athletes’ interpretations of punishment. Further, I was intrigued by the possibility that the use of punishment strategies in sport might contribute to the dropout rates seen in youth athletics (Hunter et al., 2002). An analysis of the athletes’ interpretations of punishment identified three overarching themes: the nature of punishment, athletes’ responses and reactions to punishment, and athletes’ conceptualization of punishment in sport culture.

Summary of Findings

Punishment reportedly occurs frequently in competitive youth hockey in the forms of forced conditioning, yelling, and benching. Reasons for punishment use varied, with performance and behavioural transgressions being reported most frequently. The athletes’ responses also varied with respect to perceived effectiveness of punishment.

Through assessing the athletes’ reported thoughts, feelings, and behavioural responses, it was apparent that punishment experiences impacted three main aspects: the psychological self, relationships with others, and their sport experiences more broadly. Unfortunately, these impacts were often negative in nature. Punishment reportedly diminished athletes’ self-worth, as they questioned their athletic abilities and hockey future. Punishment also appeared to tarnish their relationships with the coach and teammates, as these individuals were the perpetrators or cause of such negative experiences. And finally, punishment reduced the positive or fun aspects of hockey and fuelled notions of withdrawal. Athletes identified behavioural responses to punishment, such as self-talk, avoidance, and reframing, as strategies to deal with the effects of punishment.
Despite the reported negative implications associated with punishment experiences, there appeared to be a degree of normalization of these tactics in competitive youth hockey. Athletes referenced perspectives that were indicative of tolerance and in some cases, acceptance of punishment. The athletes also consistently emphasized the distinctiveness of the sport environment compared to the school environment, thus providing a plausible reason for the frequency and tolerance of punishment use. Moreover, athletes often believed that punishment tactics could never completely be abandoned in sport, and thus often advocated continued punishment use. The findings will be interpreted in accordance with current literature.

**Descriptive Data**

The finding regarding the frequent use of punishment supports preliminary research by Burak et al. (2013) who found that more than 90% of physical education majors reported that their previous coaches had used exercise as punishment (EAP); similarly, Richardson et al. (2012) indicated more than 60% of teachers and teacher-coaches had used EAP. Athletes in this study also reported benching and yelling as normative forms of punishment. Although research on emotional abuse within the coach-athlete relationship refers to the use of yelling (Stirling & Kerr, 2008), no previous researchers have addressed the use of benching as a punishment strategy.

The most frequently cited reason for punishment is behaviour modification, namely to alter behaviour and deter individuals from engaging in future unfavourable actions/behaviours (Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a; Seifried, 2008; Skinner, 1974). The current findings support previous research, as participants indicated that punishment was used by the coach to alter unfavourable behaviours (e.g. not paying attention and fooling around), and poor athletic performance (e.g. lack of effort and performance mistakes).

For the most part, the participants perceived punishment to be effective. This is congruent with previous EAP (Burak et al., 2013) and developmental psychology literature
(Andero & Stewart, 2002; Baumrind, 1996a, 1996b; Larzelere, 1996), which indicates that punishments are effective in fostering learning and more positive attitudes and conveying the message that there are consequences for certain actions. Athletes in the current study supported these notions, as they perceived all forms of punishment to act as a “wake up call,” allowing them to become “aware” of their mistakes, and in doing so, reportedly allowed them to improve and get better (i.e. athletic growth). More specifically, the athletes’ responses regarding EAP supported findings by Burak et al. (2013) and Richardson et al. (2012) that participants often believed this strategy was effective in fostering enhanced fitness.

However, at times, athletes perceived punishments to be ineffective, reporting that such tactics hindered athletic growth in ways which included, but were not limited to: a loss of confidence, increased performance anxiety, and failing to present appropriate, alternative behaviours. These findings are consistent with those of Dubanoski et al. (1983) who argued that punishment does not foster positive outcomes, such as improved character, nor does it teach the child what to do; instead, punishment hinders development and teaches the child what not to do. The findings also support Albrecht’s (2009) sport-specific suppositions that exercise as punishment is not effective and inhibits athlete development via diminishing self-confidence and self-esteem, increasing performance worries, and reinforcing the lowest level of moral development. Although the psychology literature (e.g. Straus, 1994) highlights physical punishment (i.e. corporal punishment) and sport research (e.g. Burak et al., 2013) has been specific to EAP, it is proposed that the reasons for punishment use and effectiveness can also be extrapolated to benching and yelling responses.

The reported frequent occurrence of punishment in competitive youth hockey seems to suggest that the culture of sport may be one that promotes and/or endorses the use of punishment- a proposition to be explained in the following section.
Normalizing Punishment in Youth Sport

The athletes in this study often normalized punishment use. For example, they tolerated punishment and referred to punishment as “part of the game.” In addition, the athletes also highlighted sport as a distinct domain with niche values and expectations (e.g. competitiveness), factors which reportedly made sport an environment conducive to punishment use.

Participants’ responses regarding the normalization of punishment in hockey exemplified Coakley’s (2001) notion of the two sport model: power/performance and pleasure/participation. Athletes perceived the sport environment to focus on the need to win, out-compete, and “fight” against opposing teams to demonstrate performance excellence and athletic competence. In doing so, the athletes described the power/performance model. This model entails excellence through competition, hard work, sacrifice, taking risks, and considering opponents to be enemies whereas; the pleasure/participation model emphasizes active participation, fun, relationships, and development (Coakley, 2001; Gracey, 2010). The focus on a power/performance model seems to influence competitive youth hockey as a “site of discipline, rather than a site of play” (Gracey, 2010, p. 127). As a result, punishments may be accepted because they are perceived to enable desired outcomes (e.g. competition and sacrifice) advocated in the power/performance model. More specifically, according to the participants’ responses, any behaviours that failed to appease the power/performance model of sport, such as poor performances and a lack of competitiveness or effort, were deemed unacceptable and thus punishable.

To better understand the frequent use of punishment in competitive youth hockey and the subsequent normalization of punishment reported by the athletes, it is important to highlight inherent values in sport culture, such as the ‘sport ethic’ (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). The sport ethic emphasizes the pursuit of performance excellence via self-sacrifice, unyielding dedication and commitment to “the game,” taking risks, challenging limits, and winning, as an exclusive
guide for appropriate athlete behaviour (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). Accordingly, these ideologies focus less on athlete development and more on athletic success at all costs (Coakley, 2001; David, 2005). As sport is grounded in such masculine values (Coakley, 2001; Hughes & Coakley, 1991), validation of the sport ethic and thus athletic competence and success are derived by measures that exemplify a player’s ability and willingness to engage in masculine displays (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). Consequently, athletes become vulnerable as they are constantly evaluated according to these ‘correct’ standards, and as the participants noted, they could then be subjected to practices, such as punishment, in an effort to achieve performance success (Gracey, 2010; Hughes & Coakley, 1991). In other words, punishment tactics may become another aspect of the dominant script which dictates, that for athletes to be successful they must encompass certain qualities including: competitiveness, bravery, risk-taking, and never giving up (Connell & Connell, 1995; Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Pronger, 1990), ideologies shared by the participants.

