

EXPLORING PROFESSIONAL FEMALE HOCKEY PLAYER'S PERCEPTIONS OF BEING
DUAL CAREER ATHLETES

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Abstract

Women's sports are considered the fastest-growing subgroup in the world of sports (Du Li et al., 2021). Despite this, most professional female hockey players in North America must work full-time. In fact, empirical evidence has shown that if dual-career athletes cannot attain a balanced lifestyle, they are prone to succumb to challenges and experience burnout, injuries, and/or psychological distress (Lopez-Flores et al., 2021). Furthermore, compared to the vast literature on male professional athletes, literature on female professional athletes, including hockey players, remains in its infancy. Thus, this study aimed to gain an understanding of North American professional female hockey players' perspectives of balancing their professional sport and non-sport careers, including their desired coaching behaviours and forms of support. Ten professional female hockey players, each with a full-time job, participated in individual semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and a thematic analysis was used to organize data into themes and subthemes, offering a comprehensive understanding of each participant's experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The analysis revealed the strategies and behaviours employed by athletes, coaches, and work superiors to successfully manage the athletes' dual careers. All of the athletes described navigating demanding schedules and responsibilities, involving work, sports, and community outreach, highlighting their significant commitment and dedication to balancing their passion for hockey with other life demands. This balancing act required considerable time, effort, and patience, and the participants shared strategies to overcome these challenges. These included demonstrating strong organizational skills, engaging in clear communication with coaches and employers, prioritizing mental and physical health, and acknowledging the impossibility of doing everything at all times. The athletes voiced their preference for adaptable coaches who could empathize with their non-sport responsibilities while upholding high performance standards. In contrast, they simply desired understanding from their employers who, recognizing the athletes' commitment to their professional sports career, would willingly hire them. Effective and proactive communication was appreciated, as the coaches' behaviours significantly impacted the athletes' ability to manage their dual careers, thereby influencing their personal and professional success. These insights contribute valuable knowledge to the growing field of dual career studies in professional female sports. Such research is crucial in helping to empower young women to fully realize the physical, psychological, and social advantages of sports participation, while simultaneously overcoming barriers in the professional area.

Résumé

Les sports féminins sont considérés comme le groupe qui grandit le plus rapidement dans le monde du sport (Du Li et al., 2021). Malgré cela, la plupart des joueuses de hockey professionnelles en Amérique du Nord doivent travailler à temps plein. En fait, des études empiriques ont démontré que si les athlètes ayant une double carrière ne parviennent pas à atteindre un équilibre de vie, ils sont davantage enclins à faire face à des défis et à vivre un épuisement professionnel, des blessures et/ou une détresse psychologique (Lopez-Flores et al., 2021). De plus, comparativement à la vaste littérature sur les athlètes professionnels masculins, la littérature sur les athlètes professionnelles féminines, y compris les joueuses de hockey, en est encore à ses débuts. Ainsi, cette étude visait à comprendre les perspectives des joueuses professionnelles de hockey féminin nord-américaines sur l'équilibre entre leurs carrières sportives professionnelles et non sportives, y compris les comportements souhaités et le type de soutien provenant des entraîneurs. Dix joueuses professionnelles de hockey féminin, chacune ayant un emploi à temps plein, ont participé à des entretiens individuels semi-structurés. Les entretiens ont été transcrits verbatim et une analyse thématique a été réalisée pour organiser les données en thèmes et sous-thèmes offrant ainsi une compréhension complète de l'expérience de chaque participante (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). L'analyse a révélé des stratégies et des comportements utilisés par les athlètes, les entraîneurs et les employeurs pour gérer avec succès les doubles carrières des athlètes. Toutes les athlètes naviguaient des horaires exigeants et de grandes responsabilités, incluant le travail, le sport et la sensibilisation communautaire, soulignant leur engagement et leur dévouement pour équilibrer leur passion pour le hockey avec d'autres demandes de la vie. Cet équilibre a nécessité beaucoup de temps, d'efforts et de patience, et les participantes ont partagé des stratégies pour surmonter ces défis. Celles-ci incluaient la démonstration de fortes compétences organisationnelles, une communication claire avec les entraîneurs et les employeurs, la priorisation de la santé mentale et physique et la reconnaissance de l'impossibilité de tout faire en tout temps. Les athlètes avaient une préférence pour les entraîneurs qui s'adaptaient et étaient empathiques avec leurs responsabilités qui n'étaient pas reliées à leur sport tout en maintenant des normes de performance élevées. En revanche, elles désiraient simplement une compréhension de la part de leurs employeurs qui, reconnaissant l'engagement des athlètes envers leur carrière sportive professionnelle, les embaucheraient volontiers. Une communication efficace et proactive était appréciée, car les comportements des entraîneurs avaient un impact significatif sur la capacité des athlètes à gérer leurs doubles carrières, influençant ainsi leur réussite personnelle et professionnelle. Ces résultats apportent une connaissance précieuse au domaine en pleine croissance des études sur les doubles carrières dans le sport professionnel féminin. De telles recherches sont essentielles afin d'habiliter les jeunes femmes à atteindre pleinement les avantages physiques, psychologiques et sociaux de la participation dans le sport, tout en surmontant simultanément les obstacles dans l'aréna professionnel.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

An optimal sport-life balance has positively impacted athlete well-being and performance in high-performance sport (Linnér et al., 2021; Stambulova et al., 2015; Stambulova et al., 2021; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). One world-class female athlete who has lived with sport-life balance is former ice hockey player Hayley Wickenheiser. Representing Team Canada at thirteen World Championships and six Olympics, Hayley was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2021. In addition to her athletic success, Hayley earned multiple University degrees, raised a child, became a senior director of player development for the NHL's Toronto Maple Leafs, and worked as a medical doctor (Wickenheiser, 2021). Hayley shared her experiences of balancing the demands of multiple roles in male-dominated fields such as hockey and medicine (Wickenheiser, 2021). Wickenheiser (2021) illuminated that professional female hockey leagues do not provide enough financial compensation to help players pay their bills. Therefore, "most players need to have a full-time job to cover rent and living expenses, then spend all of their 'spare' time training and competing" (Wickenheiser, 2021, p. 12).

Since the introduction of Title IX in 1972, there has been considerable growth in female sports participation (Bowes & Culvin, 2019). In fact, women's sports are considered one of the fastest-growing subgroups in the sports industry worldwide (Curran et al., 2019; Emmonds et al., 2019; Lough & Geurin, 2019; Nimphius, 2019; Perry et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2022), with increases of female sport participation near 15% at the collegiate and international levels since 1994 (International Olympic Committee, n.d.; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2021). In addition to the increasing rates of female sports participation, female sports viewership is also rising (Fink, 2015; Lebel et al., 2019). The Canada-US women's gold-medal hockey game at the

2022 Olympics was the second-most-watched hockey game in North America since 2019, regardless of gender (The Canadian Press, 2022). Increases in female sports participation across the globe are enhancing the popularity of women's sports, leading to the establishment of professional female teams. Most notably, individual sports such as the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) and the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) have paved the way for women in sport (Bowes & Culvin, 2019; Bowes & Kitching, 2021). However, despite the recent enhanced popularity of women's sports, female athletes continue to be bound and influenced by gendered social structures (Bowes & Culvin, 2019; Hextrum & Sethi, 2022; McLeod & Nite, in press; Pink et al., 2018).

According to feminist scholars, gendered barriers are sustained by the gendered logic of society, whereby identity and roles are linked to meanings of femininity through media coverage (Cooky, 2018; Fink, 2015; Kitching et al., 2021; Lebel et al., 2019) and cultural role expectations (Kavoura & Ryba, 2020; Kavoura et al., 2015; Lappalainen et al., 2013; McGannon et al., 2018; McGannon et al., 2019). Gender barriers prevent female athletes from thriving in sport by contributing to a lack of media coverage (Cooky, 2018; Fink, 2015), insufficient financial remuneration (Szto et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2022), and multiple, often conflicting, roles and identities (Kavoura et al., 2015; Ryba et al., 2021). For example, female sports receive just 2% of total sports media coverage (Cooky et al., 2013), with most of that coverage portraying female athletes as women who play sports rather than focusing on their athletic abilities and achievements (Cooky, 2018; Fink, 2015; Kitching et al., 2021; Lebel et al., 2019). Fink (2015) described this current media trend as a “symbolic annihilation” of women's sports that focuses on female athletes as hypersexualized or heterosexual wives and mothers first and athletes second (p. 333). Moreover, female athletes are pressured to behave, think, and feel in ways that

align with stereotypical female life domains (e.g., sport, school, vocation, motherhood) (Bar-Eli et al., 2004; Curran et al., 2019). For example, Ryba et al. (2021) found that female athletes often constructed a ‘superwoman’ persona to cope with society's high expectations of excellence to achieve “a balanced totality” of being perfect mothers, earning one’s living, and being active community members (p. 9). The authors found that adopting a 'superwoman' persona was the only way female athletes could bend the gendered social norms to achieve excellence in multiple life domains while pursuing their sporting aspirations (Ryba et al., 2021). Moreover, empirical evidence has found that despite having the same passion for sport as males (Ryba et al., 2021), female athletes were more likely to prioritize education over sport (Ekengren et al., 2020; Ronkainen et al., 2018; Sorkkila et al., 2017), as well as to adopt multiple roles and identities to comply with gendered ideologies such as being a mother, student, or employee (McLean & Syed, 2015; Ronkainen et al., 2016; Ryba et al., 2021).

Finally, most professional female sports leagues around the globe do not provide enough financial compensation for the players to make a living (Leavitt & Adams, 2019; Szto et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2022). Therefore, most players need to have a full-time job to cover the cost of living expenses while spending the rest of their free time balancing the demands of a social life, training, and competitions (Harrison et al., 2022; Szto et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2022). Many professional female athletes have stated that they are grateful for the opportunity to finally get paid to play (Bowes & Kitching, 2021; Harrison et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2022), but emphasized that the current state of professional women's sport makes it an unsustainable option (Bowes & Culvin, 2019; Bowes & Kitching, 2021; Kitching et al., 2021; Leavitt & Adams, 2019; Szto et al., 2021; Wicker et al., in press). Taken together, these studies suggest that despite increased participation and remarkable athletic achievements, female athletes must still

overcome the gendered barrier of conflicting roles and identities that continue to be perpetuated through a lack of media coverage and financial remuneration (Cooky, 2018; Fink, 2015; Kitching et al., 2021; Lebel et al., 2019). Despite recent success for some professional women's sports, the move to professionalize other sports –specifically team sports– has been marred with difficulties (Bowes & Culvin, 2019), as female athletes strive to balance their professional sport and non-sport careers.

A dual career is a current reality for most North American professional female hockey players as they primarily train and compete in a male-dominated field (Leavitt & Adams, 2019). A dual career athlete is an individual who must simultaneously balance the demands of sport with an education or vocation (Stambulova et al., 2021). According to various experts, participating in sport alongside an education/vocation has some benefits, such as broader identity and social network (Cross & Fouke, 2019), increased time management skills (Hardcastle et al., 2015), and improved self-discipline skills (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015) that leads to an easier transition into sport retirement (Stambulova et al., 2021). However, balancing a dual career becomes extremely challenging as both sport and non-sport careers progress (Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Taylor, 2021; Harrison et al., 2022; Lopez-Flores et al., 2021; van Rens et al., 2019). According to Role Strain Theory (RST), if DCs do not obtain adequate support to balance their sport and non-sport demands, their unrelenting role strain will predispose them to increased stress, reduced well-being, and burnout (Silva et al., 2022; van Rens et al., 2019; van Rens et al., 2016). RST has been studied across a variety of fields across the globe to understand experiences of stress, well-being, and performance amongst individuals juggling the demands of multiple roles (e.g., Berger & Bruch, 2021; Home, 1997; Ko & Hwang, 2021; Levant, 2022; McGee et al., 2019; McGovern, 2022; Reyna, 2021; Romero, Pitney, Brumels, et al., 2018; Varpio et al.,

2018). These studies suggested that attempting to balance multiple roles led to role strain which increased the prevalence of stress and self-doubt and reduced performance and emotional well-being (Ellinas et al., 2018; McGovern, 2022; Romero, Pitney, Brumels, et al., 2018; Romero, Pitney, Mazerolle, et al., 2018).

Moreover, sport psychology scholars have noted that the challenges associated with role strain are often intensified by a lack of understanding from supporters and elite sport narratives that endorse a single-minded dedication to sport (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Saarinen et al., 2020). Sport researchers have suggested that dual career athlete supporters, especially coaches, are critical environmental influences for DCs (Graczyk et al., 2017; Ryba et al., 2016; Sorkkila et al., 2018; Stebbings et al., 2015; Storm et al., 2021). In fact, scholars have suggested that dual career coaches have the potential to improve DCs experiences (Ronkainen et al., 2018; Saarinen et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2022). However, there remains a lack of criteria for effective dual career coaching practices across all female team sports, both in North America and around the globe (O'Reilly et al., 2018; Perry et al., 2021; Pielichaty, 2019; Taylor et al., 2022). Female hockey players, in particular, face unique biases and cultural expectations that often add extra pressure on them to succeed in all aspects of their life (Szto et al., 2021). For example, female hockey players in North America have grown up in an environment where hockey is predominantly viewed as a male sport. This cultural backdrop can amplify the role strain they experience, as they must not only balance the dual demands of sport and career, but also navigate a complex web of gender expectations and societal pressures (Ryba et al., 2021). Additionally, these athletes often find themselves in the position of advocating for the legitimacy and recognition of women's hockey (Szto et al., 2021). The current climate underscores the

importance of understanding, supporting, and advancing women's professional hockey both on and off the ice.

To date, there have only been a small number of studies that have explored the demands of DCs solely in elite women's sport (Hayman et al., 2020), and no studies on defining effective dual career coaching practices for elite female team sport athletes (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). In fact, studies show that on a global level, female-specific sports research fails to emulate the increase in participation and popularity of women's sport (Curran et al., 2019; Emmonds et al., 2019; Nimphius, 2019; Perry et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2022). In sum, the lived realities for professional female athletes are very complex. They are grateful for the opportunity to finally get paid to play but are aware that the current state of professional women's sport makes it an unsustainable option (Bowes & Culvin, 2019; Wickenheiser, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of North American professional female hockey players' perspectives of balancing their professional sport and non-sport careers, including their desired coaching behaviours and forms of support. More specifically:

- a) How do North American professional female hockey players adapt their schedules to combine their athletic and vocational roles and responsibilities?
- b) What do professional female hockey players want, expect, and prefer from their supporters, specifically their coaches and bosses at work, both inside and outside of sport?
- c) How can coaches and employers positively support or negatively hinder the professional female dual career hockey players' career aspirations?

Significance of the Study

Women's sport is one of the fastest-growing sub-groups in the sports industry worldwide (Du Li et al., 2021). Concerning ice hockey, the number of registered female hockey players has grown 78.65% in Canada between 1995 and 2018 and has increased 33.85% globally between 2007 and 2018 (International Ice Hockey Federation, 2018). Despite these notable increases, there has not been a sustainable professional league for women's ice hockey in North America or elsewhere. Thus, most, if not all, professional female hockey players in North America must commit to achieving athletic excellence while balancing a full-time job.

The Canadian Women's Hockey League (CWHL) was formed in 2007 and was the first established professional women's hockey league (Szto et al., 2021). However, the league could not pay its players living wages and thus closed its operations in 2019 (Szto et al., 2021). Currently, one professional women's hockey league in North America pays its players to play. Created in 2015, the National Women's Hockey League (NWHL), now called the Premier Hockey Federation (PHF), encompasses six teams. Each team plays 20 regular-season games, and the top 4 teams advance to the finals to have a chance to win the Isabel Cup. Each team in this league has a head coach and GM.

Professional female hockey players must make a substantial commitment to their sport training and competition while also developing their non-athletic careers. Therefore, understanding current approaches to dual career support in these environments and identifying effective avenues may further the current opportunities for athletes within these contexts and mitigate negative experiences that may impact their present and future lives (Pink et al., 2018). Therefore, the results from this study will contribute to a better understanding of professional female hockey players' experiences of balancing multiple roles and their preferred coaching

behaviours. It may also expand the literature in sport by providing education and support to help elite team coaches and players navigate their stressors. Finally, other athletes, such as men's professional hockey players playing in leagues like the East Coast Hockey League (ECHL) or competing in Olympic sports without a professional league, must also balance employment responsibilities while training and competing in their sport. Therefore, these results may also apply to any high-level male and female DCs and their coaches who must balance multiple roles.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were identified for the present study:

1. Participants will be professional female hockey players who have played a minimum of 2 years in the PHF.
2. Participants must have a full-time job (i.e., have a regular workweek) in addition to being a professional hockey player.
3. Participants will not be nationally carded athletes, since they all receive a sufficient monthly stipend from the Canadian government.

Limitations

The following limitations were identified:

1. Results will be limited by the abilities of professional female hockey players to recall events or their experiences. In the context of the present study, experiences will be specifically related to their experience playing professional women's hockey.
2. Results may only be applicable to DCs playing in North American sport organizations and thus may not be transferable to DCs playing in other countries.

Operational Definitions

Following the purpose of the research, the following definitions will be used:

Dual Career Athlete:

An individual who must simultaneously balance the demands of sport with an education or vocation (Stambulova et al., 2021).

Professional Athlete:

An athlete who receives financial compensation for their sport participation while training and competing in a high-performance setting (Leavitt & Adam, 2019; Szto et al., 2021).

Role Conflict:

A subset of role strain that explains the extent to which an individual receives conflicting role obligations or expectations (Ellinas et al., 2018).

Role Overload:

A subset of role strain that explains the extent to which individuals feel over-burdened by role activities (Ellinas et al., 2018).

Role Strain:

The difficulty fulfilling the demands of one or multiple roles, composed of role conflict, overload, underload and ambiguity (Goode, 1960).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter will include two main sections. The first section will introduce DCs, identify the challenges of dual career pursuit, and address the factors that promote and inhibit a successful career. The second section will explain Role Strain Theory (RST), emphasizing the challenges DCs face while striving to balance multiple roles.

Dual Career Athletes (DCs)

A DC is defined as an individual who is simultaneously involved in sport and non-sport careers (i.e., educational or vocational) (Stambulova et al., 2021). In addition to the distinct benefits of participating in sports and achieving an education/vocation, sport psychology scholars have demonstrated that DCs also benefitted from a broader identity and social network (Cross & Fouke, 2019), increased time management skills (Hardcastle et al., 2015), and improved self-discipline skills (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015) that led to an easier transition into sport retirement (Stambulova et al., 2021). However, empirical evidence has emphasized that balancing elite sport with education can be challenging (Stambulova et al., 2015). For example, Stambulova and Wylleman (2019) reviewed, synthesized, and analyzed 42 research articles on DCs from 2015 to 2018 and found that DCs struggled to integrate elite sport with education/vocation effectively. The findings also demonstrated that the challenges of balancing school/vocation with elite sports (e.g., physical and mental fatigue, feelings of isolation, identity issues) began in high school, but became more demanding in early adulthood when confronted with increased training hours and academic or vocational workloads (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019).

Interestingly, the existing research lacks a direct comparison between vocational and educational DCs (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). While studies have considered both types of

non-sport careers, they have typically treated them as equivalent without distinguishing between them (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). This appears to overlook the fact that being a DC might grow more challenging as one's career progresses, possibly indicating that vocational DCs face greater difficulties. However, this aspect remains largely unexplored in current literature.

DC Challenges. Empirical evidence has shown that if DCs did not attain a balanced lifestyle, they succumbed to challenges and experienced burnout, psychological distress, or injuries (Lopez-Flores et al., 2021). In fact, researchers have highlighted three levels of challenges that DCs had to overcome to thrive in their sport and education/vocation, including psychological (Rossi & Hallmann, 2021), psychosocial (Li & Sum, 2017), and financial (Harrison et al., 2022). Researchers also suggested that these challenges became more demanding as their academic/vocational and athletic careers progressed (Harrison et al., 2022; Li & Sum, 2017; Rossi & Hallmann, 2021). More specifically, Rossi and Hallmann (2021) interviewed eleven male and female German team-sport DCs to identify the constraints and facilitators they encountered as they advanced to higher stages of their athletic and academic/vocational careers. Among the results, the DCs reported that they felt most constrained by intense psychological pressure characterized by physical and mental fatigue, feeling like an outsider, lacking concentration and focus, and feelings of insecurity. The DCs also reported that the psychological pressures continued to increase as their two careers advanced and thus demanded more from them (Rossi & Hallmann, 2021). Moreover, Li and Sum (2017) conducted a meta-synthesis from 1996 to 2015 of elite DC's experiences. Their findings revealed that in addition to the psychological, physical, and emotional impact of a dual career, DCs reported many psychosocial challenges concerning their interactions or relationships within their families, schools, or sport. More specifically, splitting their time and commitments between their careers

meant adapting their daily routines to combine their athletic, academic/vocational, and familial roles. The DCs reported that their complex situations and daily responsibilities contributed to conflicts with their coaches, teachers and/or families, who expected them to prioritize their specific domain. The DCs reported that their coaches, teachers, and families were the most influential figures in their lives, and thus, they felt pressured to impress them in each domain. However, they acknowledged that they needed to attain a balanced lifestyle to thrive in both careers, but felt they lacked the support to manage their limited time effectively (Li & Sum, 2017). Finally, Harrison et al. (2022) interviewed eleven elite European female soccer players from collegiate and professional teams, exploring their challenges combining work/education with their sporting commitments. Results supported previous findings (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019) that balancing a dual career led to various psychosocial and psychological challenges enhanced by increased educational demands. However, the authors noted that vocational DCs were also confronted with the financial pressures of insufficient funding, which increased their dual career challenges considerably. Although the players earned a small income playing semi-professional soccer, they reported it was nearly impossible to find a full-time job accommodating their soccer schedules. Therefore, most players at the professional level indicated a need to withdraw from soccer to get a career started and cover the costs of their bills and debts. This study is among the first to demonstrate the challenges of balancing a full-time job with sport from the perspective of professional female athletes. The authors noted that future research should continue to examine professional female DCs' challenges to prevent a loss of talent within professional women's sports (Harrison et al., 2022). Taken together, this collection of studies outlined the challenges that prevent DCs from achieving their potential in both of their careers. It also highlighted the need to support this population to help them attain a balanced lifestyle.

Supporting DCs. Social support refers to the support an athlete may receive from their coaches, teammates, and families when dealing with the demands of high-level sport (Rees & Hardy, 2000). Empirical evidence highlights three strategies that lead to effective DC support: helping DCs attain a balance between careers (Knight et al., 2018), matching their support to dual career demands (Arnold et al., 2018), and assisting the DCs in developing dual career management strategies (Knight et al., 2018). For instance, Knight et al. (2018) interviewed eight UK adolescent male and female athletes and their supporters to understand the role of social support in facilitating DCs' balance. The findings demonstrated that effective DC supporters helped DCs balance their careers by creating autonomy-supportive environments that established a belief in the value of a dual career. Furthermore, the results revealed that in addition to high support levels, the DCs who felt the most ease balancing their dual career had integrated efforts within their support team. In a similar manner, Arnold et al. (2018) surveyed 122 male and female British student athletes to examine the effect of social support on the relationship between perceived stressors and subjective performance. Among the results, the authors found a positive relationship between perceived stressors and subjective performance at lower levels of social support. In contrast, when the DCs experienced higher levels of social support, there was a negative relationship between perceived stressors and subjective performance. These results imply that some dimensions of social support exacerbated rather than mitigated the DCs' stress levels when they encountered high-pressure and demanding situations. Moreover, the authors suggested that the type of support the DCs were receiving did not assist them in effectively managing their stressors, which made the situation seem worse. The authors recommended that supporters should not focus exclusively on instrumental, technical, and tactical support but rather integrate support that matches the demands the DCs' encounter (Arnold et al., 2018). Finally, De

Brandt et al. (2017) conducted a survey-based study on 107 Flemish elite DCs to explore their perceptions of dual career management skills, known as DC competencies (dual career management, DCM; Career Planning, CPL; Mental Toughness, MTO; Social Intelligence and Adaptability, SIA). The participants reported average to good possession of DC competencies and perceived a need to develop them to thrive in both careers. Notably, females rated three of the four DC competencies (DCM, CPL, SIA) higher than males, suggesting that supporters must especially help female DCs develop competencies to thrive in both careers (De Brandt et al., 2017). In sum, these studies indicated that effective social support must match the stressors that the athlete experiences and help them develop competencies to manage their environment (Arnold et al., 2018; Knight et al., 2018; Linnér et al., 2022). Furthermore, the authors recommended that future research explore what is deemed sufficient support for DCs (Arnold et al., 2018), emphasizing the need to define effective DC coaching behaviours (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019).

DC Coaching Practices. As noted in the critical review by Stambulova and Wylleman (2019), there is insufficient information on effective DC coaching strategies. Although coaches are considered important environmental influences for DCs (Graczyk et al., 2017; Ryba et al., 2016; Sorkkila et al., 2018; Stebbings et al., 2015; Storm et al., 2021), the authors found no clear criteria for effective DC coaching practices. In their future directions, they urged researchers to understand DCs' holistic environment better so that environmental influences, such as coaches, can strive to optimize DC development environments and help them thrive (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019).

Although there is still a need for more empirical research on coaching DC, the limited research has indicated that coaches were unsure how to implement DC agendas into their

coaching practices (Ronkainen et al., 2018) and were heavily influenced by elite sport narratives that implied the only way to athletic success was through a single-minded dedication to sport (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Eriksen, 2022; Saarinen et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2022; Wicker et al., in press). For example, Ronkainen et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study on ten male Finnish ice hockey coaches to explore coaches' attitudes and behaviours towards athletes' dual careers. The results revealed that, despite good intentions, most coaches did not take an actual interest in the athletes' educational aspirations or the challenges they faced outside of hockey. The coaches portrayed education as a backup plan for the athletes who could not 'make it' professionally. The authors suggested that these beliefs might have led athletes to view education as a non-intrinsically meaningful life project. Coaches reported that they wanted to integrate life skill development and DC agendas into their coaching practices but were unsure how to do so (Ronkainen et al., 2018). Additionally, Saarinen et al. (2020) interviewed 17 Finnish student-athletes about coaches that empowered or disempowered their DC experiences. The results revealed that 13 out of the 17 participants experienced disempowering coaching climates due to coaches' exclusive emphasis on athletic performance. Participants described how their coaches' support depended on their sport commitment that reinforced the elite sports narrative. In fact, athletes who reported high levels of commitment to sport had more experiences with coaches who supported their autonomy than the athletes who reported investing less in their athletic careers. Thus, due to the dearth of effective DC coaching strategies and a responsibility to maintain athletic excellence, coaches were partial to athletes that prioritized sport that often left the athletes who valued their dual careers feeling overwhelmed (Ronkainen et al., 2018; Saarinen et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2022).

Finally, Taylor et al. (2022) conducted a mixed-methods study on 88 semi-professional female rugby players and their coaches from New Zealand and Australia to understand the athletes' experiences in semi-professional careers in traditionally male team sports. The athletes divulged that compared to university sport, coaches at the semi-professional had higher athletic expectations that caused them considerable stress. Since the athletes were receiving financial remuneration from their team, they were expected to have increased sport commitment that hindered their ability to hold full-time work. The coaches acknowledged their players' various responsibilities but explained that they needed to enforce performance and behavioural standards to focus on winning in a professional sport setting. Overall, the players recognized the high degree of support from the coaching staff. However, the high athletic expectations combined with vocational obligations led to tension between coaches and players because of the challenge of navigating two or more employment commitments while simultaneously committing to athletic excellence. The authors noted that the relative experiences of players may have been overly buoyant since the study was investigating players after the inaugural season of the National Rugby League Women's Premiership, which may have been influenced by an appreciation of finally being paid to play. Thus, the authors recommended that future researchers continue to examine women's sports professionalization in more mature leagues to extend the understanding of women's sporting career experiences and choices. Furthermore, the authors emphasized that experiences may differ across sports and have different culturally specific contexts. Therefore, the authors urged future researchers to investigate teams and athletes from other sports and countries to increase the quality of information about professional female athlete experiences and effective coaching practices (Taylor et al., 2022).

Overall, DCs often faced many challenges intensified by a lack of understanding from supporters and elite sport narratives (Saarinen et al., 2020). Educational programs on DC challenges would allow coaches to assimilate the knowledge of the associated struggles of balancing a dual career to help them develop positive cultures. It would also help coaches provide athletes with resources to find a balance that accommodates their athletes' specific needs (Ronkainen et al., 2018; Saarinen et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2022).

Role Strain Theory

The drive to succeed in multiple domains, such as sport and academics/vocation, can lead to outstanding achievements (Dubuc-Charbonneau & Durand-Bush, 2015). However, a drive to succeed in various roles can also be challenging since each role is accompanied by considerable demands (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014; Sauvé et al., 2022). When individuals cannot manage demands, it can lead to stress, reduced well-being, and burnout (Gould & Whitley, 2009). In fact, empirical evidence suggests that stress, reduced well-being, and burnout are the most prominent consequences of DCs' inability to balance their academic/vocational and athletic demands (Silva et al., 2022). Upon exploring these consequences, researchers have suggested that the consequences associated with an unbalanced dual career can result from experiences of role strain (Simon, 1995).

Role Strain Theory (RST) is widely recognized in educational (Ellinas et al., 2018; Fenzel, 1989; McGovern, 2022), social (Levant, 2022; Mobily, 1991), and organizational (Anderson-Kulman & Paludi, 1986; Berger & Bruch, 2021) psychology to explain the difficulties experienced when fulfilling multiple role demands (Goode, 1960). It has only recently been applied to the sport psychology setting (van Rens et al., 2016). RST encapsulates four key components: *ambiguity*, *conflict*, *overload*, and *underload* (Fenzel, 1989). *Role*

ambiguity describes a lack of understanding or clarity about one's expectations in one or multiple roles (Ivancevich et al., 2017). This ambiguity could be represented as increased stress resulting from a DC's uncertainty about the training requirements (van Rens et al., 2016). *Role conflict* refers to a discrepancy between the performance expectations by others (e.g., coaches, parents, employers) within roles or an internal discrepancy for what constitutes acceptable behaviours or performance (Fenzel, 1989). For example, a sport coach might prefer a DC to prioritize sport over school, while an employer might prefer the DC to prioritize work over sport (van Rens et al., 2016). *Role underload* refers to a perceived underutilization of one's abilities (Ivancevich et al., 2017). For instance, a female DC might not have access to competitive sports teams upon university graduation and thus may not be challenged to further develop her sporting abilities (Szto et al., 2021). Finally, *role overload* denotes a lack of personal resources to meet demands within and between roles (Fenzel, 1989). An example of overload is a DC's lack of time to fulfill vocational and athletic demands (Harrison et al., 2022; van Rens et al., 2016).

RST has been studied across a variety of fields to understand experiences of stress, well-being, and performance amongst individuals juggling the demands of multiple roles (e.g., Berger & Bruch, 2021; Ko & Hwang, 2021; Levant, 2022; McGee et al., 2019; McGovern, 2022; Reyna, 2021; Romero, Pitney, Brumels, et al., 2018; Varpio et al., 2018). For example, McGovern (in press) interviewed 31 experiential outdoor learning instructors who led groups of students on wilderness expeditions to understand the stress associated with multiple roles (e.g., skills trainer, program designer, translator, facilitator, teacher, and mentor and trainer of other staff) and to develop support programs to help instructors be successful in their roles. Their findings revealed that the instructors felt that they could not balance all their role demands which led to heightened stress levels and decreased job performance and satisfaction. More specifically, instructors

described that their role strain led to heightened mental and emotional anguish that made them question their ability to lead the course effectively and, therefore, impaired job performance. This self-doubt led the instructors to question their career choice, and thus, the authors suggested that instructor supporters should develop strategies to help instructors mitigate their role strain to prevent turnover and burnout (McGovern, 2022).

Furthermore, a recent survey-based study of 389 professional sports team athletic trainers (ATPSSs) indicated that role strain was associated with decreased job satisfaction, increased thoughts of career termination, reduced productivity, and overall reduced life satisfaction (Romero, Pitney, Brumels, et al., 2018). In the second part of their study, the authors interviewed 34 ATPSSs to gain insight into the source of role strain and identify ways to reduce it (Romero, Pitney, Mazerolle, et al., 2018). The ATPSS's reported that they often sacrificed personal and family obligations when trying to meet the excessive demands from the professional sports league, organization, team, and players. Moreover, the ATPSS's explained their work-life imbalance prevented them from providing quality care to all their athletes that is the part of their job they valued most. The reduced quality of care led to feelings of self-doubt and ultimately led some ATPSS to retire early. Finally, Ellinas et al. (2018) surveyed 614 faculty members from the Medical College of Wisconsin to assess gender differences in role strain, work-life balance, and organizational climate as predictors of promotion seeking, leadership seeking, and intent to leave. Their results revealed that perceived work-life conflict was negatively correlated with leadership and promotion seeking for women but not for men. The authors posited that this result might have been derived from diminished role clarity in females since nearly 90% of leaders in this institution were male. As a result, the female faculty members may not have had clear promotion goals or may have experienced reduced role expectations. Moreover, men reported

lower perceptions of work-life conflict, suggesting that work-life conflict affects male and female faculty differently and thus should be addressed in future research to remove barriers for females seeking leadership opportunities (Ellinas et al., 2018).

In sum, empirical evidence suggested that attempting to balance multiple roles led to role strain which increased the prevalence of stress and self-doubt, and reduced performance and well-being (Ellinas et al., 2018; McGovern, 2022; Romero, Pitney, Brumels, et al., 2018; Romero, Pitney, Mazerolle, et al., 2018). While RST is used as a theoretical framework in many fields and is clearly applicable to sport, it was not applied in the sport context until 2016 (van Rens et al., 2016).

Role Strain in DCs. Understanding DCs' athletic and student/vocational identities has gained increasing attention over the past decade (e.g., Cartigny, Fletcher, Coupland, & Bandelow, 2021; Higginbotham, 2021; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; Lu et al., 2018; Mosewich et al., 2021; Murray & Sabiston, 2022; Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2018). However, until recently, no studies have been framed around RST to investigate the challenges elite athletes face while striving to balance their dual careers (Hayman et al., 2021; Hayman et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2018; van Rens et al., 2019; van Rens et al., 2018). One of the first studies to use the role strain framework in the sport psychology context was van Rens et al. (2016), who interviewed 20 elite Australian DCs aged 13-17 on their experiences of balancing their sport with education. In contrast to the four RST components proposed by Fenzel (1989), the findings of this study supported five distinct areas that reflected the sources of role strain in DCs: (i) overload in school, (ii) overload in sport and between roles, (iii) between-role conflict, (iv) underload, and (v) ambiguity. The difference was that they separated the overload category into two distinct categories to reflect the overwhelmingly high levels of overload the athletes felt in school and

sports domains. High role overload levels in multiple domains caused the athletes to feel depleted in their physical and mental vigour, self-efficacy, social support, and time. The participants also reported that role conflict occurred when they felt obliged to prioritize one role over the other. Nearly half of the athletes said that their relationships with their family and friends were strained because they prioritized their academic and athletic commitments. Finally, some athletes reported that their supporters did not understand the extent of the demands they were experiencing. These included negative attitudes from some teachers who did not understand why they were 'only in school half of the time' and non-athlete peers and relatives who did not understand the athlete's responsibilities and commitments. In their future directions, van Rens et al. (2016) urged researchers to continue exploring role strain in different sports and other academic stages to advance the understanding of role strain on the performance and well-being of elite DCs.