Participants acknowledged different rules and regulations for teachers versus those for coaches. The perception that school is a stricter and more regulated environment as opposed to hockey highlights the premise that the sporting movement developed under the principles of self-organization and self-regulation (David, 2005). Sport’s self-regulating nature has allowed immunity from government regulations and human rights initiatives (Chappelet, 2010; Rhind, Cook, & Dorsch, 2013), or as the athletes noted, allowed for more “flexibility” in the sport environment, as opposed to other domains such as school. In doing so, questionable coaching practices, such as punishment use becomes unscrutinized (Brackenridge, 2004; David, 2005) and instead are considered “a part of the game” or normalized, as evidenced by participant responses. Unfortunately, as long as the sport environment is deemed a closed world with its own codes of conduct, punishment use will likely occur, thus maintaining the status quo (i.e. sport ethic) (Kennedy, 2006; Rhind et al., 2013).
The autonomous nature of the sporting environment (David, 2005), combined with sport culture’s deep-rooted adherence to the sport ethic (Hughes & Coakley, 1991), resulted in participant responses that acknowledged the inevitable use of punishment in sport and a preference for a strict coach. As a result, participants indicated intentions to use punishment in the future if they were to coach; thus, these patterns of behaviours are reproduced. According to this framework, as the athletes become accustomed to punishment use, these tactics become interpreted as normative components of what it means to be an athlete, in accordance with the ideologies valued in sport culture (Burak et al., 2013; Hughes & Coakley, 1991). Consequently, regardless of the negative implications associated with punishment, these tactics are then likely to not only be normalized, but also perceived as somewhat ‘effective’ since they are influential in appeasing cultural standards. For example, even in extreme cases when athletes believed the use of punishment might have resulted in sport withdrawal, adherence to the sport ethic was apparent. They were unable to voice their concerns and were never able to definitively say punishments were ineffective (still rationalized some beneficial outcomes such as learning from mistakes); further emphasizing the idea that athletes will do whatever it takes to win and sacrifice themselves for the team (Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Proteau, 2011). Finally, because the athletes are acclimated to these standards in sport culture, they may advocate continued punishment use when they coach. These notions were exemplified throughout this study.

Athletes’ reactions and responses varied according to the form of punishment. The athletes perceived both benching and yelling as detrimental, however benching was considered the most detrimental form of punishment. Being directed to engage in conditioning exercises was perceived less as a form of punishment and more as something integral/normative to sport. These notions can be discussed relative to Lazarus’ (1999) cognitive motivational-relational theory (CMRT). CMRT informed the study but did not restrict data collection or interpretation, and thus the findings that pertained to the CMRT will be addressed below.
Evaluating the Forms of Punishment

For the participants in this study, identifying as a competent and successful athlete through performance displays and positive relationships with their coach and teammates was very important (goal commitment) (Lazarus, 1999). Punishment experiences reportedly had the potential to impact this goal commitment, thus evoking various thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (appraisals and reactions).

Athletes indicated that experiencing benching and yelling as forms of punishment signified that they were not good enough, caused them to doubt their hockey future, had the potential to negatively impact their relationships with the coach and teammates, and tarnish their overall sport experience. These perceptions can be seen as contradictory to their desire to be a “good” hockey player and therefore, created a goal incongruent situation (see Lazarus, 1999). Athletes’ responses after benching and yelling also exemplified Lazarus’ (1999) primary appraisal component-types of ego-involvements. For example, benching and yelling can be seen as having impacted participants’ ego ideals (i.e. what they thought it meant to be a good/successful athlete), in addition to their self and social-esteem (i.e. their worth and their perceived worth in relation to others). Unfortunately, when these punishments occurred, athletes often blamed themselves (blame or credit) for such experiences and had perceptions of how these punishments would negatively impact future performance (future expectations), exemplifying components of secondary appraisal (see Lazarus, 1999).

Accordingly, responses to benching and yelling seemed to be indicative of harm/loss and threat appraisal, which indicate the actual or potential for harm (Lazarus, 1999, 2000). Athletes articulated a diminished self-worth via degrading thoughts and feelings about their athletic abilities (actual harm). In addition, they also thought about the negative implications these punishment experiences might have on their subsequent performances, relationships with others, and their hockey future or lack thereof (potential harm). Associated with these types of
appraisals are negatively toned emotions (see Lazarus, 1999 for ‘core relational themes’). Athlete responses frequently supported these negative emotional responses. For example, in accordance with thinking negatively about the self after experiencing benching or yelling, the athletes felt as though they let their team down and failed to live up to requisite standards of performance (guilt). In addition, benching and yelling frequently perpetuated feelings, which included but were not limited to shame and embarrassment.

Benching. Interestingly, athlete responses exemplified that the degree to which benching was appraised as detrimental (i.e. harm/loss, threat, and negatively toned emotions) was greater than that associated with yelling. At a young age, these athletes were already aware of the common notion in sport culture that the best players are afforded the greatest amount of playing time (Coakley, 2001; Gracey, 2010). Thus, despite the finding that yelling stimulated threat and harm/loss appraisals and negatively toned emotions, athletes allowed to engage in play. In doing so, athletes were afforded opportunities to adhere to their goal commitment of being a competent competitive athlete (Lazarus, 1999, 2000).

On the other hand, benching afforded no such opportunities, as the athletes were physically removed from engagement, a blatant and observable impediment to their goals of displaying athletic competency. The loss of playing time associated with benching reportedly confirmed the negative appraisals and emotional reactions about the self, what others thought of the self, their relationships with others, and their sport experience, further exacerbating deleterious effects. More specifically, benching was also likely appraised as most detrimental when considering the impact of others (situational factors) associated with this punishment on the athletes’ goal commitment (Lazarus, 1999, 2000). As mentioned, the participants believed that being a good athlete also involved being perceived as competent in the eyes of coaches and teammates. Unfortunately, benching not only told the athletes of their inadequacies but also acted as a visual reminder to everyone watching that they did something wrong. These benched
athletes became the example of what not to do (goal incongruence), they indicated the actual or potential for a tarnished relationship, primarily with the coach (e.g. “I don’t like my coach for making me feel bad”), and with teammates, influential figures in determining their athletic self-worth (goal commitment). It is not surprising that negative reactions and responses pertaining to benching were exacerbated for goaltenders, compared with other players. For goalies, this punishment required a stoppage in play during the game and in doing so, created a highly public threatening or harmful situation/interaction (Lazarus, 1999).

**Forced conditioning exercises.** On the contrary, responses to being directed to engage in conditioning exercises were reportedly less detrimental. Challenge appraisals embody an opportunity for growth and mastery and are associated with positively toned emotions (see Lazarus, 1999). Athletes exemplified these notions, as they believed that engaging in forced conditioning exercises would enhance their endurance/stamina and provide them with stronger legs, “mastery skills” they deemed necessary to excel in hockey (Lazarus, 1999, 2000). Accordingly, they often articulated positively toned emotional responses that can be associated with challenge appraisal, such as perseverance and a need for accomplishment (e.g. “I can do this, I will be stronger”).

Other athletes seemed to embody benefit appraisals, which are those that acknowledge positive outcomes have already occurred, and encompass positively and negatively toned emotions that result from stressful experiences (Lazarus, 1999). For example, some athletes only perceived beneficial outcomes associated with forced conditioning after the punishment was completed. At that point, the beneficial outcomes perceived by the athletes (e.g. enhanced endurance) had supposedly already occurred and despite reporting anger for being forced to engage in this punishment, they also displayed a sense of relief and pride after completion.

This punishment was also likely perceived to be less detrimental when acknowledging future expectations and blame or credit (Lazarus, 1999, 2000).
positives associated with physical conditioning exercises, athletes’ perceptions of how this tactic would impact their future performance (future expectations) were not negative in nature. Moreover, the athletes did not attribute blame towards themselves, as they were often not responsible for this punishment occurrence and thus were not concerned with how their teammates or coaches perceived them. Therefore, it is likely that forced conditioning exercises were frequently perceived positively (challenge or benefit) and integral to sport because they were seen as supporting the participants’ views of being a competent competitive athlete (goal commitment). As a result, goal congruence and positive ego involvements, which fostered self-esteem and ego ideals, seemed to be fostered (Lazarus, 1999, 2000).