In a similar study, van Rens et al. (2018) conducted a survey-based study of 112 Australian male football players aged 16-18 to explore the relationship between role strain and multidimensional life satisfaction. The findings revealed that all components of role strain were negatively associated with the total life satisfaction of the DCs. More specifically, nearly all the DCs experienced role strain associated with decreased life satisfaction in sport, friendships, family, personal, and global life satisfaction domains. Furthermore, the authors noted that the AFL provided the DCs' with 'talent development managers' who assisted them with their pursuits outside of sport which may have decreased the amount of role strain experienced. Additionally, the authors noted that their sample consisted of a homogenous sample of male junior DCs. Therefore, they recommended that researchers conduct similar studies in different sports and with older samples that include female DCs (van Rens et al., 2018). Taken together,

these studies suggested that an inability to balance sport and academics led to role strain and subsequently decreased athlete well-being and overall life satisfaction (van Rens et al., 2016; van Rens et al., 2018).

In another study, Hayman et al. (2020) interviewed five female Great Britain DCs aged 14-17 to explore potential physical and psychological health risks associated with balancing elite sport and academics through a RST lens. Their findings revealed that DCs experienced low-level but chronic role strain at the beginning of their athletic careers. Furthermore, both role strain frequency and volume increased as they got older, and their athletic level progressed. Moreover, the participants revealed that situational (e.g., early sport specialization), personal (e.g., wanting to become an elite acrobat), and social factors (e.g., support from parents, teachers, coaches) attenuated their role strain intensity and regularity. More specifically, the participants reported a very single-minded focus and commitment to securing world-class junior acrobat status and a desire to become an elite acrobat from a young age. Their unwavering desire to be an elite athlete reduced their role strain because they spent less time training and competing in other sports, which exempted them from committing to other identities. Additionally, their single-minded sport focus allowed them to develop clear goals and expectations of the choices they had to make to get to the top level. Moreover, the participants reported significant social support from their teachers and coaches, who fully understood their competing role demands. Recognizing that the role strain frequency and volume increased with age, the authors urged future researchers to explore the effects of role strain in older DCs who are obliged to fully commit to multiple roles and identities (Hayman et al., 2020).

Overall, there have been a small number of studies designed to explore the demands of DCs in the context of RST. Although findings report that role strain frequency and volume

increased with age (Hayman et al., 2020), all the studies conducted to date have been on junior DCs (Hayman et al., 2021; van Rens et al., 2016; van Rens et al., 2018). Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that role strain is attenuated by positive social support (Hayman et al., 2020). However, there are no studies designed to help coaches, parents, teachers, and policymakers help elite DCs navigate high role strain and the accompanying negative consequences (Hayman et al., 2020; van Rens et al., 2016; van Rens et al., 2018). Finally, scholars have suggested that role strain affects males and females differently (Ellinas et al., 2018). Therefore, future research is recommended to explore how older female DCs balance the demands of elite sport with advanced academic or vocational roles.

Chapter 3

Methods

Qualitative research methods have been growing in popularity, especially in fields such as sport psychology (Poucher et al., 2020). In fact, in their systematic review, Culver et al. (2012) found that 29% of all the articles they examined in three major sport psychology journals between 2000 and 2009 were qualitative, which was a significant increase compared to the previous decade. This predominant increase has emphasized the value of qualitative research and its contribution to social inquiry, seeking to understand human lives and social phenomena (Leavy et al., 2020; Schwandt, 2001). The following chapter will explain the qualitative research methods used to guide this study, which will include the design, participants, procedure, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

Philosophical Assumptions

Qualitative research is primarily influenced by a researcher's beliefs about the world (Smith & Caddick, 2012). These beliefs are referred to as philosophical assumptions that help construct a conceptual framework for a study (Maxwell, 2013). Researchers can conduct qualitative research from a range of philosophical assumptions, including post-positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, constructivism, and constructionism (Poucher et al., 2020).

The primary aim of a *social constructivist paradigm* is to understand the meanings that individuals create for and attribute to their lived experiences (Jones et al., 2014). In contrast to a social constructionist paradigm which promotes social action and focuses on the historical and cultural aspects of knowledge and understanding (Burr & Dick, 2017), a *social constructivist paradigm* aims to explore a phenomenon from the perspectives of multiple others (Poucher et al., 2020). The current study examined how North American professional female hockey players

balanced their professional sport and non-sport careers, including their desired coaching behaviours and forms of support. Therefore, a *social constructivist paradigm* allowed the researcher to acknowledge that each participant had a unique experience balancing their sport and non-sport careers (e.g., different jobs, families, teams, etc.). This study also recognized that the interpretations of the data were subjective and dependent on the individual participants, time, unique demands of each role, and context (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Therefore, a *social constructivist paradigm* informed the study.

Ontological and epistemological assumptions underpin and inform the entire research project (Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). They tell the reader what the researcher considers as knowledge and who they believe has the most insight into a portion of that knowledge (Lincoln, 2010). Ontological assumptions represent the nature of reality (Poucher et al., 2020). Qualitative researchers adhere to a *relativist ontology* when they believe that there are multiple subjective realities based on individuals' lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The current study aligned with a *relativist ontology* because it investigated the experience of balancing professional sport and non-sport roles from the multiple subjective perspectives of each participant based on their lived experiences.

Epistemological assumptions represent the creation of knowledge and consider what establishes truth (McFee, 2009). Based on the researcher's background in hockey and experience as a DC, the current study followed a *subjectivist/transactional epistemology*. A study guided by a *subjectivist epistemology* entails a social construction of knowledge about a phenomenon through interactions between the researcher and the participants (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Rather than objectively determining the truth about a phenomenon, researchers following a *subjectivist epistemology* acknowledge that they cannot remove their past experiences from a

study (Poucher et al., 2021). In fact, a researchers' experiential knowledge is seen as a strength because it allows them to access a significant source of insight, hypotheses, and validity checks about a phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013).

Typically, researchers have assumptions about the phenomena of interest based on their previous experiences and interpretations of those experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2019). An essential part of the qualitative inquiry process involves a researcher's critical reflexive ability (Maxwell, 2013). More specifically, they cannot suppress their experiences or be overwhelmed by them but simply be conscious of their existence and the impact they have on the research process (Duffy et al., 2021). Many factors can influence data collection, interpretation and analysis, such as gender, culture, and experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The primary author has played competitive female hockey for 18 years, including five years in USPORTS for the McGill women's hockey team. Thus, her previous experience as a competitive female dual career hockey player shaped how she interacted with the participants and interpreted the data to understand how professional female DCs balanced their sport and non-sport careers. Therefore, based on the chosen paradigm and ontological and epistemological assumptions, this study allowed the participants to share their experiences balancing their professional sports and non-sport careers.

Methodology

Research methodology refers to the theories and practices used to create a structural framework for a coherent study (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Common methodologies in qualitative research include *narrative research*, *phenomenology*, *case studies*, *grounded theory* and *ethnography*; however, the current study will use a *generic qualitative research* approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Bradbury-Jones et al. (2017),

a *generic qualitative research* approach can be used whenever a researcher wants to represent the subjective experiences of a specific group of individuals. More specifically, *generic qualitative studies* are typically guided by individuals' subjective 'takes' on actual external events (Kahlke, 2014) and are more aligned with understanding the outer-world content of research questions (Percy et al., 2015). For example, *generic qualitative research* studies typically explore questions about people's attitudes, opinions, or beliefs about a particular issue or experience rather than their internal subjective structures, such as how an individual experiences a phenomenon or why they feel the way they do (Percy et al., 2015).

Additionally, *generic qualitative research* studies typically align with social constructivist paradigmatic assumptions because they attempt to understand how individuals interpret and attribute meaning to their experiences by analyzing participants' voices, experiences, and meaning-making (Jones et al., 2014; Kahlke, 2014). This aligned well with the current study's aim to explore how professional female dual career hockey players interpreted and attributed meaning to their experiences of balancing their professional sport and non-sport careers. Therefore, this study's philosophical assumptions, research aim, and research questions aligned well with those of a *generic qualitative research* study.

Participants

Qualitative researchers engage in sampling to recruit participants with a sound understanding of a phenomenon of interest (Schreier, 2018). Qualitative researchers typically engage in *purposive or purposeful sampling* to understand their participants' complex and in-depth experiences (Smith & Caddick, 2012). In *purposive sampling*, the researcher strategically selects a specific subset of individuals who have in-depth knowledge and experiences with or can provide "information-rich cases" about the phenomenon of interest (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p.

24). This study used *purposive sampling* to understand the complex experiences of a small (i.e., idiographic) number of professional female dual career hockey players.

Among the various types of *purposive sampling* techniques (e.g., maximum variation sampling, deviant case sampling, etc.), this study used a *criterion-based sampling* technique (Patton, 1990). *Criterion-based sampling* takes advantage of the experiences of individuals who have a distinct involvement with an information-rich case (Boehnke et al., 2011), to generate in-depth understandings rather than empirical generalizations (Patton, 1999). Under these circumstances, *criterion-based sampling* aims to "understand cases that are likely to be information-rich because they may reveal major system weaknesses that become targets of opportunity for program or system improvement" (Patton, 1990, p. 177). The distinct involvement of the chosen subset was established based on criteria that suited the study's purpose (Patton, 2015).

Following the principles of *criterion-based sampling*, this study recruited ten professional female hockey players based on a predetermined set of criteria:

1. They were current professional female hockey players in North America at the time of the interview.
2. They had played in the PHF for at least two years.
3. They were professional female hockey players who had a full-time (i.e., have a regular workweek) non-sport job at the time of the interview.
4. They were no longer a full-time student.
5. They were not nationally carded athletes who received a sufficient monthly stipend from the Canadian government.

As mentioned, all the participants were non-carded, professional, dual career female hockey players who were playing in the PHF. Of the ten participants, four were Canadian and six were American, and they were recruited from six out of the seven teams who compete across North America in the PHF. The mean age of the participants was 26.7 years, and the mean years played in a professional league was 4.1. Additionally, eight of the ten participants worked more than 35 hours per week in their non-sport job, and the remaining two participants worked slightly less than 35 hours per week, primarily because they were also part-time students. These two participants were still included in the study because their demanding schedules were similar to those of the eight full-time employees. This consideration for part-time students and employees aligns with research suggesting that being a vocational DC may be more challenging and that this complexity tends to increase as careers progress (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019).

Procedures. Ethics was obtained from the McGill University Research Ethics Board (REB) before the interview process begun. Once the REB approved the research, the participants were recruited via email. To obtain data about the specific settings or participants that qualitative researchers select, they need to establish relationships with potential participants and gatekeepers or other influential persons who may control or facilitate access to these settings or participants (Maxwell, 2018). All the participants were recruited through personal contacts of the lead researcher (see Appendix A), who provided each participant with a consent form explaining the benefits and risks of the study (see Appendix B). All interviews were scheduled according to the preferred time and location of each participant. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Due to the ever-changing state of the pandemic, and to accommodate the participants' schedules, interviews were held virtually through Microsoft Teams. Additionally, the primary researcher conducted one pilot interview to become familiar

with the interview process and obtain feedback from her more experienced supervisor to strengthen the interview guide and the primary researcher's interview skills and technique (Maxwell, 2013). Following the pilot interview, necessary modifications were implemented based on the supervisor's suggestions.

Data Gathering

The goal of data collection in qualitative research is to obtain deep and detailed accounts of a particular phenomenon (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Interviews are the most common techniques used among the multiple avenues of collecting qualitative data (e.g., observation, media, focus groups) (Maxwell, 2018). Interviews pertain to a conversationalist method that allows the researcher to guide the participants to share deep, personal, and meaningful information that goes beyond the surface (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). There have recently been many media posts about the financial inequality that professional female hockey players face (Szto et al., 2021); however, this study was among the first to go beyond the surface and ask the players about their perspectives of their experiences being DCs. During this active dyadic interaction, both the researcher and participant co-constructed knowledge concerning the perception of their experiences (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Interviews are primarily used to understand the personal and sometimes sensitive topics pertaining to the participants' feelings, emotions, and behaviours (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). As such, the participant's responses affected how and which questions the researcher asked next (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Thus, qualitative interviews are subjective processes shaped by the researchers' and participants' social characteristics and personal experiences, such as motivations, memories, beliefs, and emotions (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). The specific experiences targeted throughout this research process involved the participants' professional dual career hockey experiences, specifically how they

balanced multiple roles and the influence of their supporters. The interactive interview process allowed the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of this topic by probing the participants to participate in deep introspection while providing them with an opportunity to share any feelings, emotions, and behaviours they felt throughout the experience (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Documents. Documents have been used extensively to provide context and meaning around an assessment topic in qualitative research studies (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis involves finding information from many sources (e.g., public records, biographies) on the participants before the interview to contextualize the interview guide (Creswell, 2013). The present study obtained documents pertaining to each participant's biography and previous athletic records. The analysis of these documents provided the researcher with insight into the participants' athletic involvement (e.g., number of years competing in elite hockey), the nature of their non-sport profession, and the context behind their professional female hockey involvement to facilitate the analysis of the participants' responses (Warshaw & Upton, 2018).

Interviews. Individual *semi-structured interviews* were used to foster a two-way conversation while preventing the participants from going on a tangent (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Although the researcher was equipped with a pre-established set of open-ended questions, she was given the freedom to ask unplanned questions, allowing the generation of unanticipated insights specific to the phenomenon of interest (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Compared with a structured interview, a *semi-structured interview* enabled the participants to express their perspectives, emotions, and attitudes with more flexibility (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Typically, researchers are equipped with a list of questions or series of topics they want to ask before starting the interview, however, they are given the flexibility about when and how they ask the questions (Edwards & Holland, 2013). In line with a subjectivist epistemology, researchers using

semi-structured interviews aim to co-create a phenomenon of interest by steering the participant toward introspection and deep reflection (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Moreover, *semi-structured interviews* are ideal for researchers following a relativist ontology because they are uniquely capable of capturing the subjective experiences and realities of each participant's human experience, talk and interaction (Brinkmann, 2013). This dyadic interaction allowed reflexivity that complemented a social constructivist approach to highlight each individual's unique experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher's objective was to maintain an engaged conversation while ensuring the participant felt comfortable and relaxed throughout the process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Given these points, semi-structured interviews seemed best suited for this study due to their structure and flexibility, allowing the researcher to gain insight into professional dual career female hockey players' experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Interviews with the primary researcher lasted 55 to 95 minutes and combined for a total of 715 minutes and 118 transcribed pages.