**Managing punishment experiences.** Although the athletes were not explicitly asked about coping efforts, they indicated behaviours associated with punishment experiences that could be categorized according to Lazarus’ (1999) concepts of problem and emotion-focused coping. Athletes seemed to embody problem-focused coping strategies in response to punishment, which included but were not limited to trying harder and practicing more to fix mistakes. However, the behaviours reported most frequently by the athletes after punishments occurred, seemed to exemplify emotion-focused coping (Lazarus, 1999). More specifically, most of the emotion-focused behaviours mentioned by the athletes in this study were avoidance-oriented, as they either physically avoided coaches and teammates or cognitively avoided (e.g. blocking out) the situation, in an effort to minimize negative thoughts and feelings about the self, their relationships with others, and their sport experience that stemmed from punishment. Stress and coping literature has indicated that situations of low perceived controllability are characterized by a predominance of emotion-focused coping responses (Holt, Hoar, & Fraser, 2005; Lazarus, 1999; Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Although athletes may have blamed themselves for punishment, it may be argued that given the reported negative implications
associated with these occurrences, punishment was an “uncontrollable” situation, thus providing a plausible explanation as to why a variety of emotion-focused behaviours were reported.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that although coping effectiveness was not assessed, it may be argued that for the most part athletes perceived their behaviours to be effective in minimizing the negative implications of punishment. In fact, researchers have indicated that emotion-focused coping responses, specifically those that are avoidance-oriented (e.g. cognitive avoidance), are effective in minimizing negative emotions and maintaining focus (i.e. short-term goals) (Holt et al., 2005; Nicholls & Polman, 2007), notions identified by the athletes. However, researchers have also indicated, in the long term, these strategies (e.g. avoidance and blocking out) are often maladaptive, in contrast to adaptive or effective strategies (e.g. problem solving) (Goyen & Anshel, 1998; Holt et al., 2005; Nicholls & Polman, 2007).

The findings support the previously documented detrimental effects of punishment acknowledged in the psychology (e.g. Durrant & Ensom, 2004) and sport literature (e.g. Albrecht, 2009). However, to further understand the processes by which punishment experiences affect young people, it is important to consider the participants’ stage of psychosocial development, a topic that will be discussed below.

**Athletic Inferiority**

While there are numerous theories on developmental processes (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Maslow, 1943; Piaget, 1976), I chose Erikson’s (1968) theory because it focuses on identity development through assessing physical, emotional, cognitive, and social aspects of the self. More specifically, Erikson’s theory discusses identity development across the lifespan, indicating psychosocial challenges specific to the individual’s current stage in life (e.g. youth processes), as well as addresses the contextual factors (e.g. cultural demands) that influence identity formation. As a result, this theory provides a more holistic view to understanding youth
athletes’ interpretations of punishment. As the athletes were between 11-13 years of age, they fell into Erikson’s stage of industry versus inferiority, which consisted of children aged 6-12.

During this stage, children reportedly display eagerness for skill development and to perform meaningful work, otherwise known as industry (Erikson, 1968; Newman & Newman, 2014). Acquiring skills and the subsequent displays of these skills are an effort to display one’s competency (Côté & Hay, 2002). Research indicated that between the ages of 8-13 years, athletic competence is one of five specific domains that encompass a child’s overall perception of competence (Harter, 1985, 1993). Measures of industry consist of three dimensions: a cognitive component (i.e. acquisition of skills and knowledge valued), a behavioural component (i.e. ability to apply skills and knowledge effectively), and an affective component (i.e. positive emotions with regards to the acquisition and application of skills and knowledge) (Kowaz & Marcia, 1991). According to the participants’ responses, punishment interfered with the development of industry, and thus perceptions of competence. For example, benching and yelling caused athletes to question their athletic abilities, hockey future, and produced negative emotional responses, such as embarrassment, shame, and anxiety - factors that impacted or had the potential to impact performance. Consequently, the idea of inferiority may emerge. Feelings of worthlessness and perceptions of inadequacy arise from the self and the social environment (Erikson, 1968; Newman & Newman, 2014).

The need to display competency at this stage of development through skill building causes a constant focus on self-evaluation (Crain, 1996; Erikson, 1968; Harter, 2006; Savin-Williams & Demo, 1993). The process of self-evaluation often occurs from a framework of self-confidence or self-doubt, which is derived from one’s own and others’ perceptions about the self (Newman & Newman, 2014), a topic that will be discussed later. All athletes internalized hockey as an important aspect of their life and they expressed a desire to excel in the sport. Consequently, any information that may contradict these objectives/ideals may contribute to
feelings of inferiority (Erikson, 1968; Ryan & Deci, 2008). Punishments (benching and yelling) called into question their athletic competence and, in doing so, often promoted self-evaluations comprised of self-doubt. Associated with these evaluations were corresponding negative feelings about the self, such as shame, embarrassment, and worthlessness. Moreover, participants reported behaviours directed towards the self after punishment experiences that further emphasized the importance of displaying competency (or limiting displays of athletic incompetency), at this stage of development. For example, self-talk and blocking out were behaviours that reportedly minimized perceptions of athletic incompetence, whereas, practicing and working harder were behaviours intended to enhance future displays of athletic competence.

Social environment. Social identities youth develop (e.g. sport membership), have been acknowledged as an integral component of a youth’s self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg & Abrams, 2001). This is not surprising, considering researchers have indicated that youth often have a desire to seek approval and internalize input from others with whom they interact (see Harter, 2006; Mead, 1934 for “generalized other”). Therefore, the social environment can further perpetuate negative implications for the self (i.e. inferiority), as part of children’s self-evaluation is dependent on feedback and responses from others (Erikson, 1968; Maccoby, 1980).

One aspect of this feedback from the social environment occurs through social comparison. At this stage of development, children are constantly being confronted with and evaluated in accordance with their peers’ abilities (Butler & Ruzany, 1993; Harter, 2006; Horn & Harris, 2002). This was present throughout the study as the athletes indicated that punishments acted as a barometer of how well they were performing in general and how well they were performing in relation to their teammates and standards set by the coach. Unfortunately, social comparisons often lead to negative self-judgments (Fraser-Thomas, & Côté, 2006; Wankel & Kreisel, 1985; Wankel & Mummery, 1990), notions exemplified by the
participants in this study. For example, when experiencing benching and yelling, the athletes referenced the difference between what it meant to be a “good” versus “bad” player. According to the athletes, good players were those who were not punished, as it meant they were performing well and helping the team succeed; bad players (which they perceived themselves to be) were those who experienced punishment, as their efforts were not deemed sufficient in comparison to other players. Interestingly, feelings of inferiority via social comparison rarely occurred with experiencing forced conditioning as punishment because this tactic was often team-oriented and the participants were not the individuals at fault.

Additionally, feedback from the social environment stimulates inferiority through the negative values placed on any kind of failure (Erikson, 1968; Newman & Newman, 2014). More specifically, at this stage of development in sport, youth athletes rely heavily on the external feedback from adult figures such as coaches and parents, as well as their peers (Amorose & Weiss, 1998; Horn & Weiss, 1992; Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2010). Accordingly, the expectations of others (e.g. parents, teammates, or coaches), or more importantly, the failure to live up to these expectations become vital determinants of one’s (negative) self-image (Harter, 2006), notions identified by the participants.

Newman and Newman (2014) highlight two types of failure messages that likely produce perceptions of inferiority. The first failure message consists of criticisms of an individual’s motivation (e.g. If you tried harder failure could have been avoided; Newman & Newman, 2014). This message was represented frequently throughout participants’ responses, as after experiencing benching, yelling, and to a lesser extent, forced conditioning, they often blamed themselves for these punishment occurrences (e.g. “I’m angry, I have no one to blame but myself”). In accordance with this failure message, athlete responses also highlighted the concept of an imaginary audience, an element of adolescent development, in which adolescents assume they are continuously the focus of other individual’s thoughts (Elkind, 1967; Harter,
2006). For example, athletes often believed that coaches and teammates ‘expected’ more from them, further leading to negative thoughts about themselves and their efforts, as well as feelings of guilt and disappointment. Interestingly, athletes’ perceptions that coaches and teammates expected more from their play seem to be consistent with current research findings, which highlight ‘performance efforts’ as a prominent source of coach stress (Thelwell et al., 2008) and teammate conflict (Holt, Knight, & Zukiwski, 2012).