Interview Guide. An interview guide (see Appendix C) was created to ask participants pre-planned, open-ended questions about their experiences as professional female dual career hockey players (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). The interview guide began with opening questions about the participants' goals and motivations for becoming professional hockey players. The subsequent section included key questions that encompassed how the participants adapted their daily routines to combine their athletic and vocational roles and responsibilities and their preferred/effective support. These questions were all based on the three Research Questions of this study. The researcher also used prompts to help the participants elaborate on their responses while ensuring that their responses pertained to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Finally, the researcher concluded the interviews by asking the

participants summary and conclusion questions (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). At this point, the participants were given the opportunity to share any final questions or comments they had.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is an interpretive and reflexive process involving inductive and deductive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). It begins at the onset of an investigation, with information being organized into increasingly more abstract data units (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative researchers must also be reflexive during their data analysis, reflecting on their role in the study and how their personal experiences shape how they interpret the data and ascribe meaning to it (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Qualitative data analysis typically involves transcription, data management, data familiarization, and data interpretation (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). During this process, the researcher explored possible interrelationships and through the writing process reflexively collated the data to represent the participants' various meanings (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). The current study used *reflexive thematic analysis* to transcribe, manage and analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). *Thematic analysis* is one of the most widely used data analyses in qualitative methods because it allows the researcher to identify patterns of meaning across nuanced and complex qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Thematic analysis is guided by a six-phase model where researchers actively progress through the phases recursively and reflexively (Poucher et al., 2020). In the first phase of *thematic analysis*, the researcher gained *familiarity* by analyzing and critically engaging with the data to answer the research questions (Braun et al., 2016). Once the researchers had read the data a few times and gained a sound understanding, they advanced to the second phase, where they begin *generating codes*. In this phase, the researchers progressed their analysis beyond immediate and obvious meaning to identify and label the data with codes that captured the

content and analytic relevance of the data (Braun et al., 2016). At the end of phase two, the researchers had a systematic, coherent and robust set of codes that were ready to be organized in the next phase (Terry et al., 2017). The data was coded from a more inductive and latent standpoint to identify the participants' stressors and their desired forms of support. This involved looking beyond the surface level of the data to uncover underlying patterns and themes related to the participants' stressors and supporters. The data was also coded to identify the strategies used by the participants and their supporters to cope with these stressors. Through this process, 39 initial codes were identified. The third phase referred to *theme development* which involved organizing the coded data into higher-level groups known as candidate themes (Braun et al., 2016) (see Appendix D). The generation of these themes went beyond simply summarizing and describing the data, it involved analytic comments on the importance and implications of the topic concerning the research questions (Terry et al., 2017). During this phase the researchers identified nine candidate themes before moving onto the fourth phase. The fourth phase aimed to *revise and refine the candidate themes into higher order themes* to ensure that the data aligned with the coded extracts and addressed the research questions compellingly and coherently (Braun et al., 2016). The researchers came up with four higher order themes (see Appendix D). Once the researchers were confident that the *thematic analysis* captured the data content well and addressed the research question, they moved on to the fifth *naming* phase. In this phase, the researcher defined, clarified and refined the scope and focus of each theme to build an analytic narrative about the coded data (Braun et al., 2016). The theme names succinctly explained the essence of each theme while also incorporating their scope and boundaries (Braun et al., 2016). Finally, the sixth phase consisted of *writing the report*, which allowed the researchers to compile, edit, and refine the existing analytic writing while also situating the analysis within the

overall report (Braun et al., 2016). The final report consisted of both illustrative and analytic data extracts that clearly and compellingly demonstrated the analytical relevance of the themes (Terry et al., 2017). One of the critical distinctions between thematic analysis and reflexive thematic analysis is that *reflexive thematic analysis* is an open, exploratory, flexible, and iterative process (Braun & Clark, 2019), meaning that the researchers are aware of the need to make decisions around the analysis. Therefore, the researchers knowingly engaged and made decisions around the analysis and fully understood how they came up with their interpretations (Duffy et al., 2021) by referring to their reflexive notes rather than thoughtlessly following the six phases outlined above (Braun et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness

Credibility and the assessment of research quality are among the many differences between qualitative and quantitative research (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Credibility in qualitative research is not about finding an objective ‘truth’; rather, it is achieved when the researchers' interpretation of the data accurately represents the constructed realities of the participants (Burke, 2016). In fact, inter-rater reliability and validity to achieve rigour are typically rejected by qualitative researchers who use the philosophical assumptions of epistemological subjectivism and ontological relativism (Smith & McGannon, 2018). When using a relativist approach, the criteria for judging qualitative research are not applied universally but rather are guided by a dynamic list of characterizing traits that align their purpose, methods, and results to enhance the quality of their work (Burke, 2016). As a result, the researchers reflexively determine the characterizing criteria to align with the study's purpose and context, contributing to rigour, quality, and credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In line with a constructivist paradigm and the philosophical assumptions of a relativist ontology and a

subjectivist/transactional epistemology, this study relied on the criteria of a critical friend, reflexive journaling, substantive contribution and width, and worthy topic to ensure that the study achieved rigour, credibility, and coherence.

Critical Friend. *Critical friends* have been frequently used as a qualitative research criterion to achieve rigor and trustworthiness (Smith & McGannon, 2018). While using this criterion, the primary researchers engaged in a critical dialogue with her thesis supervisor to enhance her reflexive self-awareness and to ensure that the report resonated with people other than herself (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). A constructivist paradigm supports *critical friends* because the researcher and her peer explored other plausible interpretations of the data suggesting that independent realities existed based on the meanings people attributed to their experiences (Smith & McGannon, 2018). In this specific study, the primary author shared her interpretations with her thesis supervisor, the secondary author. The secondary author challenged the primary author's thought process and interpretations to foster more profound reflexivity and critical thinking (Tracy, 2010).

Reflexive Journaling. Qualitative researchers use *reflexive journaling* to increase a study's rigour by bringing the researcher's biases and preconceptions into consciousness (Etherington, 2007). In this study, the primary researcher used a *reflexive journal* during data collection and analysis to log her observations, assumptions, emotions, and reactions concerning the topic studied. The process of *reflexive journaling* aligned well with reflexive thematic analysis, which allowed the primary researcher to consider the influence of her experiential knowledge and beliefs on the research data as well as her evolving understanding of their roles and relationships within the study (Culver et al., 2012; Etherington, 2007). Additionally, the primary author's *reflexive journal* included information about why she wanted to study this

topic, her experiences as a DC and the assumptions she had about balancing sport and non-sport professions. Finally, the primary researcher acknowledged that she could not remove her past experiences from the study. However, *reflexive journaling* allowed her to fully understand how she came up with her interpretations by exploring her past experiences and thoughts. This enabled the final report to be representative of the participants' accounts, interpretations, and subjective realities.

Substantive Contribution and Width. *Substantive contribution* refers to how the researcher creates an analytic narrative that contributes to an understanding of social phenomena, whereas *width* refers to the overall comprehensiveness of the data (Burke, 2016). The current study purposively recruited participants to ensure that the sample included professional female DCs. The final report provided insight into how a select group of professional female athletes balanced multiple roles (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Additionally, substantial quotations and alternative explanations of the analysis were presented to support the reader's judgment of their interpretation (Burke, 2016). This allowed the reader to interpret the findings, leading to a comprehensive, high-quality final qualitative report (Tracy, 2010).

Worthy Topic. *Worthy topic* refers to how a qualitative research study is "timely, significant, interesting or evocative" (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). The current study was conducted simultaneously with the Professional Women's Hockey Player Association (PWHPA)'s #stickintheground campaign, which advocates for better support for professional female hockey players (Professional Women's Hockey Players Association, 2021). The PWHPA is an association of North America's best female hockey players. Since the present study aimed to explore effective avenues of support for professional female hockey players, it was both timely

and significant. Therefore, this study aligned well with the *worthy topic* criterion and thus enhanced the study's trustworthiness.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter presents the results of individual interviews with ten professional female hockey players. The initial interviews ranged from 55 to 95 minutes, totaling 715 minutes in duration. Further, the interviews were transcribed verbatim to produce 118 single-spaced pages of text. The thematic analysis allowed us to organize data into 39 codes, nine themes, and finally, four overarching themes, which were called: *women's hockey in North America*; *stressors*; *aspects of social support*; and *strategies for achieving life balance* (see Appendix D). The following chapter will provide descriptions and the participants' own words to illustrate each of the four overarching themes in detail. Moreover, in order to protect the participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms (e.g., Sophia) will be used throughout the results section.

Women's Hockey in North America

This overarching theme encapsulates information on the women's hockey context and culture in North America. This overarching theme is split into themes of *amateur women's hockey* and *professional women's hockey*.

Amateur Women's Hockey

This theme focuses on the various life experiences and events that helped the participants ascend to the professional women's hockey ranks. Each athlete's life journey (i.e., athletics, education, etc.) was unique; however, there were many commonalities about their journey navigating minor hockey, which stemmed from their love of hockey: "I started playing hockey when I was five, grew up, and absolutely loved it" (Marie). One of the most prevalent sources of this passion came from their parents' continuous support: "From a young age, we were always

skating. My dad would build a rink in the backyard every winter. We just loved being on the ice” (Madison).

Over the years, my parents were a huge, huge help with my hockey career. I grew up in a Southern State, and there's not a lot of hockey. But I loved it, so there were times when they drove me 4 hours to practice there and back (Sophia).

Moreover, all participants mentioned that despite not having a professional league to aspire to when they were young, they wanted to continue pursuing their dreams in hockey:

I never intended to play professional hockey, partially because we didn't have the exposure as kids. I grew up in a really small town, and the only real significant female figure I had in hockey was an Olympian from my community (Tina).

Watching the Olympians every four years when I grew up inspired me to go pro. They were definitely some big inspirations, and you look at them when you're growing up and think about how cool it would be to have your name on your stick and all the equipment and get new skates (Sophia).

The athletes' passion for hockey is undeniable. Despite facing challenges and barriers as females, their love for the sport led them to pursue opportunities to play at the university level and eventually beyond: “I grew up in a generation of hockey where if you wanted to play hockey as a female, you had to have another job or commitment” (Siobhan).

I'm super passionate about the game of hockey. I love hockey, and after university was done, I wanted to keep playing. So, I tried to see if there were opportunities for girl hockey players, and now I don't want to stop playing. I want to keep playing for as long as I can (Jodi).

In conclusion, despite having diverse experiences and journeys toward becoming professional hockey players, all the athletes faced challenges in not having a clear path to follow. These athletes were driven by their passion for hockey which stemmed from their parents unwavering support, and most were inspired by the Olympians they saw on TV every four years. The shared experiences of being introduced to hockey at a young age, pursuing university athletics, and having a love for the game contributed to their success as professional athletes.

Professional Women's Hockey

This theme briefly overviews North America's professional women's hockey context and culture. The professional women's hockey league is relatively new and still growing. However, it is still not at a level where playing professional female hockey can be a full-time job:

We are juggling two full-time jobs because we love the game. That's something you have to embrace. Obviously, we'd love to have a league like the NHL, but it is what it is, and we know that's the territory (Madison).

In fact, many athletes noted that they felt more like professional athletes on their college teams compared to their current professional team:

Everything was at my fingertips in college, which is not the case now. If I needed to see a doctor tomorrow, I could have. If I needed to get treatment in an hour, I could have. If I needed a prescription that same day, I could have it. All those little things are definitely different now that I'm done college. We're just not there yet in the PHF or even close to having all those types of support, which is sad (Cherokee).

At times in college, I had more resources than at the pro level, as far as amount of coaching staff, the equipment managers, and the tools they had. The resources were at times much better in college (Sophia).

Despite the nascent state of professional women's hockey, the athletes were all grateful for the opportunity to be able to play high-level after university and get compensated for it. However, they acknowledged that there is still work to be done: "Half the girls on my team this year can live on their hockey salaries, but half can't because we don't have enough money for everybody to have a livable wage" (Jodi).

This year the salary cap is \$750,000/team per year, so there's much more room for paying other players. I think the highest-paid player right now is \$80,000/year. So, the range gets bigger. Like, before, it was between 5k and 40k. And now it's between 13.5k and 80k. That average is obviously skewed but, theoretically, the average right now should be about 36k to 40k. In previous years, it was way lower than that, probably around 10k (Tina).

The other day, a girl on our team said, "anything is better than nothing." Which is sad, but at the same time, that's what we're used to. We're used to it, but we also expect more, and that's the important part (Madison).

Finally, the athletes are motivated to continue growing women's hockey and making the PHF more sustainable. They want salaries to increase and to be able to play professional hockey full-time, with the hope that young girls will continue beyond college and the Olympics:

By the time I retire from hockey, I want this league to be better and more sustainable. I want salaries to increase, but I also want this to be somebody's full-time job. I really, truly want female hockey players to be able to say that they're just professional hockey players. I want young girls to be 10 years old and say I want to play in the PHF (Alex).

However, despite this motivation, all of the athletes acknowledged that growth takes time and effort and that it's crucial for them to keep pushing for improvement for the next generation of players:

All the growth we've seen in the league and women's hockey, more generally, comes from doing the work in the community, getting your name out there and doing all the little things outside of hockey and work. I love the direction it's headed. And if we can survive the next three years, it will only keep improving (Marie).

In conclusion, while the professional women's hockey league has made significant progress in recent years, there is still work to be done to reach a level where playing professional women's hockey can be a full-time job. Many players have expressed the need for improved salaries, benefits, and support systems similar to what they experienced on their college teams. Despite the challenges, the athletes noted that it is essential to keep pushing for changes that will benefit the next generation of players and continue to grow the sport.

Stressors

The following overarching theme represents aspects of the athletes' lives, both in and out of sport, that contribute to feelings of stress and negatively impacted the athletes' performances. It is split into two themes: *stress-inducing factors* and *performance stressors*.

Stress-Inducing Factors

This section includes aspects of the athletes' lives, both in and out of sport, which contributed to feelings of stress. The athletes experienced stress due to unfavorable conditions and a lack of resources that they encountered while playing at the professional level, which was a significant difference from the level of support they received in college:

In college everything is there for you, but here it's not. It's disheartening. But that's the whole point of building the league where we can get back to at least the college-level expectations. We sometimes put up with poor conditions because we have that passion for the game and we want it to grow (Madison).

There's a lot more progress to be made to make the professional hockey experience better. There's always been talk about getting your own locker room, gym, professional travel, and things like that. Having a trainer on staff the whole time. Sometimes there are nights when we don't have a trainer, or we don't have a full coaching staff or things like that (Tina).

Moreover, the athletes admitted that juggling both hockey and work dug into their sleep schedules: "Another big part that adds to my sense of feeling mentally drained is lack of sleep. Juggling both hockey and work definitely digs into your sleep schedule" (Sophia). They mentioned that they typically got minimal sleep, making it hard to rest and perform well on the ice: "It's a lot of driving, waking up at 5am, and then getting five hours of sleep" (Jodi). In addition to the lack of sleep, the athletes mentioned that the pressure of both careers didn't allow for much of a social life to let off steam:

One area that does take its toll is my social life. I have a boyfriend and since he also plays professional hockey, he gets it. I'm very thankful to have him in my life. But I don't get to see him as much because I play most weekends. But I have to do my thing. And I see my best friends for like an hour here and there. I'm not able to spend as much time as I hope with them or my family (Alex).

Finally, the athletes discussed that one of the major factors that contributed to feeling stressed was inconsistent schedules and last-minute changes, which led to difficulties in managing their time and created feelings of uncertainty about what is expected of them:

When I have a TBD on my schedule, I do what I think is best at that moment. I don't want to ask too much because I don't want to be punished. What if I need to ask something in the future so that I don't get cut next year, even if it does not correlate with being asked back? They could easily get someone who doesn't work to play in my spot next year. That's the thought process that I go through. It doesn't even make sense, but it makes sense because my coach has done it before to some people (Alyssa).

Our coaches do a terrible job of helping us plan and manage everything which only adds to the stress. On Monday, for example, it said that we practice at 5pm, then in the notes, it says workout at 5:15pm and practice at 6:30pm. Okay, so the practice doesn't start at 5:00? Does it start at 5:15 pm? When does it end? (Marie).

Athletes also emphasized the stress and pressure to prioritize hockey over work, with coaches expecting them to put in long hours towards training and travel:

There are definitely times when the coaches expect hockey to be a priority like it is for the guys in the NHL. For example, between skating, lifting, and recovery, our coaches expect us to put in at least 5 hours a day towards training. Then when you add in travelling, it's like we are working two 40 or more-hour week jobs (Sophia).

Furthermore, the increased expectations on the hockey side have made it difficult to balance their commitment to the team with their jobs outside of hockey. This has led to internal conflict about whether they should prioritize hockey or work:

Sometimes it's difficult to leave early from practice to finish something for work. How do I tell my coach that I'm going to be late because of work? Again, coaches are really, really understanding, but it's uncomfortable sometimes because you don't want to feel like you're letting the team down. How do I show that my commitment is 100% here, but it's also 100% with something else too? (Tina).

In conclusion, the athletes discussed various aspects of their lives, both in and out of sport, that contributed to feelings of stress, including playing in unfavourable conditions, lack of resources, juggling both hockey and work, inconsistent schedules, last-minute changes, and pressure to prioritize hockey over work. The athletes expressed their hope that the league would improve its support for athletes, including better facilities, equipment, and schedules, and recognized that progress would take time. They also discussed the difficulties of managing their time and balancing commitments to both hockey and work, highlighting the need to sacrifice parts of their life such as their sleep and social life until there's sufficient money to support their hockey careers.

Performance Stressors

This theme explains the various psychological and emotional factors that can negatively impact an athlete's performance on the ice or at work. One of the significant challenges that the athletes mentioned was the pressure to perform at high levels in both arenas: "I definitely feel a lot of pressure to excel in both of my "lives" because I want to be the best [name of her job] and obviously be the best hockey player that I can be" (Alex).

Both sides sometimes forget that you live this double life, and you do both of these things. So around playoff times, you have more to do. It's hard. Your coach wants to win.

So, they're holding that hockey side to a higher standard, and then at the same time, work is a busy season for us (Danielle).

The expectation for performance is the same in the workforce as it is with hockey; you're expected to perform. You're expected to succeed. You're expected to do well. And if you're not, then there's a conversation that needs to be had to figure out what's wrong (Tina).

More specifically, the athletes discussed that as the league continues to grow, players face higher expectations and pressure to excel in hockey, with increased money, sponsorship, and fan attendance, which created challenges for those balancing full-time jobs with hockey commitments: “It was a downward spiral where I wanted to perform well on the ice, but I also needed the job, but then I was stressed about that, and they kept influencing each other in negative ways” (Jodi).

Every year the expectation for hockey goes up. More money is coming into the space, more sponsorships and stuff. There are definitely higher standards and more pressure. High standards are good, but just higher standards for owners and management players. Even with fan attendance, there's more pressure to come and support (Siobhan).

Furthermore, the athletes stressed the need to understand that playing professional hockey is also a business that requires a professional attitude and good ambassadorship, with the pressure of negotiating for higher salaries based on performance: “There are more eyes on you when you're playing a professional sport. Both in the social media world and in general. There are way more people at our games, so you always have to be on your best behaviour” (Jodi).

You have to evidently perform because if you can perform and do well, you can negotiate for more money next year. So once the money's involved, it's a different type of pressure (Danielle).

The athletes also faced high expectations to be accountable for their non-sport work:

I want my employers to feel that they're my priority and that I will put in the work, especially since I am just starting out and don't have an extensive background in the field. I've always said that my job comes first because it pays the bills, and I'm going to take care of those responsibilities at work first. It has worked out well so far (Madison). My boss is open to me playing professional hockey, but he's also strict with the time and expects that I will stay at work until all my work is done. If the coaches tell us we have something last minute after practice, I'm screwed. For example, we have an exhibition game at 3:30pm on Tuesday. I can't go because I've already committed to my work. If I wasn't working, I could've gone to play (Cherokee).