The second failure message was also exemplified in this study. The message refers to a lack of ability, indicating that the individual does not have the competence to succeed (Newman & Newman, 2014) and is associated with beliefs about the self that embody learned helplessness (see Seligman, 1975). For example, as mentioned, the athletes noted that benching and yelling conveyed the message that their performance was inadequate and unacceptable. More specifically, the athletes also believed the coach and teammates were telling them (imaginary audience) that they were not athletically competent, or in other words, that they could not do anything right and were simply “extra players” signed to fill up a roster spot. They criticized their abilities and generalized negative thoughts and feelings, ignoring previous successful performances they might have displayed (Harter, 2006). Participants’ belief that their perceived level of competency after experiencing punishment was likely influenced by others is not uncommon. In fact, sport research highlighted the link between one’s perceived competency and the influence of others. For example, in youth sport, positive peer interactions have been associated with higher perceived competence, whereas less positive peer interactions have been associated with diminished perceived competence (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006; Weiss and Duncan, 1992). In addition, researchers have indicated that the type of coach feedback (e.g. praise or criticism) influences athletes’ perceived level of competence (Allen & Howe, 1998; Amorose & Weiss, 1998).
Consequently, the participants’ negative perceptions (thoughts and feelings) of the self, as well as what they believed others thought of the self after being benched or yelled at, often promoted an overall self-definition that encompassed a pessimistic view (Phillips, 1984). Interestingly, the failure messages that were illustrated through the athletes’ responses suggest that they may have been cast into the informal role of ‘scapegoat,’ a team member who is considered to be incompetent and blamed for team problems (Cope, Eys, Beauchamp, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2011; Farrell, Madeline, Schmitt, & Heinemann, 2001).

Referring to sport-specific research, Smith (1989) reported that fears of failure and disapproval are the most common sources of stress for athletes. More specifically, findings associated with punishment experiences (or ‘failure experiences’) in this study are consistent with research conducted by Sagar and colleagues (2007) that assessed the perceived consequences of failure in elite youth sport. For example, Sagar et al. (2007) highlighted that consequences of failure perceived by athletes included, but were not limited to: a diminished perception of self, negative emotional costs, negative social evaluations associated with letting down significant others (e.g. parents, coaches and teammates), uncertain future, and potential sport withdrawal. All of these were referred to by the participants in the current study regarding benching and yelling. Although the participants in Sagar et al.’s (2007) study were 14-17 years of age and were asked about their worst sporting experiences, it can be argued that perceptions of failure in sport likely have tremendous implications for athletes of all ages and may be exemplified via punishments.

Overall, it is important to note that experiencing forced conditioning rarely seemed to arouse feelings of inferiority. According to athletes’ responses, this is likely a result of forced conditioning being a team-oriented punishment, limiting the element of social comparison, in addition to the athletes often perceiving beneficial outcomes associated with this tactic, which in turn, minimized failure messages.
Team play. Interestingly, the concept of inferiority, which has been represented by athletes’ responses, can also be interpreted according to dynamics of team play, an important element at this stage of development (Mowling, Brock & Hastie, 2006; Newman & Newman, 2014). Team play is a new dimension to children’s play between 6-12 years of age. As children participate in team sports, they learn that team play involves interdependence, cooperation, division of labour, and competition (Charlesworth, Wood, & Viggiani, 2008; Kernan & Greenfield, 2005; Van der Vegt, Emans, & Van De Vliert, 2001). The children adopt team values, support each other, learn their roles within a larger system, begin to view others outside of the team dynamic as the enemy, and recognize the outcome of competition is to win or lose (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961).

However, in-group versus out-group dynamics can often form within the team, as certain individuals are marked as higher tier players, leaving lower tier players to feel like outsiders or even be ridiculed if they contribute to poor team displays (Farrell et al., 2001; Mowling et al., 2006; Newman & Newman, 2014). For example, a study by Zucchermaglio (2005) reported that after a victory, participants referred to the team as a whole (e.g. it was a group effort); however, after a loss, the athletes often dissociated themselves from the team, identifying particular players or a group of players to blame for the loss (e.g. the forwards played poorly). This premise was demonstrated in the current study after punishment was experienced. As mentioned, the athletes frequently reported that after being benched or yelled at, they believed their teammates and coaches thought less of them, blamed them, and felt as though they were not contributing to the team. In doing so, this often made the athletes think and feel like they did not belong or as one athlete phrased it, “No one wants a player that sucks.” Unsurprisingly, the athletes come to feel that they are somewhat disconnected from the team (out-group) and are “not only competing with members of the opposing team but have to protect themselves from insults, pranks, and other efforts by their own team members to ostracize them” (Newman &
Newman, 2014, p. 385). Subsequently, the athletes began to highlight ‘alienation,’ a component of Erikson’s next stage of psychosocial development (group identity versus alienation), which is not surprising considering the participants were transitioning towards or already within the 13-18-age range (see Erikson, 1968).

Unfortunately, because of the negative messages, such as failure, self-consciousness, and doubt associated with inferiority, children will often try to escape situations that may perpetuate these notions and may even refuse to engage in new activities for fear of possibly being out-performed by their peers and perceived as incompetent (Crooks, 1988; Sagar et al., 2007; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009). These ideas were also supported by the findings in this study. At times, the athletes deliberately avoided thinking about the punishment experience (i.e. cognitive avoidance), interacting with the coach or teammates (i.e. physical avoidance), and even indicated a desire to withdraw from hockey, all in an effort to minimize the negative thoughts and feelings associated with punishment. These findings will be further interpreted according to the youth sport dropout literature in the following section.

**Youth Sport Attrition**

Findings indicated that benching and yelling forms of punishment fostered negative thoughts and feelings about the self and the coach (more so than for teammates). Subsequently, these thoughts and feelings were associated with perceptions of hockey as being less fun as well as negative coach-athlete relationships, factors the participants reported might have the potential to foster sport withdrawal. These notions are most alarming when considering that researchers have highlighted fun and the coach-athlete dynamic as influential determinants in maintaining or minimizing sport participation (Weiss & Williams, 2004).

**Fun in sport.** Fun has been consistently shown to be the most important determinant of children’s participation in youth sport programs; unfortunately, lack of fun is also the primary reason why youth athletes leave sport (Butcher, Lindner, & Johns, 2002; Cope, Bailey, &
Researchers (e.g. Baumgarten, 1984; Feezell; 2004; Gracey, 2010; Kleiber, 1981) have argued that fun in sport often stems from ‘play,’ which is considered free and joyous engagement in any activity that can be perceived as physical or intellectual in nature. In sport, this type of engagement is often represented in games, both in practice (e.g. scrimmages) and for competition (Strean & Holt, 2000). However, the emphasis on a power/performance model (mentioned previously), limits sport as a site of play, and thus perceived physical and mental engagement/involvement. The importance of perceived involvement (physical and mental) in sport is expressed by Gracey (2010), who found that some youth basketball athletes preferred practices, as opposed to games, because they were afforded the opportunity to touch the ball, minimizing thoughts of whether they belonged on the team.

The participants in the current study supported the importance of perceived involvement in hockey. Athletes reported that cognitions and feelings pertaining to lack of fun and thus potential sport withdrawal were often a result of a perceived lack of physical and mental engagement associated with punishments. For example, benching physically removed the athlete from being on the ice (the most important/fun aspect of hockey), whereas yelling and forced conditioning often caused the athletes to mentally disengage or “go through the motions.” More specifically, athletes’ recognition of mental disengagement (i.e. boredom), with regards to forced conditioning is consistent with previous literature which indicated that mundane tasks/drills were reported as being boring elements of sport participation (Strean & Holt, 2000). Ultimately, as the youth athletes perceived punishments as hindering their involvement, hockey no longer became a place of enjoyable experiences but instead something to avoid.

Researchers have also noted that high perceptions of competence and skill level are individual antecedents of fun in youth sport (Chalip, Csikszentmihalyi, Kleiber, & Larson, 1984; Strean & Holt, 2000; Wankel & Sefton, 1989). More specifically, perceived competence has
been cited as an influential variable to predicting sport continuation; sport dropouts typically have lower perceived competence scores compared to participants who maintain participation (Martin & Dodder, 1991; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009). Similarly, the participants in the current study frequently indicated a desire to display their athletic competence and be deemed a “good player.” Unfortunately, as mentioned previously, punishments hindered these perceptions of competence, as athletes believed that punishments conveyed the message that they were inadequate hockey players. As a result, the negative thoughts and feelings about athletic competence reported by the athletes after punishment occurred, resulted in them frequently perceiving hockey as less fun, thus leading them to question their sport participation. According to Gracey (2010), employing tactics with the effort of controlling behaviour (i.e. punishment) can diminish fun in sport, as it results in athletes knowing more about what they cannot do and what they are not good at as opposed to what they can do or are good at. Subsequently, such revelations result in athletes questioning how good they are, whether they belong on the team, or even if they should continue in sport, notions evidenced by the athletes in this study.