The participants discussed the stress of their jobs, proving themselves to bosses, adapting to higher expectations, communicating their schedules with their team, and the importance of time management: Once I showed that I could manage my time, balance both and produce quality work, my bosses took a step back because they trusted that I would get my work done and that I could balance both (Danielle).

Finally, many participants mentioned the difficulties of balancing the demands of work and hockey, particularly during times when they needed to be away from work for games or tournaments and expressed concerns about making a living through hockey: "It's stressful being far away from work. If something comes up where they need you and you're completely unavailable because you're playing hockey" (Marie).

A frustrating point for me is that the league has decided to play games on Friday and Saturday so now we have to leave Thursday. So, I can't work Thursday or Friday. We're not at a point where you can ask players to take two days off work like that. Again, I'm very lucky because I have a very flexible work schedule. However, that's still two days away from work. So, I'm disappointed that they decided to do that this year and I wish I knew their reasoning (Marie).

In conclusion, balancing both their professional hockey careers and full-time jobs presented a myriad of challenges and high expectations that negatively impacted the athletes' performance on the ice and at work. The pressure to excel in both arenas was often overwhelming, and athletes had to navigate the stressors of negotiating for higher salaries, proving themselves to bosses, adapting to higher expectations and communicating their schedules with their team. Additionally, the difficulties of balancing the demands of work and hockey, particularly during times when they needed to be away from work for games or tournaments, raised concerns about making a living through hockey. Nevertheless, these athletes persevered, demonstrating resilience and determination, and served as role models for others who faced similar challenges.

Aspects of Social Support

This overarching theme describes the interviewed athletes' various types of social support, as well as necessary accommodations made by supporters, including bosses and coaches, to help them balance their professional sports with non-sport jobs. It is split into *social support* and *support necessities*.

Social Support

This theme explains the various types of social support, outside of coaches and employers, that helped the athletes balance multiple areas of their lives. The participants emphasized the importance of having supportive teammates who understood the challenges of balancing hockey with other commitments: “I rely heavily on my teammates. I just like hearing how their day goes because a lot of similarities come about. Just hearing how they handle certain situations makes me feel a lot better” (Alex).

My biggest supporters are my teammates. Everyone is approachable and open to talk. They all know what you are going through. They all know the grind, and they all know what it's like. You don't have to explain to anyone why or how you feel a certain way; they just understand (Alyssa).

The participants also noted that their family and friends provided a supportive network that allowed them to pursue their hockey career while balancing other aspects of their life. They specifically mentioned the how much they valued the practical support such as attending games: “My family and friends, they're unbelievable. They are so supportive in every way. Anytime they can make things easier they always do. My parents still come to every game” (Alyssa).

Finally, several participants mentioned the importance of having access to mental health resources such as sports therapists or counsellors: “Our hockey team recently got a counsellor. They're providing more resources for us now, which is good because we have a lot of added stressors outside of hockey” (Jodi). They noted that these resources could help them manage stress and navigate the challenges of balancing multiple areas of their life:

Our staff was good about honouring mental health days. That is something they really value and it's starting to grow more. Nobody should be stressed about missing practice. Obviously, you're committed to the team. But if you're not there mentally, it's okay

because it will affect your performance. Typically, that happens when athletes are burned out from work (Tina).

In conclusion, the participants identified several different types of social support that helped them balance multiple areas of their lives as professional women's hockey players. The participants noted that supportive teammates who understood the challenges of balancing hockey with other commitments helped them manage stress and find a balance in their lives. Moreover, the participants noted the importance of having access to mental health resources and a supportive family and friend network that could help with various aspects of their life, such as attending games, providing advice, or simply offering a listening ear. The participants emphasized that social support, in its various forms, plays a crucial role in their ability to balance their athletic pursuits with other areas of their lives.

Support Necessities

This theme describes the necessary accommodations made by the athletes' supporters to help them effectively manage the challenges of balancing their professional sports career with their non-sport jobs. The participants discussed the challenges of balancing professional hockey careers with other commitments, but praised coaches and employers who were supportive and understanding: "Our coaches were aware that players also had other commitments and other jobs. Being aware that at a late-night practice, people worked all day makes a big difference" (Jodi).

My coaches are so supportive and understand the amount of stress we are balancing.

They are very understanding and know that if we are stressed or pushed to our limits with our full-time jobs we aren't going to perform well at hockey. They do their best to

support us, give us what we need, or give us the necessary time off to be successful at both jobs, they truly care a lot about our success at our full-time jobs as well (Alex).

I have great support at work. My bosses are amazing. People have kids, everyone has something going on outside work, but my colleagues are very supportive. They said look, if you can't make a weekend shift, but you can make two for the next, let's do that. Or if you can't work this day because you have a game and want to switch with someone, try to make that happen. If no one can switch, then we'll figure it out (Alyssa).

More specifically, the participants emphasized the importance of open communication, flexibility in scheduling, and accommodations for travel and logistics:

It is important for coaches to be mindful of our normal working hours schedule. If they're going to schedule something, schedule it during non-normal working hours. Or articulate their plans earlier. They should give at least a week's notice (Cherokee).

My current boss is very accommodating of my schedule and allows me to make changes to my schedule at any time if something with the team comes up. As long as I get my work done, he does not mind. He has also been great if I have to take more days off than my PTO days for hockey. So, the days I can't work, I simply don't get paid for those days, which gives me more motivation to make it work. Obviously, I cannot take weeks off at a time, but as long as I get my work done, he is pretty good with everything (Sophia).

While the increase in salary for professional female hockey players was noted, participants recognized that coaches needed to recognize that work would still have to come first until players are making a living wage:

Work has always been assumed to come first. But that line is starting to get blurred as the players get paid more. But that's not to say that it's going to be a total change in a year or

two because girls are still making the league minimum of \$13,500 this year. You can't live on that. Until every player is going to make at least 50 or 60 grand, it's hard to say that hockey has to come first (Tina).

More specifically, the participants appreciated coaches who prioritized quality over quantity in training and were patient and understanding with scheduling:

My coaches understand that you come to the rink every day after you've already worked eight-hours. They never skate us or do massive conditioning. They don't expect us to come and suffer for three hours because nobody wants to do that. Since people are working, we're putting so much time and effort into the rest of our days and then showing up to the rink (Sophia).

Coaches need to consider time and be aware of the strain that balancing everything has on us as players. Some people work really high-stress jobs. Some people are in person 100% of the time. I'm not in person. I go in one day a week, maybe twice. I don't work a super physical job. But some people work in construction. Some people work in hospitals. There's a lot to be said about people like that. So, it's understanding that people experience different things at work, and it will affect them at the end of the day. And if it carries over to hockey, the coaches have to understand that it happens (Tina).

On the employers' side, the participants mentioned that flexible scheduling and understanding from their bosses was important. This included accommodating athletes' schedules around practices and games, allowing them to take time off for competitions, and being mindful of those who have different schedules than others: "The flexibility and the supportiveness of the employers I was interviewing with were definitely something that I had thought about, and, ultimately, is the reason why I went with my company. It's the perfect setup for me" (Madison).

The last-minute stuff is tough to work around. I'm very lucky that my boss is very flexible. I'm lucky to have people to help (Marie).

However, the athletes acknowledged that as long as their employers allowed them to play hockey, they couldn't ask too much of them other than having faith and the willingness to provide flexibility and support to help them succeed: "To have a positive experience, you have to have employers that are willing to adjust. Their willingness to help you out is huge and important" (Siobhan).

The biggest piece of advice I'd give to my boss is that athletes are built differently. Some people don't even give hiring an athlete a second thought because they want someone who will always be there. But it's important that our bosses know that we will get the work done (Sophia).

Finally, the participants desired a future where hockey could be a full-time job. Still, they emphasized that, in the meantime, good supporters were the key to helping work and hockey coexist with minimal conflict: "The environment you're in on both sides can make a more positive experience. Having a good support system and flexibility is a big factor in a positive work and hockey environment" (Danielle).

Having a good support system makes all the difference. I certainly wouldn't have been able to play hockey without the help of my teammates here at work. And then I also have my team at the hockey, so it's nice having those two supportive teams and right now, it works out well. You need to have teamwork at your job and on the team (Madison).

I expect the coaches' expectations of players will continue to increase as the salary increases. If we're trying to make this a league where girls will get paid full-time salaries, they'll get health insurance, and they'll get different benefits if that's the goal, similar to

the WNBA or the NWSL. If that's the goal, you can't be working a second job. But right now, that's kind of the track record that you have to be on because girls don't really have the opportunity to go play junior and come into school as a 21 or 22-year-old freshman knowing that they're going to make over \$100,000 by the time that their first year out of school. It definitely will get there, and that is where the expectation has to be (Tina).

In conclusion, the participants emphasized the challenges they faced in balancing their professional hockey careers with their non-sport jobs. However, they also praised coaches and employers who were understanding and accommodating, allowing for open communication, flexibility in scheduling, and accommodations for travel and logistics. The participants also emphasized the importance of quality over quantity in training, a positive environment at the rink, and patience and understanding with scheduling. Ultimately, the participants expressed a desire for a future where hockey can be a full-time job but emphasized that in the meantime, supporters can help work and hockey coexist without conflict through good support systems and teamwork. Overall, it is clear that creating an environment that supports and accommodates athletes with non-sport jobs is essential for both their success on the ice and in their careers outside of hockey.

Strategies for Achieving Life Balance

Athletes, particularly professional female hockey players, face unique challenges in balancing their professional sports career, non-sport jobs, and other life responsibilities. Managing the demands of multiple areas of life, such as work, family, and personal interests, can be challenging and overwhelming even with a strong support network. In this section, we will explore the techniques used by professional female hockey players to navigate the physical and

emotional stress of balancing multiple areas of their lives. It is split into *schedule and responsibilities*, *athlete adaptive techniques*, and *life balance*.

Schedule and Responsibilities

This section includes information regarding the athlete's daily schedule and responsibilities balancing work, hockey, and other life responsibilities. Despite the differences in their respective jobs and roles, there are several similarities between the participants. Firstly, they all have very busy schedules, juggling multiple commitments in a day, such as work, training, and playing hockey. They have to manage their time carefully to fit everything in and often have long days:

I usually get up at 5:00am on weekdays, make my lunch, have breakfast, get on the train around 6:10am, and get to work around 6:35am. I'll be on my floor by 6:35am, and then I sit down at the computer and map out my day. Then I'll eat lunch around 2pm and obviously I'll take some small breaks in between. At 7pm the new shift comes in, so I tell them about how the day was. Then from 7:15pm to 7:30pm, I scoot out. If I packed dinner with me in the morning, I try to heat it up at work and eat it on the way home on the train. And then I get in my car, and I go to practice. I usually get to the rink by 8:15pm and I practice from 9-10pm, shower, and get home around 10:45pm. So, it's a pretty long day (Alyssa).

Some players also had to drive long distances to attend practices and games, adding to the already demanding schedule:

I live an hour and a half away from the rink. The drive is hard, but I can't live in the city because of the very expensive rent. And you can only support yourself if you have a job that pays well outside of hockey or if hockey is paying well (Alex).

We have a couple of people on our team that live in the city and we have a couple of people that live out of state. I have an hour and a half commute and some people have a longer commute to the rink (Tina).

Finally, given the nascent state of the league, the players also have a responsibility to do community outreach: “I know, we’re not the NHL or remotely like those guys. We’re still at a point where you must get out and do the community outreach. Because if we don’t sell, it’s a business, right? If money is not coming in, money’s not going out” (Marie).

We usually do some community outreach before some of the weekend games. This weekend, we have a game in the Cape, and we’re doing a little Learn to Skate activity at the rink before the game. So those things are intertwined because I know that the league wants to give back to the community. I try to find the time because I’m like, why not give back to the community that helped me get to where I am? (Alex).

In conclusion, the daily schedules and responsibilities of the athletes in this section highlight the challenges of balancing work, hockey, and other life commitments. Despite the differences in their roles and jobs, they all have to manage their time carefully to fit everything in, often resulting in long days and little time for rest. Some players have to travel long distances to attend practices and games, while others have to factor in community outreach events into their busy schedules. Overall, their stories illustrate the dedication and commitment required to pursue their passion for hockey while managing other responsibilities.

Athlete Adaptive Techniques

This theme explores the techniques used by the participants to manage the cognitive, physical, and emotional stress of balancing multiple areas of their lives. Many participants stressed the need to prioritize and make tough decisions between work and hockey commitments,

and to be upfront with coaches and employers about scheduling conflicts and their well-being:

“It's important to vocalize to the coaching staff when we have too much” (Siobhan).

When a challenge arises, I try to communicate with both bosses. I often get in my head, and I have to remind myself that I cannot try to fix things on my own. It's important that I communicate with both sides. And being able to have that open communication with my bosses at work, my coaches, and the managing staff. It's just nice to know that they know what's going on in my life. I'm not really keeping it a secret. They know if I'm stressed and I'm taking a lot of extra time off work. It's nice to know that they're there (Alex).

Knowing that coaches understand the importance of mental health is really important.

They are starting to acclimate better, which is good. But also, don't be afraid to tell your coaches if you need a day off from hockey today or if you need to take a day off from work because you want to go to hockey. We are so busy all the time, so it is important to find the time every once in a while, to rest, stay in, and relax (Tina).

Additionally, they discussed the importance of having an organized schedule, planning in advance, and being proactive in managing their time:

When I first started my job, I was definitely worried about being able to get myself to do both things fully and to be able to get enough sleep and have the time to do everything, but I have found a pretty good schedule and routine and stuff like that. I'm usually very disciplined in my routine and schedule, which helps too (Madison).

To make both my careers work, I need to ensure I plan things out in advance. So first, I print out a calendar for the month, write in all the practices, and then write in all the games. I start with that, and then I try to fit in the weekends. If we play Saturday and Sunday, and then we have one weekend off, I write down that I will work the off week

when we're not playing. I sit down and write it out because there's no way I can plan it all in my head and try to figure it out on top of the chaotic schedule (Alyssa).

Moreover, participants described the need to take care of oneself through proper nutrition, rest, and exercise to avoid overloading: "Some days you just need to reset and rest" (Sophia).

Setting goals in three separate areas of my life helps me to progress in each category.

Having a good balance of them can strengthen and make you a more balanced person.

When you can give everything you can to each area, although it has to be equal, you can be a badass person, for lack of a better term (Alex).

On top of that, the participants mentioned the value of being adaptable and having a positive attitude and approach to managing their schedules:

You have to give yourself room to succeed, and although there will be failures along the way, having a positive mental approach to those failures will help you keep persisting and have a positive experience (Madison).

There are many times when things go differently than my plan. So just being adaptable and flexible and accepting that it is not always going to go how I want it to go and being ok with that (Alyssa).

Finally, the athletes noted the need to take breaks and be mindful of their well-being: "It's important not to forget that you're human too, if that makes sense" (Sophia).

Knowing when to pause is important because I'm always Go, Go, Go. That's just how I am. I've gotten better at knowing when I need to give myself a break. For example, if I cook every meal one week, then the next week, I can get Chipotle or something. I've been focusing on not being so strict about my schedule (Madison).

In conclusion, the participants in this study offered a wealth of adaptive techniques to balance multiple areas of their lives, particularly when juggling work and hockey commitments. Key strategies included prioritizing and making tough decisions, open communication with coaches and employers, organizing schedules and planning ahead, taking care of one's physical and mental well-being, setting goals in various life areas, being adaptable, and recognizing the need for breaks and self-care. Overall, these insights highlight the importance of a holistic approach to managing one's time and responsibilities and underscore the value of maintaining a healthy work-life balance. By embracing these strategies, individuals can successfully navigate the challenges of their busy lives and ensure they continue to thrive in both their personal and professional pursuits.

Life Balance

This section provides information about the participants' well-being and how they could achieve a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction by striving for a well-rounded balance in multiple areas of their lives. The participants acknowledged that balancing work and hockey is physically and mentally exhausting and that everyone struggles with it to some extent: “Balancing both careers is not easy at all. It's very hard in both settings. And just finding that balance and taking care of myself outside of both settings is super important because it's hard to be on your A-game every day” (Alyssa)

Mentally, it's challenging to balance all of this. It's very easy to compare yourself to your teammates, which adds to the stress of feeling like you should be able to balance it all too. It may seem like they have no problems balancing hockey, their job, and their social life. But sometimes, it's a lot harder for other people to be able to do it (Alex).

Some participants also expressed the difficulty of knowing when to give themselves a break and worrying about burning out: “Not knowing when to give yourself a break will make you burn out, no matter how stubborn you are. Expecting too much of yourself from both areas and overshooting with certain things will make the experience way more difficult” (Madison).

Balancing everything for me is mentally more exhausting than the physical side because you go to the rink, and you can go on the ice without thinking about the drills. You're thinking about this, but you also are up very early. Then I'm thinking about what I have to do for work as soon as I get off the ice. It's mentally exhausting. I feel my brain is always on the go, and once Friday hits, I sleep. I don't remember the last time we went out on a Friday (Cherokee).

Hockey, for a lot of people, is a really good outlet. It's a great opportunity to put aside your outside life. Whether you're fighting with your family or work, whatever it may be, hockey's always there, but sometimes it's not, and sometimes you need a break from it. I've seen it in my work too. You've been taught since college that to succeed, you need to go, go, go, go, go. You go to school; you have hockey, practice, you have games, and then right after you graduate, you're like, get a job and work, work, work, work, work, hockey, hockey, hockey, so it's okay to take a step back because pushing is hard and I have literally just recently learned this. I'm very reluctant to admit that I'm not fine. I always tell myself I'm fine. Like, I can do this, hockey is great. Life is great. Everything is great. Well, sometimes it's not. It's not going to be great all the time, and that's okay (Tina).