**Coach-athlete dynamic.** Whether positive (athlete) development occurs is influenced substantially by the nature of the coach-athlete dynamic (Clarke et al., 1994; Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Smoll & Smith, 2002). The coach-athlete relationship is noted to be one of dependency, in which the coach tells the athletes what to do and when and how to do it, as opposed to a relationships in which individual responsibility is promoted (Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997; Tomlinson & Strachan, 1996). Crosset (1986) referred to this dynamic as a “master/slave” relationship in which the coach has complete dominance over the controlled/vulnerable athlete. Thus, when recognizing the critical relationship role the coach maintains with the athlete (Burke, 2001; Kerr & Stirling, 2008), a negative coach-athlete relationship can have implications for athletes’ sense of self, as well as their sport experience and potential sport withdrawal.
Researchers have indicated that children who have more positive experiences with their coach are more likely to maintain sport participation in comparison to those who have negative sport experiences with their coach (Barnett et al., 1992; Lesyk & Kornspan, 2000; Pelletier et al., 2001). Similarly, the athletes in this study often recognized the coach as having the potential to ‘make or break’ their hockey experience. Consequently, after benching and yelling were employed, athletes indicated that their relationship with the coach was tarnished as they disliked the coach, questioned their relationship status, displayed avoidance behaviour, and lost respect and trust for the coach. According to the athletes, the negative connotations associated with the coach-athlete relationship can be a catalyst for withdrawal from hockey.

The effects of a negative coach-athlete relationship appeared to be twofold; in addition to affecting intentions to continue participation, perceptions of fun were also diminished which aroused thoughts and feelings of future withdrawal from hockey. For example, the athletes often noted that their thoughts and feelings about the coach translated into how they thought and felt about hockey (e.g. “Because I hate the coach, I hate hockey”). Given the importance of the coach in fostering positive sport experiences (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Holt, 2008; Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979), it follows that the coach-athlete relationship is also a source of perceived fun. In fact, this premise is consistent with previous literature, which has reported that in addition to individual antecedents, there are situational influences of fun in youth sport such as coach interactions (Keegan et al., 2010; Scanlan, Carpenter, Lobel, & Simons, 1993). More specifically, references to the coach-athlete relationship as an element of athletes’ perceived fun in hockey, is supported by preliminary research that acknowledges positive coaching behaviours (e.g. the coach allows mistakes and encourages me) to be one of 11 fun-dimensions in sport (see Visek et al., 2015).

Ultimately, this study supported previous literature (e.g. Weiss & Williams, 2004), which indicated “lack of fun” and “coach conflicts” are common reasons why youth athletes
leave sport. Moreover, athletes’ responses expanded on these findings, indicating that punishment is likely a precursor to negative sport experiences, and thus potential sport withdrawal. Nonetheless, as athletes in this study were all active participants in hockey, only reported intentions to withdraw could be assessed. Of particular significance was the finding that every participant in the current study referenced a friend or former teammate who recently left hockey because of punishments and the subsequent negative implications (i.e. lack of fun and tarnished coach-athlete relationships) associated with these tactics. As all participants were between the ages of 11-13, this finding seems to be consistent with the statistic that youth sport participation in Canada declines around 13 years of age (Hunter et al., 2002).

**Theoretical Implications**

This study advances the sparse literature assessing punishment in sport, as it is the first research study to examine punishment in youth sport. More specifically, the implications of punishment were explored through competitive youth athletes’ subjective interpretations of these events- a critical step needed for developing empirically informed preventative and intervention strategies. Findings of this study also advance the current literature on punishment in sport and sport research more generally by highlighting punishment as a potential inhibitor to the various benefits known to be associated with sport participation (Hanna, 2012; Holt, 2008). For example, sport participation has been known to foster benefits, which include but are not limited to healthy psychological and social well-being (Holt, 2008). However, it is apparent that the employment of punishment often hindered these benefits and in fact, perpetuated negative thoughts and emotions about the self, relationships with others, and one’s sport experience. The findings of this study advance current dropout literature. This study was the first research to specifically examine punishment as a potential precursor to negative sport experiences, such as “lack of fun,” and “coach-conflicts,” which are frequently cited reasons for sport withdrawal (Weiss & Williams, 2004). In doing so, this research begins to make a crucial connection
between the recognition of punishment as a determinant that has the potential to impact youth
sport participation rates.

Limitations

While this study provides compelling implications resulting from the use of punishment
in sport, it is not without limitations. The selection criteria required hockey athletes between 11-13 years of age. The age of the participants meant they were often volunteered by their parents
to take part in the study. Despite my best efforts to mitigate any vulnerability, participants may
have been reluctant to give accurate responses, for fear of these responses negatively impacting
their status on their club team and their relationships with the coaching staff.

Another limitation of the present study was that all of the athletes who participated had a
male coach. It is unclear as to whether occurrences of punishment and the athletes’ subsequent
interpretations of these events may vary depending on the gender of the coach. Therefore, it
would be interesting to assess whether similar findings emerge or are transferable for youth
athletes who have female coaches. In addition, despite the mix of male and female athletes, the
sample size was not large enough to adequately assess gender differences. Furthermore, this
study did not differentiate between players’ skill levels, although all participants appeared to be
middle to higher skilled players on their respective team. Thus, it would be interesting to
examine whether athletes’ interpretations of punishment may vary, depending on whether they
are recognized as a role player (i.e. less skilled players who may be privy to punishment
experiences) or as a regular starter (i.e. higher skilled players).

The final limitation of this study pertained to a method of data collection employed.
Concept maps were integrated as a supplemental form of data collection, providing the athletes
with another opportunity to articulate their sport experiences if they were unable to do so in the
interview (Novak & Gowin, 1984). However, throughout the interview process, it became
apparent that all athletes were able to adequately articulate their responses. As a result, the
concept maps were likely perceived by the participants as redundant homework tasks and thus despite having instructions on completing the concept maps, athletes’ responses were often non-descriptive, consisting of one word answers. Rather than concept maps providing another rich source of data, they merely corroborated findings from the interview. Employing participant observations as an alternative data collection method as opposed to concept maps may allow for more rich data to emerge (i.e. exploration of multiple variables at once) and limit self-reporting bias (Carlson & Morrison, 2008; Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2003).

**Future Directions**

Punishment reportedly occurs in competitive youth hockey and may occur in other sports at the youth level. Regardless of the domain (e.g. school, sports, or familial), negative experiences and interactions at early stages of development often shape the subsequent experiences of an individual later on in life (Burke, 2001; Bowlby, 1982; Schaffer & Emerson, 1964). The findings that punishment experiences at the youth level reportedly resulted in a diminished sense of self, tarnished relationships with others, and stimulated thoughts of withdrawing from hockey involvement, indicate that punishments can constitute negative experiences. Therefore, it is important for researchers to further examine punishment use in various sports at the youth level, in attempts to challenge sport ideologies that perpetuate the use of such practices and more importantly, to promote alternative methods of working with young people in a sport context. Given the well-documented importance of early positive experiences in sport for healthy, holistic athlete development as well as longer-term participation in sport (Holt, 2008), current ideologies around punishment use must be contested and replaced.

Future research is warranted to further examine the link between punishment and sport attrition rates. Understanding the potential link between punishment experiences and dropout may be of greatest importance for maintaining female participation in sport at the youth level, as female youth athletes tend to dropout at greater rates than male youth (Hunter et al., 2002; Kane
et al., 2007). Researchers should consider a retrospective analysis or prospective longitudinal approach to assess the extent to which punishment experiences contribute to sport withdrawal.

Researchers, sport authorities, coach educators, and sport psychology consultants should consider education for coaches about alternative healthier strategies for teaching and managing a group of young people. The need for alternative strategies may be most apparent for benching. According to current sport literature benching has been advocated as an effective alternative strategy to EAP in controlling athlete behaviour (Baribeau, 2006; Richardson et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 2010). However, as highlighted in this study, benching is not an effective alternative; in fact, athletes perceived benching to be a form of punishment and more importantly, the most detrimental form of punishment. There is a wealth of information on pedagogical practices in educational settings that do not involve the use of punishment and that may help to inform coaching practices.