Finally, some participants shared that their personal experiences were so demanding that they quit their job or began questioning their love for hockey: “I often wonder how much longer

I want to continue doing this. And I've never had that feeling in my career. I've always loved hockey, but sometimes I show up to the rink and have to remind myself to put a smile on and get going" (Marie).

The stress of balancing work and hockey got to the point where I had to quit work right before the season ended. It was the end of February. It was right before the last regular season weekend, and then we had playoffs, and I couldn't do it anymore. I had agreed to work until the end of March, and then I gave them two weeks right before the end of our regular season in February so I could be okay for playoffs. I wanted to perform well, and if we had gotten into the playoffs, I would not have been able to perform at my best. So I ended up quitting my job (Jodi).

There's one girl on my team who had to quit hockey because she just couldn't do it. And I could very easily quit at any point, but I just keep going (Alyssa).

However, despite the inevitable stress that accompanied balancing their dual careers, the participants mentioned that their passion for the game allowed them to continue to play and balance demanding circumstances. Many mentioned that they would continue to play until the challenges became too much: "We say this all the time, but we continue to play because we love the game; we're not getting paid two and a half million dollars or anything like that. We're here, and sometimes we put up with maybe not the best working conditions to continue playing the game we love" (Madison).

I try not to be so negative about the job aspect because we are getting paid. It is technically a job, but it's not the job I would have thought I had when I was younger. I never thought I would be a professional hockey player, so I try to step back and appreciate it and have my perspective come from a different lens (Alyssa).

I'm super passionate about the game of hockey. I love hockey, and after university was done, I wanted to keep playing in whatever capacity that looked like. So I tried to see if there were opportunities for female hockey players, and now I don't want to stop playing. Even though it can be challenging at times, I want to keep playing for as long as I can (Jodi).

Now that the league is getting to a point of financial stability, the players are in a conundrum. Half say they would 100% be full-time hockey players if they received NHL-like conditions because that has always been the dream: "I want to play hockey until my body can't take it. If I had enough money to support myself, I would like to keep playing for ten years and not worry about working another job" (Jodi).

At the end of the day, hockey is my passion. I love it. And I think if someone had the opportunity to do that and live out their passion full-time, I'd be kind of a moron to say that I'd love to carry both careers (Danielle).

In a perfect world where my body didn't deteriorate over time, and neither did my mind, I'd play hockey as long as possible if I were getting paid enough. In a perfect world, we would be treated how NHL players are treated. We would get that whole experience. If you want three meals a day, you get three meals a day, or if you want a massage, you get a massage. If that were the case, I'd play as long as I possibly could and until I'm ready to settle down and hang up the skates (Sophia).

But the other half remarked that they would continue to have another career if they were paid a liveable wage from hockey: "To me, having a career outside of hockey has always been something that I've put first" (Sophia). Some participants discussed how the societal expectation

for females to have another commitment besides hockey had impacted their ability to play hockey full-time:

I was really set on having a good education and being able to utilize my degree. Right now, people don't see women's hockey as a profession, so before we can change the league, we need to change the narrative around it (Tina).

I grew up in a generation of hockey where if you wanted to play hockey as a female, you had to have another job or commitment. With the increasing salaries, I'm trying to persuade myself more with the training that I could be a full-time athlete (Siobhan).

These participants suggested that more girls would be inclined to play hockey full-time if this societal expectation did not exist: "If I had grown up in a society where it wasn't the norm or the expectation for females to have another commitment to play hockey, I would be more inclined to play hockey full-time, and many girls would" (Siobhan).

As the sport evolves, you'll begin to see more girls that want to make a career out of hockey versus wanting to work or thinking that they need to work (Tina).

Finally, some players acknowledged that having both a job and hockey provides a sense of balance and fulfillment outside of just being a hockey player, which could positively impact their overall well-being and identity: "I've always been someone that has been obsessed with sports and obsessed with hockey, but I'm also not just a hockey player. There's so much more to me outside of hockey" (Danielle).

I would say juggling both hockey and a job helps to an extent. When I graduated from college, I was like "oh, okay, I'm done. Like now what?" I had a total identity crisis. Part of me wanted to keep playing, but at the same time, another part of me knew that if I kept playing, I didn't want to be 28 without a career. My whole life, anytime hockey wasn't

going right, I could go to school, and anytime school wasn't going well, I could turn to hockey. I always had an outlet to turn to, and now both school and hockey were gone all of a sudden. Once you're done with hockey, and the blinders come off, you're like, "Oh, well shoot, now I have to spend another ten years working towards this new goal," and you're exhausted realistically. So having both careers will help in certain situations (Sophia).

Right now, I'm at a point where I am focusing just as much on hockey as I am my job, so I know when I transition out of playing hockey, I will feel this void. As you can tell, my life is so chaotic, and I'm so used to it being like that, so when I have all this downtime, I won't know what to do (Alex).

Regardless of the situation, every participant was passionate about growing the league to a point where the next generation of players doesn't need to balance both a full-time job and their hockey careers: "My goal in life is what I'm doing now to pave the way for someone else to have a livable wage and to do something that they love. And not have to work two or three jobs to make it work" (Alyssa).

By the time I retire from hockey, I want this league to be better and more sustainable. I want salaries to increase, and now I feel like I'm still there. But I also want this to be somebody's full-time job. I really, truly want female hockey players to be able to just say that they're professional hockey players. I want young girls to be 10 years old and say I want to play professional hockey. Knowing that it doesn't stop at college, it doesn't stop at the Olympics. You can go to that next level (Alex).

All the growth that we've seen in the league and in women's hockey, more generally, comes from doing the work in the community, getting your name out there and doing all

the little things. I love the direction it's headed. And if we can survive the next three years, it will only keep improving. And these kids coming out of college will be able to make living wages playing women's hockey, which is awesome. But we also need to be patient and realize that we're not quite there yet. That doesn't mean that we stop working at it (Marie).

In conclusion, balancing work and hockey is a mental and physical challenge, and participants acknowledged the difficulty of finding a balance between both careers. Despite this, they continued to play because of their passion for the game, even when they had to balance it with demanding circumstances. While some would prefer to be full-time hockey players, the societal expectation for females to have another commitment besides hockey has impacted their ability to do so. However, all players shared a common goal of growing the league to a point where the next generation doesn't need to balance a full-time job and their hockey careers. They hope to create a better and more sustainable professional women's hockey landscape, where young girls can aspire to play professional hockey and where women can play hockey full-time as a job. The growth and progress made so far are promising, but there is still more work to be done to achieve their goals.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Balancing elite sports with education or vocation poses challenges for DCs (DCs), as they often struggle to effectively manage both domains (Stambulova et al., 2015). DCs encounter various obstacles such as physical and mental fatigue, feelings of isolation, intense pressures to perform, and identity issues, which can hinder their ability to successfully manage their dual commitments (Ryba et al., 2015; Tekavc et al., 2020). More specifically, Stambulova and Wylleman's (2019) systematic review on the increasing challenges DCs face, found that only two out of the 42 studies they reviewed considered specific aspects of dual careers in both sport and work domains. Recognizing this gap in the literature, the purpose of this study was to delve into the unique perspectives of North American professional female hockey players. Specifically, it sought to understand how these athletes navigate the intricate balance between their professional sporting and vocational careers. The exploration was further enriched by focusing on the various forms of support they receive from key figures in their lives, such as coaches, employers, and other close supporters, providing a comprehensive view of this overlooked group of DCs.

The results of the study indicated that professional female hockey players desired different types of support that recognized and accommodated the challenges they faced in balancing their professional sport and non-sport careers. These desires stemmed from their experience of role strain in different areas of their lives. This chapter will be divided into two sections to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current findings. The first section will delve into the unique stressors experienced by professional female hockey players who have jobs

and discuss the impact of these stressors on their overall well-being. The second section will focus on the desired forms of support identified by the participants.

Role Strain

The current study provides information on the experiences of professional female hockey players who also have full-time jobs. Despite varying job roles and responsibilities, all the athletes' responses to juggling multiple roles and demands involved descriptions of stressors stemming from role strain (Fenzel, 1989; Goode, 1960), such as scheduling, intense pressure to perform, finances, and feelings of isolation. Unlike previous studies that focused on role strain (RS) within academic and athletic realms in educational institutions (Hayman et al., 2020; Hayman et al., 2021; Heller et al., 2005; Li et al., 2017; Moreland et al., 2018; van Rens et al., 2016), this study revealed that the dispersed and unconnected nature of the dual careers at the professional level contributed to feelings of RS in the form of conflict, ambiguity, and overload (Fenzel, 1989).

Role Conflict

Results from the current study indicated that role conflict arose when athletes received conflicting schedules from their employers and coaches (Ellinas et al., 2018; Goode, 1960). This finding is consistent with a recent European survey-based study that indicated that the majority of professional female rugby players with additional non-sport careers experienced workplace stress in negotiating schedules with their employers (Taylor et al., 2022), yet the causes of the increased stress were not provided. The findings of the current study suggested that the athletes experienced role conflict resulting from challenges in making choices between their job and hockey, particularly when their schedules were disrupted by last-minute changes or hockey travels.

The study highlights the impact of role conflict on athletes' well-being and raises concerns about the need for better balance and support in managing dual careers in professional women's hockey. The current study's findings align with other studies conducted in Europe that have highlighted the challenges faced by professional female athletes in balancing work/education with sporting commitments (Harrison et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2022). The results of the current study emphasize the commonality of role conflict (Goode, 1960) and the struggles associated with managing multiple roles and conflicting obligations among professional female athletes, irrespective of the specific cultural context or sport (e.g., Harrison et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2022). The collective evidence underscores the need for comprehensive support systems and strategies to address the challenges of dual careers at the professional level and to enhance the well-being and performance of professional female athletes (Harrison et al., 2022; Szto et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2022). Considering the negative impact of role conflict on domain-specific life satisfaction (van Rens et al., 2018), understanding the impact of factors such as unexpected events, travel time, and last-minute changes on performance and well-being is crucial for researchers, coaches, and practitioners to effectively support professional female DCs and promote their domain-specific life satisfaction.

Role Ambiguity

Furthermore, the athletes in the study experienced role ambiguity, stemming from a lack of understanding and clarity about the performance expectations set by their coaches and bosses in their hockey and non-sport job domains (Goode, 1960; Ivancevich et al., 2017). The results suggest that this ambiguity created uncertainty and made it challenging for the athletes to grasp what was expected of them in each role. For instance, some athletes shared that their coaches and bosses did not fully recognize the demands of their dual life, resulting in heightened expectations

in both their work and hockey domains and contributing to a sense of uncertainty. Furthermore, the athletes disclosed a self-imposed pressure to match the performance levels of their non-sport colleagues and single career hockey teammates, despite the physical time limitations they faced in balancing their training and work commitments. This pressure was influenced by the visibility and recognition associated with being present and putting in extra effort (Sherry & Zeller, 2014), which aligns with elite sport narratives emphasizing single-minded dedication to sport (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Eriksen, 2022; Saarinen et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2022; Wicker et al., in press). However, the findings contrast with previous research on North American DCs, where their academic and athletic roles were integrated and mutually supportive (Miller & Kerr, 2003; Sturm et al., 2011; Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2018), highlighting the distinct nature of the participants' careers and identities as professional female DCs in North America. The results of the current study suggest that the structural separation of their dual careers in conjunction with single career teammates and colleagues and omnipresent elite sport narratives led to heightened expectations in both domains, increased pressure, and self-imposed expectations, contributing to their experiences of role ambiguity. By acknowledging the impact of role ambiguity and its association with performance expectations (van Rens et al., 2019), stakeholders can work towards establishing supportive and transparent environments for professional female DCs. This proactive approach can contribute to enhancing their overall well-being and performance in both their athletic and non-sport job domains, potentially reducing instances of job dissatisfaction, tension/anxiety, and the likelihood of job or sport dropout, as supported by previous research (Eys et al., 2003; Hayman et al., 2021; Jackson & Schuler, 1985). This knowledge is crucial for coaches and employers to help alleviate the negative consequences associated with role ambiguity (Eys et al., 2003; Hayman et al., 2021; Jackson & Schuler, 1985) and ensure that

professional female DCs feel understood and supported in meeting the demands of their multiple roles.

Role Overload

Finally, in addition to contending with scheduling stressors and intense pressures to perform, participants in this study experienced role overload as they independently managed the demands of their financial obligations, vocational work, and athletic commitments (Fenzel, 1989; Goode, 1960; Harrison et al., 2022; van Rens et al., 2016). This resulted in limited resources to meet the demands within and between their careers, leading to psychological, physical, and social strain (Rossi & Hallmann, 2021; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Torregrossa et al., 2015). A growing body of literature has found that managing the demands of sport alongside the demands of education was often anxiety-provoking, mentally and physically draining, and socially isolating which was a result of the high demands on their time and resources (Rossi & Hallmann, 2021; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Torregrossa et al., 2015). For example, Rossi and Hallmann (2021) found that both male and female DCs reported that the psychological pressure of high workloads resulted in a lack of rest and recovery and missing social activities and connections with friends and family. However, few studies have explored the impact of managing these demands independently, without the interrelated support typically found in collegiate environments (e.g., Heller et al., 2005; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Sturm et al., 2011; Yurkymenko-Lescroart, 2018). Additionally, few studies have explored the additional impact of the financial aspect of their dual careers which was a prominent concern for the athletes, as they had to navigate the complexities of making a living through their non-sport jobs and hockey careers without the financial support often available to student-athletes (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Heller et al., 2005). The realization that professional women's hockey might not provide

sustainable financial stability, combined with concerns about being unavailable for work-related tasks due to hockey travels, intensified the stress and pressure experienced by the athletes and prevented them from getting adequate sleep and time and social connection with loved ones.

The findings of the study contribute to our understanding of the positive impact of rest and social connection in mitigating the negative effects of role overload (Karatepe, 2015) among professional female dual career hockey players. This study expands on previous research (Karatepe, 2015; Rossi & Hallman, 2022; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) by considering the additional factors of financial stress and the lack of interrelated support, which contributed to role overload and resulted in a lack of rest and social connection with loved ones. Recognizing and addressing these factors is crucial for stakeholders to effectively support the well-being and performance of professional female hockey players with dual careers. Implementing strategies that prioritize rest, foster social connections, and address financial concerns can enhance the overall experiences and outcomes for these athletes.

In conclusion, this section highlighted the role strain (Goode, 1960) faced by professional female hockey players with full-time jobs in managing their dual careers. The athletes experienced role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload, influenced by factors such as pressure to perform, scheduling stressors, financial concerns, inadequate rest and feelings of isolation (Ellinas et al., 2018; McGovern, 2022; Romero, Pitney, Brumels, et al., 2018; Romero, Pitney, Mazerolle, et al., 2018). These findings expand our understanding of the unique role strain experiences of professional female dual career hockey players and emphasize the need for comprehensive support systems to effectively manage the demands of dual careers in this context. By addressing the issues of role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload, stakeholders

can enhance the well-being and performance of DCs in professional women's hockey (Silva et al., 2022; van Rens et al., 2019; van Rens et al., 2016).

Dual Career Support Preferences

In addition to detailing the role strain professional female hockey players face while balancing their professional sport and non-sport careers, this study also provides information on the social support preferences of these athletes. The significance of social support for DCs is underscored in numerous studies (Arnold et al., 2018; Knight et al., 2018; Linnér et al., 2022), and its importance is perhaps even more pronounced for vocational or professional DCs who are posited to endure vocational strain exceeding the academic challenges of student athletes (Harrison et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2022). Each athlete operated within a unique network of support, which encompassed a variety of figures such as coaches, employers or bosses, teammates, parents, and counsellors. Of particular significance were their coaches and employers, who often emerged as pivotal players in the athletes' dual career journey. The degree of support, flexibility, and understanding they offered seemed to profoundly shape the athlete's capacity to navigate both their professional sporting and non-sporting careers. The subsequent section aims to delve into the athletes' perspectives and their favoured forms of support from these two crucial groups, examining the impact on both their sports and professional pursuits.

Coach Support

The current study's findings indicated that athletes valued coaches who understood the unique demands of their dual careers, expressing a preference for prioritizing the quality of training over quantity. This finding aligns with existing high-performance sport coaching literature, which underscores the importance of coaches recognizing athletes' unique developmental needs to enhance satisfaction both in and outside of their sport (Duchesne et al.,

2011; Henderson et al., 2022; Levi et al., in press; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). For instance, Vallée and Bloom (2005) interviewed five expert Canadian female university coaches and found these coaches respected their players' individual differences and aimed to empower each athlete as a person. They fostered individual growth among the players, aligning with the individualized consideration component of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 1985; Turnnidge & Côté, 2019). Our findings are also consistent with the individualized consideration component of the transformational leadership model (Bass & Riggio, 1985), whereby the leader needs to be aware of their followers' needs (Turnnidge & Côté, 2019; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Most athletes in the current study expressed satisfaction with their coaches' efforts to understand their unique needs for effectively managing their dual careers. For example, some athletes appreciated their coaches' initiatives to make team lifts optional, thereby reducing stress for those unable to attend. However, there were instances where some athletes felt the need to prompt their coaches to focus more on the quality rather than the quantity of practices and training, which differed from their university athlete experiences. Moreover, one athlete explained that compared to the collegiate level, coaching at the professional level required managing athletes with established strengths and clearly defined roles, suggesting an even greater need for individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 1985). These results extend the current literature by suggesting that professional dual career coaching practices are different from the developmental approach seen in collegiate coaching, where athletes' roles often shift annually or even seasonally (Vallée & Bloom, 2005). This is important to consider since the majority of dual career coaching literature has focused on collegiate athletes (e.g., Ronkainen et al., 2018; Saarinen et al., 2020; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019) and there remains a lack of criteria for effective dual career coaching practices at the professional level, both in North America and around the globe (O'Reilly et al., 2018; Perry et

al., 2021; Pielichaty, 2019; Taylor et al., 2022). Therefore, these findings suggest a need for more comprehensive and concrete criteria for effective dual career coaching practices. As echoed in the research of Stambulova and Wylleman (2019), the development of such guidelines could help to optimize DC environments and contribute to their overall well-being and success.