Future research should examine the specific elements of each punishment (e.g. ice-time, individual versus team oriented) that may lead to different interpretations. This can be achieved through implementing the CMRT in a deductive manner, as opposed to this study, in which CMRT was used as an interpretive tool. In doing so, researchers may be able to adequately understand how and why experiencing a particular form of punishment may validate or fail to validate specific components (e.g. goal relevance) and subsequent core-relational themes of the model, thus resulting in varied interpretations (Lazarus, 1999, 2000). Understanding these relationships further may be beneficial when advocating for preventative or intervention strategies to maximize positive sport experiences (Lazarus, 1999, 2000).

Additionally, with regards to theoretical recommendations, future research on punishment in sport would benefit from situating punishment within maltreatment frameworks (Crooks & Wolfe, 2007). It is possible to interpret the punishments reported by the athletes as forms of relational maltreatment: physical abuse (forced conditioning) and emotional abuse via
intentional/unintentional denial of attention and support (benching) and verbal behaviours (yelling) (see Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling, 2009; Stirling & Kerr, 2008). Moreover, forced conditioning exercises, at times, were cited as having the potential to cause physical harm (i.e. exhaustion and injury) and in fact, benching and yelling may have perpetuated psychological harm (i.e. undermining healthy representations of the self and relationships with others) (Stirling, 2009; Wolfe & McIsaac, 2011). Therefore, a research design encompassing maltreatment as part of the theoretical framework for understanding punishment in sport may help to shed insight on questions, such as: “At what point does punishment stop being considered a normative coaching strategy and instead, constitute a form of maltreatment?” and “In the context of sport, is there a discernible difference between punishment employment and maltreatment practices?” Furthermore, assessing punishment through a maltreatment perspective may further highlight the impact of the coach on athletes’ perceptions of the self, their relationship, and their sport experience (Burke, 2001; David, 2005; Kerr & Stirling, 2008).

Similarly, future research assessing punishment in sport at the youth level would benefit from further implementing Erikson’s (1968) psychosocial stages of development model, as a theoretical framework. Between approximately 6-12 years of age, children are attempting to articulate their competences, while balancing feelings of inadequacy that may stem from the self or the social environment (Erikson, 1968; Newman & Newman, 2014). Therefore, implementing research specifically designed to highlight the impact of punishment on youth athletes’ needs, relative to their psychosocial stage of development, may help to answer such questions as: “How does punishment impact an athlete’s level of competence?”; “If punishments foster perceptions of athletic incompetency (i.e. inferiority), how are peer and coach dynamics influenced?”; as well as, “How may experiences of punishment at this particular stage of development impact the subsequent stages of an athlete’s psychosocial development?” Understanding these elements is important given that self-beliefs as well as the social
environment (i.e. peer and coach dynamics) are key factors that impact athletes’ perceptions of competency as well as their overall sport experience and intentions to continue participation or to withdraw.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

To-date, few researchers have examined the use and effects of punishment in sport, despite anecdotal evidence and preliminary studies reporting that punishment occurs frequently in this domain (Burak et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 2012). Furthermore, there is an absence of empirical work on punishment in sport at the youth level. The study of punishment within youth sport is important because of potential influences punishment may have on the nature and quality of the sport experience. Sport participation in Canada tends to decline after 10-13 years of age (Hunter et al., 2002), with youth athletes citing “lack of fun” and “coach conflicts” as common reasons for sport withdrawal (Weiss & Williams, 2004). Could it be that experiences of punishment are precursors to negative sport experiences and thus sport withdrawal?

There is a substantial body of literature in psychology on the topic of punishment and its influence on behavioural management, child development, and the quality of relationships (e.g. Durrant 1996, Durrant & Ensom, 2004; Gershoff, 2002a). Cited consequences of punishment include: increasing the risk of poorer child mental health; erosion of the parent-child relationship; placing the child at the risk for injury; increased anxiety, anger, fear; and greater tolerance of violence in a child (Durrant & Ensom, 2004). Overall, the literature review highlighted a critical gap regarding the understanding of youth athletes’ experiences of punishment and the subsequent potential negative consequences associated with these normative coaching practices. The purpose of this study therefore, was to examine competitive youth athletes’ subjective interpretations of punishment in the sport of hockey.

The methodological approach implemented for this study was qualitative inquiry, informed by a social constructivism paradigmatic position, as it allowed for a deeper understanding regarding youth athletes’ interpretations of punishment in sport (Charmaz, 2004; Creswell, 2012; Morse & Richards, 2002). Data were collected through two phases, which
consisted of individual semi-structured interviews, as well as concept maps and a brief follow-up discussion with each participant regarding their responses. Inductive thematic analysis was used to interpret and categorize the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In total, 12 youth hockey athletes (7 male and 5 female) participated in the study. All participants were between the ages of 11-13 years and were competing at the highest levels of organized hockey for their respective age and gender at the time of the study.

The athletes perceived benching, yelling, and forced conditioning as common forms of punishment that were witnessed and experienced in competitive youth hockey. According to the participants, performance and behavioural transgressions were most frequently cited as perceived reasons for the use of punishment, whereas, the degree to which athletes perceived punishments to be effective varied. Athletes often normalized these coaching practices through tolerating punishment and even accepting these tactics as “part of the game.” In addition, the athletes acknowledged differences between sport and school that reportedly made sport an environment conducive to punishment. They were also unable to articulate alternatives to punishment. Furthermore, punishments affected the athletes in three main ways: the psychological self, relationships with others, and their sport experiences. Unfortunately, the ways in which punishment affected the athletes were often negative, as punishments impacted or had the potential to negatively impact their sense of self, their coach-athlete and teammate-teammate relationships, and their perceptions of fun in hockey.

Several questions were posed for future research including the assessment of potential differences in youth athletes’ interpretations of punishment in sport according to gender of the athlete, gender of the coach, sport type, level, and age. Athletes acknowledged that punishment often contributed to negative sport experiences (i.e. lack of fun and coach conflicts), which also led to thoughts about withdrawing from hockey participation. One of the more significant findings of the current study was that every participant knew at least one other athlete who had
withdrawn from hockey participation because of punishment experiences. This warrants future research to assess the punishment-dropout link if sport authorities are to reduce attrition rates. The athletes in the current study also reported that benching affected them most negatively; as such, further research examining benching as a punishment and the specific elements (e.g. ice time) that may lead athletes to perceive this tactic as most negative is needed. Moreover, to better understand the implications of punishment at the youth level, research that is theoretically situated within the maltreatment or psychosocial development literature would be informative.

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that punishment in competitive youth hockey is a frequent occurrence that affected athletes in a negative manner and yet, was normalized. This study offers empirical attention to understanding punishment in sport and the impact of punishment on the nature of young athletes’ sport experiences. Moreover, studies such as this attempt to bridge the critical gap between the fields of developmental and sport psychology. Although future research is needed in this topic area, the results of this study may be used to stimulate questioning amongst sport authorities and coaches regarding the use and effects of punishment tactics, potentially enabling more developmentally appropriate sport practices. Only when those in the sporting domain focus on youth athletes’ developmental needs and growth-enhancing coaching methods, will an environment characterized by low attrition rates and healthy, holistic youth athlete development be created.
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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Questions to develop rapport with the athlete:

1. What made you want to get involved in hockey? How long have you been playing hockey?

2. If you were to rate hockey on a scale between 1-10 (1 being the least important and 10 being the most important) along with other parts of your life such as school, family and other sports you may play, where would hockey fall? How important is hockey to you?

***Integration of question 3 into concept maps (see Appendix B)***

3. Experiences in hockey that made me feel good (e.g. winning a championship, team bonding etc.)? Experiences in hockey that made me feel not-so-good (e.g. benching, conditioning exercises, getting injured, losing etc.)?

Punishment Questions: Descriptive

4. Have you ever seen a teammate being benched/yelled at/or directed to engage in conditioning exercises by a coach after doing something wrong?

5. Have you ever been benched/yelled at/or directed to engage in conditioning exercises by a coach after doing something wrong?

6. Why do you think coaches use these tactics/methods on athletes or teams (e.g. team cohesion, discipline etc.)?

7. Do you think these tactics are effective or ineffective? Do you think one tactic works better than others? Explain.

8. Do you view these tactics as punishment? When comparing these tactics, do you see a particular method to be more of a punishment than another (e.g. benching vs. conditioning)

9. Are there any other things your coach does that seems like punishment to you?
Punishment Questions: Thoughts/Emotions/Behaviours

10. When you were (form of punishment), what were the first things that went through your mind? Did you think one method was worse than another?

11. When you were (form of punishment), how did you feel?

12. When you were (form of punishment), what did you do?

13. Did these things make you a better athlete? Explain.

14. Did these things your coach did change how much fun you were having?

15. Did these things your coach did change how you felt about your coach? If so, how?

Punishment Questions: Normalization

16. What do you think about these tactics (e.g. they are okay, I accept them, I don’t like them)?

17. Do you think/feel these practices in sport are just “part of the game” and necessary steps to becoming a “great athlete”? If so, why?

18. Would it be okay if your teacher did these things? Why do you think these methods may be seen as ‘okay’ in sport? What do you think is different about sport that may result in these practices being seen as ‘okay’?

Punishment Questions: Alternatives

19. If you had a magic wand, what would you change about your coach or about hockey?

20. If you were the coach, how would you handle your athletes?

General Probes

1) I was wondering if you would please go over that again?
2) Tell me more about…?
3) I was wondering if you could talk a little more about…?
4) Can you give me an example of…?
5) What do you mean when…?
6) I was wondering what else you were thinking/feeling when…?
Appendix B: Concept Maps

**Positive and Negative Hockey Experiences**

Experiences in hockey that made me feel good...

Experiences in hockey that made me feel not-so-good...
Thoughts and Cognitions

Things I was thinking when I was…(insert tactic)

Emotional Reactions

How I felt when I was…(insert tactic)
Behaviours

Things I did when I was ...(insert tactic)
Appendix C: Coach Recruitment Email

Dear ________,

My name is Anthony Battaglia, I am former AA and AAA hockey athlete from the GTHL having played for teams, which include but are not limited to the Vaughan Rangers and Toronto Redwings. Currently, I am a graduate student working under the supervision of Dr. Gretchen Kerr in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education at the University of Toronto. As a result of my previous sport involvement, in addition to my current academic background I am interested in conducting a study on youth hockey athletes.

Youth sport participation tends to peak around 13 years of age and declines dramatically thereafter. Research has indicated that youth athletes withdraw from sport because of negative sporting experiences, with the most commonly cited reason for sport withdrawal being a reported ‘lack of fun.’ I would like to learn more about what young athletes experience as ‘not fun’ in hopes of understanding and preventing drop-out from sport. I am contacting you to ask if you might be willing to allocate 10-15 minutes after a practice session to allow me to speak with the parents and athletes of your current club team about my proposed study. These few minutes will enable me to explain my study, which would aid in recruiting potential participants. Please note that any involvement by athletes in this study will not interfere with hockey practices or games.

If you are interested and willing to provide me with an opportunity to talk to the parents and athletes of your current club team please contact me at anthony.battaglia@mail.utoronto.ca or by phone at (416)-768-4134. I will provide you with any additional information that you may require, as well as answer any questions you may have regarding the study. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Anthony Battaglia
Appendix D: Parent and Athlete Recruitment Email

Dear _______,

My name is Anthony Battaglia and I am a M.Sc. student working under the supervision of Dr. Gretchen Kerr in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education at the University of Toronto. I am contacting you to request your child’s participation in a research study that may help shed insight on youth sport withdrawal. More specifically, the study aims to investigate youth hockey athletes’ interpretations of common sport practices such as benching and directing athletes to engage in conditioning exercises. In doing so, I am interested in learning about young athletes’ understanding of these practices and how they may affect decisions to participate in sport.

Permitting your consent and your child’s willingness to participate, he or she will be required to engage in a 30-60 minute interview. Your child will be asked questions about his or her sporting experiences. In addition, your child will be asked to complete a few written homework concept maps (i.e. brain storming webs) which will be given at the end of the interview, where he or she will once again be asked to answer questions about his or her sport experiences. After this homework exercise is completed, I will schedule a brief follow-up meeting with your child to discuss his or her answers to the homework concept maps. Overall, an approximate time commitment for completing these study requirements is two hours. Your child’s identity and responses will remain confidential throughout the research process. All participation is voluntary; therefore if for any reason your child feels uncomfortable or no longer wishes to participate he or she may leave the study with no consequences. For the time commitment involved in this study, your child will be compensated with a $20.00 Hockey Life gift card. For additional information, please see the attached Letter of Consent and Letter of Assent.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at anthony.battaglia@mail.utoronto.ca or by phone at (416)-768-4134. I will provide you with any additional information that you may require, as well as answer any questions you may have regarding the study. You may also contact Dr. Gretchen Kerr (Graduate Supervisor), at gretchen.kerr@utoronto.ca. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Anthony Battaglia
Appendix E: Parental/Guardian Letter of Information and Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child is invited to participate in a research study about his or her experiences as a youth athlete in the sport of hockey. Please read the information below, and feel free to ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding to consent.

Study Objective:
Sport participation for youth in Canada peaks between 10-13 years of age. Commonly cited reasons why youth athletes leave sport include lack of fun and coach conflicts, however the nature of these experiences has not been previously identified. Sport typically uses practices such as benching and directing athletes to engage in conditioning exercises. For some, these practices are just part of sport training and athlete development, while for others, these practices are viewed as forms of punishment. The purpose of this study is to learn about young athletes’ understanding of these practices and how they affect young people’s sport experiences.

Procedures/Description of the Research Methods
The study will consist of three components. Your child will first meet with the researcher for a one-on-one interview, at a location of your choosing. The interview will be audio-recorded and is expected to last between 30-60 minutes. During this interview your child will be asked questions such as: “What are some things you really like about hockey? What are some things that you don’t like about hockey?” Your child will then be asked questions regarding common sport practices, which include but are not limited to: “Have you ever seen a teammate being benched/yelled at/or directed to do conditioning exercises by a coach after doing something wrong? What were your initial thoughts and feelings regarding these tactics? And Do you view these tactics as punishment?” After completion of the initial interview your child will be given homework concept maps, which he or she will be asked to complete. Concept maps are simplistic node-link diagrams representing concepts or relationship between different variables. Within the concept maps there will be specific questions provided (similar to those outlined during the interview) that your child is asked to answer (see attached for example). Concept maps are helpful as they provide young people an opportunity to further articulate their responses if they were unable to do so during the interview. After completion of the homework concept maps, a brief follow-up meeting will then be scheduled, where your child and the researcher will briefly discuss his or her concept map responses. Overall, an approximate time commitment for your child completing these study requirements is two hours. All information will remain confidential and all data collected will be destroyed following the completion of the study.

Participation
Should you consent to your child’s participation in this study, your child will subsequently be given the opportunity to consent or decline participation himself/herself. An initial meeting with your child either via phone or face-to-face will be scheduled to explain the study and his or her involvement, as well as provide him or her with an opportunity to ask questions. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time, with no penalty. If participants do withdraw from the study, information acquired/disclosed up to point of withdrawal will remain confidential and will not be included in the researcher’s data analysis, provided the withdrawal comes within one month following our
last meeting. Ultimately, if your child does not agree to participate, regardless of your consent, the study will not proceed.

**Potential Harms, Injuries, Discomforts or Inconveniences**
There are no direct short-term or long-term risks anticipated to your child as a result of participation in this project. However, it is possible that your child may feel some embarrassment or emotional upset when recounting unpleasant sport experiences. Should this occur, your child may decline answering any questions, pause the interview, reschedule the interview or cease participation in the study without penalty. Further, referral information for counseling services to deal with distressing experiences will be provided (see attached).

**Potential Benefits**
There are no direct benefits to your child for participating in this study. However, the study has the potential to have applied implications by informing sport authorities regarding the use and effects of common practices, in addition to informing coach education workshops about ways to maximize youth sport experiences.