While understanding the individual needs of athletes was undoubtedly crucial in creating a nurturing and productive dual career environment, the study further revealed that coach adaptability and proactive communication were also vital complements for enhancing the dual-career success of athletes. This finding is consistent with Levi et al. (in press) who interviewed and observed 10 elite coaches of female athletes from Olympic and professional teams in Western European countries and found that coaches perceived female athletes to engage more in information-seeking behaviours than their male counterparts, asking about dates, schedules, and plans. In a comparable study, Norman (2015) interviewed 27 European high-performance female athletes and found that positive, consistent, and frequent communication was crucial to enhancing the coach-athlete relationship with this population (Norman, 2015). The findings of the current study hold significant value, given that professional female athletes pursuing dual careers have less time and flexibility compared to those involved in a single career. Thus, the need for proactive communication about scheduling becomes even more crucial, ensuring that the athletes can effectively balance their schedule to fit both careers. For example, throughout the study, the athletes universally stressed the need for scheduling and travel flexibility, accentuating the value of coach understanding and adaptability to their work routines. This adaptability was previously acknowledged as a key component for dual-career success among elite athletes (Rossi & Hallmann, 2022). Emphasizing coach adaptability, athletes also unanimously identified that they needed to engage in proactive communication with their coaches to manage their dual

responsibilities in their employment and sports roles. Equally, if not more importantly, all the athletes expected their coaches to share their schedules and communicate their training responsibilities promptly. A few athletes specifically noted the need for access to their training and game schedules before the onset of the season. This advanced scheduling was crucial as it allowed them to coordinate with their employers to determine a mutually beneficial arrangement since conflict arose when last-minute schedule changes occurred. These findings offer initial insights into the coach's role in facilitating dual careers at the professional level, seen through the athletes' lens. These results expand the work of Rossi and Hallmann (2022), which underscored the importance of institutional and organizational support for facilitating dual careers among athletes, our results highlight an equally critical element—coach adaptability. We assert that this adaptability was indispensable for achieving dual career success among professional athletes, thereby augmenting the established understanding of the factors contributing to dual career progression. The need for flexibility, especially in scheduling and travel arrangements, was accentuated in this study, thereby indicating an additional dimension of adaptability that contributes to a successful dual career journey.

Finally, results revealed that while athletes wanted their coaches to be empathetic and accommodating with their scheduling needs, they desired coaches who could blend this empathy with high-performance standards. This observation contrasts with previous research on coaching elite female athletes, which emphasized the intertwining of gender dynamics and coaching strategies (De Haan & Sotiriadou, 2019; Levi et al., in press; Norman, 2015). Previous research has noted a distinct approach adopted by coaches when guiding elite male and female athletes - coaches of female athletes were reported to employ a more understanding, nurturing, and emotionally attuned strategy (De Haan & Sotiriadou, 2019; Levi et al., in press; Norman, 2015).

For example, de Haan and Sotiriadou (2019) interviewed 10 international male elite rowing coaches with experience in coaching male and female athletes and found that coaches who worked with male athletes tended to advocate a 'winning at all costs attitude', whereas when working with their female athletes they tended toward a 'try your best' mentality based on their understanding that female athletes were not as competitive or capable of 'high-level' performance. The current study is among the first to delve into the coaching preferences of professional female athletes in North America from their own perspective. The findings propose that these athletes desired to be held to high-performance standards - an especially noteworthy point given the occasional lack of seriousness accorded to women's team sports and competition compared to men's (Haan & Sotiriadou, 2019; Norman, 2010; Szto et al., 2022). The data also suggests that by adopting a 'softer' approach in professional coaching practices, there might be an inadvertent reinforcement of gendered behaviours which contradicts the athletes' expressed preferences for high-performance standards at the professional level (Levi et al., in press). For instance, a majority of participants underscored the need for equal treatment regarding performance expectations for all team members, irrespective of their full-time employment status. They stressed that every player was invested in improving their game and aimed to participate fully in all team activities. This sentiment bolsters the concept that these athletes were in pursuit of serious, committed coaching practices, countering any potential inclination toward a 'softer' approach that may unintentionally solidify gendered behaviours (Haan & Sotiriadou, 2019; Levi et al., in press).

Despite managing gruelling schedules, every player readily accepted the high level of commitment prerequisite to team membership, with a clear preference for additional training opportunities that could fit into their existing timetable. This observation is congruent with prior

studies highlighting the remarkable dedication exhibited by non-national female hockey players in North America, who have demonstrated their willingness to make substantial personal sacrifices, including their evenings, weekends, health, and physical wellbeing, for their sport (Szto et al., 2022). The players' unyielding desire for high-performance standards reflects a competitive spirit deeply ingrained in them. However, this intense pursuit of excellence may also lead to unrealistic expectations that they place upon themselves, particularly when comparing their commitment and performance to that of professional male players in North America. It is vital to recognize the disparate circumstances faced by female athletes, who often juggle multiple responsibilities and physically cannot devote the same number of hours to their sport as their male counterparts. Such comparisons can be both unfair and unproductive, failing to acknowledge the unique challenges and sacrifices made by female players in their quest for success. This understanding should further inform coaching strategies and foster an environment that recognizes and supports the specific needs and aspirations of female athletes pursuing dual careers.

Although the body of empirical research on dual career coaching is still growing, preliminary studies suggest that coaches struggle with how best to incorporate dual career objectives into their practices to holistically support their athletes (Ronkainen et al., 2018). This difficulty is compounded by prevailing narratives in elite sports, suggesting that the path to success requires single-minded devotion to the sport (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Eriksen, 2022; Saarinen et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2022; Wicker et al., in press). Our findings, therefore, enrich the dialogue on coaching high-performance female athletes. We shed light on the delicate equilibrium coaches must strike: exhibiting empathy and understanding towards athletes' dual career obligations, while maintaining high-performance standards, ensuring that this empathy

does not undermine team dynamics or success (Chan & Mallett, 2011; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Levi et al., in press). We encourage future research to continue unraveling these complex dynamics, facilitating the development of more informed and effective coaching strategies for DCs across the board.

Employer Support

Moving beyond coaching, the role of employers emerged as another equally crucial aspect in the support system of the athletes. Interestingly, our findings indicated that the element of emotional closeness, deemed crucial in coach-athlete relationships (Jowett, 2007), was less pivotal within the employment relationships of professional DCs. This finding aligns with theories from organizational psychology, where employment relationships are primarily anchored on the principle of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960; Guest, 2017). This principle posits that employers enhance employee well-being and satisfaction through certain HR practices in exchange for positive performance on key indicators (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Guest, 2017; Sirgy & Lee, 2017). However, applying this principle to professional DCs illuminated an intricate dynamic yet to be extensively explored. The athletes in our study commonly reported that their initial interactions with employers—particularly during job interviews and the initial months of employment—were perceived as highly daunting. This was likely attributed to their perceived need to demonstrate their capabilities, to assure their employers of the value and merit in investing in them, despite their concurrent commitment to a secondary full-time job. This sense of pressure, however, seemed to wane over time as employers became more acquainted with and understanding of the athletes' unique athletic requirements. This finding aligns with the idea that employers may be initially reluctant to offer flexibility and accommodations until performance capabilities are demonstrated (Guest, 2017). Each athlete expressed a clear desire

for their employers to provide the necessary logistical support and accommodations to balance their work and sports commitments, with minimal expectations beyond that. In fact, one athlete indicated that her advice would be more appropriately directed towards her coaches, as they, due to existing financial constraints within the league (Szto et al., 2022), were unable to provide a living wage to ensure her comfort. Consequently, she conveyed that her primary expectation from her employer was acceptance and understanding of her commitment to playing professional hockey, as it was her non-sport employment that ultimately covered her bills. It appeared that the athletes' satisfaction with their employers was primarily rooted in these practical forms of support, indicating an employment relationship that leaned more towards the transactional, rather than the emotionally charged interactions they had with their coaches.

The current findings align with Taylor et al.'s (2022) mixed methods study on dual-career female professional Australian rugby players, illuminating the complexity of their employment relationships. Despite a significant majority (91%) reporting their employers as being 'Supportive' or 'Extremely Supportive' of their athletic endeavours, over half of them (57%) still grappled with notable workplace stress (Taylor et al., 2022). This finding suggests that, notwithstanding the overarching perception of supportive employers, these athletes contended with unique stressors in their professional environment. Our study's findings shed light on various stressors that may have contributed to the notable workplace stress ratings. Every participant in the current study recounted the workplace stress associated with managing rigorous training and competition schedules alongside their work commitments. In addition, some athletes noted the challenge of navigating employer expectations during periods of intense physical recovery from sports. Instances of perceived bias were also highlighted, with some athletes pointing out that coworkers sometimes viewed them as receiving undue favour or neglecting

their work duties when they had to miss work for hockey. Remarkably, almost half of the participants revealed a deeply ingrained obligation to downplay their needs at work, likely a sentiment stemming from their perception of the risk their employers assumed in hiring them. These nuanced dynamics might provide insights into why studies, such as the one by Taylor et al. (2022), report high employer approval rates, despite inconsistencies with measures of athlete wellbeing.

Our findings therefore extend the DC athlete literature by providing one of the first qualitative accounts of the employment relationship in vocational and professional DCs. This contribution is particularly significant given that empirical evidence emphasizes the need for supporters to tailor their support to the challenges faced by DCs (Knight et al., 2018), rather than solely concentrating on instrumental, technical, and tactical assistance (Arnold et al., 2018). The latter approach was unfortunately prevalent among most employers in our study - a trend that was likely due to a lack of understanding of DCs' specific needs and support preferences. Such insight, therefore, emphasizes the potential for future research to calibrate support mechanisms more effectively with the unique requirements of DCs. Moreover, while the value of career assistance programs to facilitate athletes' transition out of sport is well-documented (Stambulova et al., 2021; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013; Torregrossa et al., 2015), studies have not yet investigated such resources for athletes who are still actively competing. Therefore, our findings, in conjunction with the existing literature (e.g., Brassard et al., in press; Stambulova et al., 2021), underscore the necessity of more refined research. This research should focus on providing athletes with career planning resources to meet the specific needs of DCs and to alleviate workplace stress and their subsequent role strain (Taylor et al., 2022). Future research should

also consider the perspective of employers, scrutinizing their understanding of their role in supporting DCs, the challenges they face, and potential interventions to bolster their support.

Lastly, this study expands the existing dual career literature by implying that an athlete's choice of employer could significantly influence their experiences in managing a dual career, and in turn seemed to influence the subsequent role strain (Goode, 1960). This inference aligns with previous studies in human resource management and organizational behaviour, which underscore the importance of reciprocity in employment relationships for cultivating 'high-performance work systems' that yield mutual benefits (e.g., Boxall, 2013; Godard, 2004; Guest, 2017). For instance, Boxall (2013) advocated a positive employer-employee relationship as a vital contributor to employee well-being, emphasizing the need to acknowledge and manage diverse interests within an employment relationship. Interestingly, our findings imply that selecting an employer with a sports interest or background could diminish the divergence of interests, thereby alleviating the challenges associated with managing the employment relationship (Boxall, 2013). Such a selection might potentially alleviate role overload and the accompanying strain experienced by athletes. Specifically, four participants in our study worked with former athletes, who seemed to foster more supportive environments than those without sports interests. Moreover, one athlete attributed her professional employment to her status as a professional athlete, implying employers who recognized the advantages of hiring professional athletes – such as amplified visibility (Chalfin et al., 2015), a robust work ethic (Williams, 2013), and demonstration of dedication and achievement (Cosentino et al., 2021) – could potentially become supportive partners in an athlete's dual-career journey. In turn, these employers were more understanding about employee flexibility (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020) and were more likely to foster an environment conducive to the athletes' athletic pursuits.

While research on athletes' career planning spans several years, focusing on factors facilitating positive post-sport career transitions (Cecić Erpič et al., 2004; Grove et al., 1997; Knights et al., 2019; Lally, 2007; Lavallee, 2005; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Park et al., 2013; Stephan, 2003; Torregrossa et al., 2015), and the impact of career planning on athletic performance (Lavallee, 2019), it has largely overlooked the unique opportunities for athletes to plan and manage their careers while still competing at high-performance levels. Furthermore, these studies rarely took into account the specific context of their training and competition demands. Therefore, there exists a significant opportunity for more nuanced research into how athletes' career choices influence their dual-career experiences, and the provision of resources similar to those aiding athletes during competition-based career transitions (Brassard et al., in press; Park & Lavallee, 2015; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013). Such studies could shed light on the role of employers in facilitating athletes' dual-career pathways and the implications of various non-sport careers on role strain and career longevity. These findings, by enhancing the support systems for DCs (Burns et al., 2019), could open up new possibilities to foster talent retention, particularly in professional women's sports (Harrison et al., 2022; Szto et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2022). The insights can inform the development of effective interventions and supports, facilitating successful non-sport careers for athletes while they continue to compete. In future studies, it would be intriguing to investigate whether specific types of careers have varying impacts on athletes' well-being and performance, and to explore if certain career paths (e.g., shift-work, corporate jobs, etc.) might be more conducive to dual career success, thus offering a more tailored alignment between professional employment and athletic endeavours.

In conclusion, this section highlights the pivotal role of social support in ameliorating the profound role strain experienced by professional female hockey players in managing dual careers

(Arnold et al., 2018; Linnér et al., 2022). Coaches and employers emerged as critical pillars of this support network, significantly shaping the athletes' ability to balance their professional sport and non-sport careers (Harrison et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2022). The athletes desired understanding, flexible, and proactive coaches who melded empathy with high-performance expectations, simultaneously calling for equitable treatment that contradicted gendered coaching norms (Haan & Sotiriadou, 2019; Levi et al., in press; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Similarly, they appreciated practical and logistical support from employers, emphasizing the transactional nature of employer relationships which contrasted the emotional connections with their coaches (Gouldner, 1960; Guest, 2017; Jowett, 2007). These findings underscore the need for a holistic recalibration of support strategies for DCs, involving a combination of empathy, adaptability, high-performance expectations, and tailored employer support (Boxall, 2013; Knight et al., 2018). Taken together, this study suggests an urgent need for future research to further elucidate these dynamics, enabling the development of more comprehensive and effective coaching methodologies, as well as employer support mechanisms that cater to the unique demands of DCs, ultimately enhancing talent retention in professional women's sports (Harrison et al., 2022; Szto et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2022).

Chapter 6

Summary of Study

Female athletes commonly grapple with unique challenges in their careers, owing to enduring gender barriers, such as limited media coverage, inadequate financial rewards, and societal expectations that cultivate a 'superwoman' persona, encapsulating multiple roles (Bowes & Culvin, 2019; Hextrum & Sethi, 2022; Kavoura & Ryba, 2020; Kavoura et al., 2015; Lappalainen et al., 2013; McGannon et al., 2018; McGannon et al., 2019). Although studies on DCs have indicated that a harmonious work-life balance can positively influence their well-being and performance (Linnér et al., 2021; Stambulova et al., 2015; Stambulova et al., 2021; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Wickenheiser, 2021), scant research has focused on professional female athletes juggling multiple roles. Therefore, this gap in the literature informed the current study's objective, which was to explore how North American professional female hockey players managed their athletic and vocational roles, identified their supportive needs from coaches and employers, and defined how these individuals could facilitate a rewarding dual career experience.

Upon receiving approval from the McGill Research Ethics Board, ten North American female professional DCs were recruited to participate in the study. On average, the participants were 26.7 years old, and played in a professional league for an average of 4.1 years. Additionally, eight of the ten participants worked more than 35 hours per week in their non-sport job, and the remaining two participants worked slightly less than 35 hours per week but were also part-time students in addition to being professional hockey players. All athletes were recruited via email to participate in one semi-structured interview based on an interview guide created by the research team. Interviews were conducted by the primary researcher, ranged from

55 to 95 minutes in length, and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which identified themes and patterns within the data and provided the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Data analysis resulted in four higher order themes, which were called: *(a) women's hockey in North America*; *(b) stressors*; *(c) aspects of social support*; and, *(d) strategies for achieving life balance*. *Women's hockey in North America* referred to background information regarding the women's hockey context and culture in North America. *Stressors* outlined aspects of the athletes' lives, both in and out of sport, that contributed to feelings of stress and negatively impacted an athlete's performance. *Aspects of social support* discussed the various types of social support as well as necessary accommodations made by supporters, including bosses and coaches, to help athletes balance their professional sports with non-sport jobs. Finally, *strategies for achieving life balance* described the techniques used by athletes to manage the cognitive, physical, and emotional stress of balancing multiple areas of their lives, including their professional sports career, non-sport jobs, and other life responsibilities.