**Privacy and Confidentially**
Your child’s identity will remain anonymous throughout the study and in any publications that may stem from this study. More specifically, prior to data acquisition, participants will be assigned a pseudonym known only to the researcher. Any data collected during the experiment (e.g. audio recordings) will be identified using only this name. Additionally, any data collected with potentially identifying information will be stored on the researcher’s password protected computer. Only when disclosures of maltreatment occur is confidentiality not protected, as by law, the researcher is required to report any occurrences of maltreatment.

**Compensation**
For participation in this study your child will receive a $20 gift certificate to Hockey Life.

The study will be conducted by Anthony Battaglia, a master’s student in the Graduate Department of Exercise Sciences at the University of Toronto. This study will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Gretchen Kerr, Professor and Vice-Dean of Academic Affairs in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education. If you have any question or concerns about the study, please do not hesitate to contact Anthony Battaglia at anthony.battaglia@mail.utoronto.ca or Gretchen Kerr, Ph.D. at gretchen.kerr@utoronto.ca.

More specifically, if, at any time, you have any questions or concerns about your child’s rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics & Review Board at the University of Toronto at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Consent Form

Please provide your consent to participate in the study and return the form to the researcher either in person or via email. Also, please keep a separate copy for your records, in case you wish to review this form at a later date.
By signing this form, I agree that:

- The purpose and objectives of this study have been clearly explained to me.
- Any questions that I asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
- The possible harms and discomforts, as well as the possible benefits of this study have been explained to me.
- I understand my right, as well as my child’s right to participate or withdraw from this study at any time.
- The decision whether or not to participate will not result in penalty.
- I am free now, and in the future, to ask any questions about the study by contacting the investigators, or the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board whose phone number is found on the previous page.
- I have been assured that records will be kept confidential and that no identifying information of my child will be released or printed in the future without my permission.
- All data (e.g. audio, electronic and paper copies) will be kept until full analyses have been performed and research has been completed.

I have read and understand the information above and have had the opportunity to ask any questions. My child hereby has my consent to participate in this study.

……………………………
Child’s Name

……………………………
Parent or Guardian’s Name

……………………………
Parent or Guardian’s Signature

……………………………
Date
Appendix F: Letter of Assent for Youth Athletes

Dear Athlete,

My name is Anthony, and I am a researcher from the University of Toronto. My email and phone number are at the bottom of this letter. I would like to invite you to participate in a study about your experiences as a youth hockey athlete. I am interested in your views of things in hockey that are positive and make you feel good, as well as things in hockey that are negative and make you feel not so good. For example, I’d like to know what you think about benching and conditioning exercises.

If you agree to participate in this research you I will then interview you, at a place you and your parent(s) feel comfortable. The interview will be recorded and will last about 30-60 minutes. During the interview I will ask you some questions about hockey and practices often used in hockey training. For example, I’d like to know if your coach ever benches you or directs you to do conditioning drills (e.g. laps) and what you think of these methods. Your job is to answer questions as best as possible. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions being asked. After this interview you will be given homework concept maps, which are similar to brainstorming webs that you will need to complete. I will give you instructions about these and will show you an example. When you finish this homework task, you and I will meet again to discuss your concept maps. Overall, completing all these tasks will require about two hours of your time.

Participation
Participation in this study is your decision, you can choose to participate or not. At any time you may decide not to answer a question if you don’t want to or don’t feel comfortable. Even if you agree to participate, you may change your mind at any time and there won’t be any consequences for you. If you do leave the study any stories you have given me will remain private and will only be included in my study if you leave after one month following the final meeting.

Confidentiality
The stories and experiences you share during the study will not be shared with anyone else, and your name will not be used. All data collected will be securely kept by me on my password-protected computer. The only time when your stories will be shared is if you indicate that a coach has been abusive (e.g. hit you). It is the law that any time a child is abused, this is reported to the people in charge. Contact information to children’s helpline will be provided to help deal with such issues (see attached).

Risks
During the study you may feel emotionally upset or embarrassed when talking about your sporting experiences. However, it is important to remember this information will not be shared with anyone else. Also it is important to remember that you have the right to refuse answering any questions if you don’t feel comfortable, pause the interview, reschedule or even leave the study.

Benefits
There are not direct benefits to you by participating in this study. However, your answers may help teach coaches and other adults about ways to make sport fun for young athletes.
Compensation
For participation in this study you will receive a $20 gift card to Hockey Life after the last interview/meeting.

If at any time you have questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact Anthony Battaglia at anthony.battaglia@mail.utoronto.ca, or Anthony’s supervisor Dr. Gretchen Kerr, at gretchen.kerr@utoronto.ca. Also if at any time, you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics & Review Board at the University of Toronto at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273. If you do wish to participate in the study, please sign below and return this sheet to Anthony. Please keep a second copy of this letter for your own personal records, in case you wish to refer to this form at a later date.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Consent to Participate

I have read and understand the information above and have had the opportunity to ask any questions. I agree to be a participant in this study.

...................................................
Participant’s Name (print name)

...................................................
Participant’s Signature (sign name)

..............................................
Date
Referral Information

Kids Help Phone
- Telephone#: 1-800-668-6868
- Website: www.kidshelpphone.ca

Hockey Canada: Speak Out
- www.hockeycanada.ca/speakout

Children’s Mental Health Ontario
- Telephone: (416) 921-2109
- Toll Free: 1-888-234-7054
- Website: http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/

Sample: Concept Map

*Anthony’s Positive and Negative Hockey Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Experiences</th>
<th>Making friends</th>
<th>Winning trophies</th>
<th>Going away to tournaments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences in hockey that made me feel good...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scoring goals</td>
<td>Team parties</td>
<td>Getting a lot of ice-time and having fun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting injured</td>
<td>Getting suspended</td>
<td>Being yelled at by the coach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences in hockey that made me feel not-so-good...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Experiences</th>
<th>Losing</th>
<th>Being forced to do conditioning drills</th>
<th>Getting benched for making a mistake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix G: Completed Youth Athlete Concept Maps

Experiences in hockey that made me feel not so good...

- Losing Games
- Getting benched for a bad play
- Getting injured and sitting out

Experiences in hockey that made me feel good...

- Scoring a goal or helping my team win
- Making friends and team parties
- Going away to tournaments

- Playing fun games in practice
- Getting a lot of ice time
- Having fun and winning
Thoughts and Cognitions

- Does he hate me?
- Am I good?
- Should I be playing at this level?

Things I was thinking when I was benched

- I don't like the coach
- Why was I benched?
- Am I wasting my time?

Emotional Reactions

- Felt bad
- Embarrassed
- Mad

How I felt when I was benched

- Ashamed
- Worried
Behaviours

- Think of what I can do to help.
- Question if coach hates me.
- Fix the problem.

Things I did when I was benched

- Wonder If I am good.
- Ask teammates.
- Put my head down.

Thoughts and Cognitions

- Why did I get yelled at?
- Did I do something really bad?
- Do I suck? Am I good?

Things I was thinking when I was yelled at

- I don't like my coach.
- What does the coach think of me?
- Why couldn't he talk to me individually?
Emotional Reactions

Felt down
Worried
Mad

How I felt when I was yelled at

Embarrassed
Awful
Questioned

Behaviours

Sat there quiet
Thought of ways to fix it
Got mad at myself

Things I did when I was yelled at

Fog
Work hard in practice

Talk to my friends
Thoughts and Cognitions

- Why do I have to do this? It's someone else's fault.
- It wasn't my fault.
- I hate the person who caused it.

Things I was thinking when I was forced to do conditioning exercises

- Maybe I will get better endurance.
- This sucks.
- Why did a player not have to pay attention.

Emotional Reactions

- Mad
- Confused
- Questioned

How I felt when I was forced to do conditioning exercises

- Angry at the player who did it
- Guilty if it was my fault.
Behaviours

- Work my hardest
- Talk to player who caused it.
- Work (10%)

Things I did when I was forced to do conditioning exercises

- Respect the decision
- Not talk back to coach
- Believe it helps