While each participant's dual career journey differed, common themes emerged from their responses. Many athletes experienced role conflict, as outlined by Goode (1960), resulting from conflicting schedules and responsibilities assigned by employers and coaches, with sudden or unexpected scheduling changes causing the most strain. These experiences shaped their concept of a successful dual career at a professional level, where the majority yearned for empathetic coaches who could ease the strain by understanding their dual demands, prioritizing quality over quantity in training, and maintaining proactive communication, particularly about scheduling and training obligations. Furthermore, all athletes wished for coaches to regard them

as elite performers, contributing not only to their personal athletic growth but also to the future development of women's hockey. Overall, this study enriches the literature on professional dual career sport coaching, specifically focusing on strategies for coaching professional female team sport athletes. It stands as one of the first qualitative inquiries into the coaching preferences of female professional athletes. The firsthand narratives from the participants allowed our research team to gain an enriched understanding of their perspectives and experiences with coaching. This deepened insight enhances the quality and flow of the conversation surrounding professional female athletes and the coaching strategies best suited to their unique situations.

Conclusions:**Women's Hockey in North America**

- The athletes expressed that, despite facing challenges such as a lack of a clearly defined professional path and support structures for female hockey players, their passion for the sport propelled them to surmount these obstacles and continue their journey to play hockey professionally.
- While the athletes recognized the evolving nature of women's professional hockey, they also identified the need for improvements in salaries, benefits, and resources, along with continuous efforts to expand and sustain the sport for future female hockey generations.

Stressors

- Many athletes stressed how transitioning from collegiate to professional DCs intensified their stress due to a myriad of increased expectations that included performance-based salary negotiations, and obligations to participate in community outreach activities.

- The majority of athletes described experiencing significant stress due to unfavourable training conditions, lack of resources, balancing work and sport, inconsistent schedules, and the pressure to prioritize their sporting career over their day jobs.
- As the professional women's hockey league grows, all of the athletes reported an annual intensification of expectations and pressures, especially while managing full-time jobs, which impacted their performance across both their sporting and professional careers.
- Some athletes explained that achieving balance between their professional and sporting obligations became especially difficult during events where they had to be away from their non-sport jobs, like games or tournaments.

Aspects of Social Support

- All of the athletes highlighted the importance of various types of social support including supportive teammates who understood their challenges, family and friends offering emotional and practical support, and access to mental health resources such as therapists or counsellors.
- The support network for each athlete, while unique in its composition, fulfilled the consistent role of aiding athletes in managing stress, establishing equilibrium in their lives, and navigating the complexities of juggling professional sports with non-sporting employment.
- Each athlete emphasized the importance of necessary adaptations from coaches and employers, such as acknowledging their dual roles, offering flexible

scheduling, and making appropriate changes to meet the distinctive requirements of athlete-employees, in maintaining their dual careers.

- Open communication and a supportive work environment were highlighted by all athletes as key factors in managing both their work and sports commitments.
- Despite appreciating the increasing salary for professional female hockey players, the participants looked forward to a future where they could focus solely on hockey, noting that until that happens, strong support systems are critical for balancing their athletic pursuits with other areas of their lives.

Strategies for Achieving Life Balance

- All of the athletes described navigating demanding schedules and responsibilities, involving work, sports, and community outreach, highlighting their significant commitment and dedication to balancing their passion for hockey with other life demands.
- The majority of athletes explained the importance of prioritizing open communication with coaches and employers about their needs.
- All of the athletes emphasized the importance of self-care, goal setting in different life areas, and recognizing the need for breaks and rest, suggesting a holistic approach to maintain a healthy life balance was crucial to success in their personal and professional pursuits.
- Despite recounting the mental and physical toll of balancing their dual careers in hockey and another profession, prompting some to reconsider their commitment or even quit, the participants' unwavering passion for the game continued to fuel their perseverance under demanding circumstances.

- All the participants shared a common goal of growing the professional women's hockey league to a point where future female players could choose to focus solely on their hockey careers if they wished.

Practical Implications

Our study stands among the first to delve into the experiences and support preferences of professional female DCs. While the findings have broad practical implications for coaches, athletes, employers, and the female hockey community at large, this particular section will concentrate specifically on the implications for athletes and coaches.

Results from the current study outlined adaptive techniques that female professional DCs considered valuable in reducing role strain and increasing performance, well-being, and overall life satisfaction. Firstly, the results revealed that it was vital for athletes to be transparent and open in their communication with coaches and employers, with the aim of managing schedule conflicts and ensuring all parties were updated regarding their well-being and stress levels (Guest, 2017). Transparent and effective communication empowered the athletes to assert their priorities and proactively address potential challenges. This can nurture a mutually beneficial relationship between athletes and their employers or coaches. Fears of expressing needs and strategies for managing dual careers can unwittingly escalate stress levels, as supporters lack the necessary information to provide assistance. Hence, athletes are strongly encouraged to articulate their schedules and needs to their employers and coaches unambiguously, to promote an environment conducive to their success.

Furthermore, the research underscored the necessity of self-care and adaptability in managing dual careers. Self-care is fundamental to the overall well-being of DCs and is instrumental in averting burnout, psychological distress, and injuries (Lopez-Flores et al., 2021).

This concept goes beyond physical health, encompassing mental well-being. Incorporating proper nutrition, rest, exercise, as well as stress management techniques like regular breaks and relaxation time, is essential (Rossi & Hallmann, 2021). Without suitable self-care practices, DCs may struggle with escalating demands, leading to mental fatigue, concentration issues, and feelings of insecurity (Rossi & Hallmann, 2021). However, while athletes and the existing literature (e.g., Rossi & Hallmann, 2021) both recognize the importance of self-care, interpreting the results of this study reveals a paradox; the demanding nature of the athletes' schedules makes achieving time for self-care a complex challenge. The belief that they must find time for self-care, in fact, may inadvertently add to the pressure they place on themselves, creating a cycle where the pursuit of well-being becomes an additional stressor rather than a relief. Consequently, athletes are urged to incorporate self-care into their weekly schedules, recognizing that the demanding nature of their routines may render daily self-care challenging to achieve.

Adaptability also seemed to play a pivotal role for DCs, who often encountered unpredictability and frequent schedule changes across their sports and academic or vocational domains (Li & Sum, 2017). Athletes in this study exhibiting flexibility and adaptability managed the complex and occasionally conflicting demands of their dual roles more efficiently. This adaptability is a crucial element of "dual career management skills," a set that encompasses career planning, mental toughness, social intelligence, and adaptability itself (De Brandt et al., 2017). These skills help athletes to harmonize their academic/vocational, athletic, and family roles, thereby preparing them to tackle a wide spectrum of challenges (De Brandt et al., 2017). Therefore, it's encouraged that athletes approach challenges with a growth mindset (add key reference of growth mindset here and to references) and accept the inherent unpredictability of dual careers.

Results from the current study also revealed that an athlete's choice of career could significantly influence their experiences in managing a dual career, and in turn seemed to influence the subsequent role strain (Goode, 1960). These findings have significant practical implications for multiple stakeholders, including athletes pursuing high-performance sport while navigating a career, employers considering adding professional athletes to their teams, and coaches guiding their athletes towards job opportunities conducive to athletic success. For athletes, this study emphasizes the critical need for strategic career planning that takes into account their high-performance sport commitments (Stambulova et al., 2021; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013; Torregrossa et al., 2021).

The results of the current study found that navigating a dual career path can be particularly stressful, given the demands of rigorous training, competition schedules, and physical recovery periods (Taylor et al., 2022). As our findings suggest, athletes often experience the pressure to prove their value to employers and demonstrate their ability to balance work commitments with their athletic responsibilities (Guest, 2017). This understanding can assist athletes in being more proactive and thoughtful in their career choices, seeking employers who appreciate the unique strengths athletes bring to the table and are willing to provide necessary accommodations for their sporting commitments (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). If possible, athletes are encouraged to seek employment with companies or individuals who have a sports background or a demonstrated understanding of the demands of high-performance sports. Such employers might be more likely to provide necessary flexibility and support for the athletes' sporting pursuits (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Chalfin et al., 2015; Cosentino et al., 2021).

Results from the current study also highlighted coaching practices that professional female DCs considered valuable in fostering athletic and personal satisfaction, such as being

empathetic, engaging in effective and proactive communication, and holding high performance standards. The results emphasized that athletes desired coaches who understood the unique demands of their dual careers, appreciating the importance of quality training over quantity (Duchesne et al., 2011; Henderson et al., 2022; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016). This is especially important at the professional level where athletes have established strengths and defined roles. For example, professional athletes could receive ample notice – such as a two-week minimum – for training sessions, games, competitions, and any other scheduling shifts. Finally, the study highlighted the importance of coach adaptability and proactive communication for dual career success (Levi et al., in press; Norman, 2015; Rossi & Hallmann, 2022). This included providing advanced scheduling information to allow athletes to balance their dual careers effectively. Coaches are also encouraged to set clear, tangible, and achievable expectations for their athletes. Moreover, in challenging prevailing research that emphasizes gender dynamics in coaching strategies (De Haan & Sotiriadou, 2019; Levi et al., in press; Norman, 2015), this study offers valuable insights into those coaching strategies and behaviours that have the potential to foster both personal and professional satisfaction among female athletes. Collectively, these findings underscore the need for a thoughtful, tailored approach to coaching that acknowledges the unique needs and aspirations of professional female athletes pursuing dual careers.

Limitations and Recommendations

While the present study provides valuable insights into coaching strategies and adaptive techniques for athletes, it is not without its limitations that warrant attention. Initially, our sample was specifically chosen based on active professional female hockey players in North America who have participated in the PHF for a minimum of two years. Additionally, they held full-time employment outside their sport and were no longer engaged in full-time studies. Finally, our

participants were not nationally carded athletes receiving a sufficient monthly stipend from the Canadian government. Although this criterion-based approach resulted in a homogeneous sample of elite athletes, it does limit the generalizability of our findings to a broader population. Hence, it is advisable for future research to broaden the participant pool to include professional female DCs from diverse contexts. This could involve athletes from an array of professional team sports with varying training demands, such as basketball (e.g., Hanis-Martin, 2006), soccer (e.g., Harrison et al., 2022), or rugby (e.g., Taylor et al., 2022). Furthermore, while the current study is centered exclusively around the athlete's viewpoint, investigating coach-athlete or coach-employer dyads could provide more diversified insights and a comprehensive understanding of their shared experiences. Additionally, expanding the sample to include athletes participating in individual or co-acting sports could provide valuable insights, considering previous research has illuminated differences in the nature and quality of coach-athlete relationships in team sports versus individual sports (Rhind et al., 2012). As such, extending the scope of the study to diverse sporting contexts would make a significant contribution to our understanding of the varied experiences of professional DCs.

Moreover, there is a pressing need for future research to focus on the employer's perspective in relation to supporting DCs (Knight et al., 2018). As the DC population continues to grow, understanding the unique challenges that employers face while accommodating these athletes becomes critical (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015). Employers play a pivotal role in facilitating the balance between sports and professional commitments for these athletes. Understanding their perspectives can therefore offer crucial insights into existing supportive structures and the potential gaps within them. Furthermore, this research direction could help identify best practices, resource allocation, and innovative strategies that employers can adopt to

create a conducive and adaptable work environment for DCs (Knight et al., 2018; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015). Such research will not only benefit the athletes but will also contribute to the broader discussion of workforce flexibility and work-life balance (Guest, 2017).

This study employed retrospective interviews to investigate the experiences of professional female DCs. However, this methodology may have influenced the data, as athletes might have struggled to recall specific instances or examples. Consequently, future research could explore more immersive methods, such as the use of reflexive journals during the participants' experiences or conducting interviews at various intervals over a period of time. It is important to acknowledge that research suggests individuals tend to underreport negative experiences (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Thus, athletes who experienced unfavourable coaching or employment circumstances may have hesitated to share these due to feelings of discomfort, embarrassment, concerns about revealing their identities, or fear of compromising their team or work positions (Ryba et al., 2021). Hence, the frequency of negative experiences reported in this study should be considered cautiously. In future studies, it may be beneficial to expand the participant pool to include athletes who have recently retired due to the overwhelming strain and demands of their dual careers. The athletes in our study, who managed to balance their dual careers successfully, might have downplayed the associated demands, potentially adhering to the 'superwoman persona' (Ryba et al., 2021). This persona represents the pursuit to excel across multiple life domains, often without seeking help or showing signs of struggle or vulnerability (Ryba et al., 2021). Therefore, investigating the viewpoints of athletes who found balancing their dual careers challenging and had to retire would provide a valuable contrasting perspective, enriching our understanding of the dual career experience.

In conclusion, this study represents a pioneering effort in examining the experiences and support preferences of professional female DCs. By delving into their unique needs, preferences, and experiences, this research has contributed valuable insights that can guide future studies and practical interventions. While this study marks a significant advancement in our understanding of professional female DCs, it also emphasizes the ongoing need for inclusive and comprehensive research. Such research is crucial in empowering young women to fully realize the physical, psychological, and social advantages of sports participation, while simultaneously overcoming barriers in the professional arena.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Script

Dear _____,

My name is Christiana Colizza, and I am currently working towards a Master of Arts degree in sport psychology at McGill University under the supervision of Dr. Gordon Bloom. We would like to invite you to participate in our study examining North American professional female hockey players' perspectives of balancing their professional sport and non-sport careers. We are contacting you based on a set of criteria highlighting your athletic experience and achievement as a professional hockey player.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in an in-person or virtual interview that would last approximately 90 minutes at a time that is convenient for you. The questions would revolve around your experiences as a professional female hockey player who also has a full-time job.

The McGill University Ethics Board has reviewed and accepted this study for its adherence to ethical guidelines. All of the information provided will be confidential and the responses will only be analyzed by myself, my supervisor Dr. Gordon Bloom, and the research team.

Should you have any questions concerning this study, please contact myself or my supervisor using the information provided at the bottom of the page. The McGill Sport Psychology Research Laboratory has a history of producing influential research on sport coaching and leadership. Please visit our website if you would like to learn more about our research:
<https://www.mcgill.ca/sportpsych/>.

Thank you for considering participating in this research project, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Christiana Colizza

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Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts for Christiana Colizza, a current graduate student in sport psychology in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education at McGill University. You are invited to participate in the research study entitled: “Exploring professional female hockey player’s perceptions of being dual career athletes”. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in a 90-minute, video and audio recorded virtual or in-person interview, without compensation. During the interview, you will be asked questions regarding your experience as a professional female hockey player who also has a full-time job.

At the end of the interview, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions or make any additional comments that were not discussed throughout the interview. Your identity will **remain confidential at all times** and the primary researcher, Christiana Colizza, and the faculty supervisor, Dr. Gordon Bloom, will be the only individuals with access to a copy of the responses. All of the data, including the recorded copy of the interview and the consent form will be stored in an encrypted folder on a password-protected computer for seven years. Any paper copies of notes will be converted into digital files and destroyed at the end of the study. The information gathered from the study will be used solely for conference presentations and journal article publications and your confidentiality will be maintained and respected throughout the entirety of the process. **Your participation in this study is voluntary and not mandatory, therefore you have the ability to refuse to answer any questions without penalty and if you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, all information attained up until that point will be destroyed.**

After reading the above statements you can now provide consent to voluntarily agree to participate in this research study based on the terms outlined in this consent form. You will be provided with a signed copy of this consent form. If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding your rights and welfare as a participant in this research study, please feel free to contact lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca or at 514-398-6831. Please sign below if you agree to participate:

Signature

Date

Researcher’s Signature

Date

I agree (**CHECK YES** ☐ **OR NO** ☐) to the visual and audio recording of the virtual interviews with the understanding that these recordings will be used solely for the purpose of transcribing these sessions.

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Appendix C

Interview Guide

Pre-Interview Routine

- Introduction of the interviewer
- Consent form

Opening Questions

1. Why did you become a professional hockey player?
 - a. What are your current goals as a professional hockey player?
2. Who has had the most influence on your professional hockey career and why?

Key Questions

3. Walk me through a typical week where you have both hockey and work [RQ1]
 - a. On-ice and off-ice commitments practices
 - b. Work schedule
 - c. Travel to practices, work, and appointments
 - d. Social life
 - e. Childcare/family obligations
4. Describe how being a dual career athlete on a professional team differs from being a dual career athlete at the college/university level? [RQ1+2]
5. Describe how your current employment conditions differ from those of your non-athlete colleagues. [RQ2]
 - a. What concessions does your work (or boss) make for you to allow you to play professional hockey?
 - b. How would your work experience be different if you were not a professional hockey player?
6. Describe how your current hockey experiences differ from your teammates that aren't dual career athletes (i.e., nationally carded players or those without a full-time job). [RQ2]
 - a. What concessions does your team (or coach) make for you to allow you to work a full-time job?
7. What are the major factors that you perceive facilitate a positive or negative experience as a professional dual career hockey player? [RQ1+2+3]
 - a. Finances
 - b. Scheduling

- c. Social life
 - d. Lack of sleep
 - e. Supporters (i.e., family, boss, coach etc.)
 - f. Psychological pressures of excelling in multiple domains
8. If you were to provide your **coaches** with advice on how to positively support a professional dual career hockey player in the form of dos or don'ts list, what would your list include? [RQ3]
9. If you were to provide your **bosses** with advice on how to positively support a professional dual career hockey player in the form of dos or don'ts list, what would your list include? [RQ3]

Summary Question

10. What are your long-term career, life, and hockey goals? [RQ2]
- a. Describe your ideal non-sport career trajectory.
 - b. Describe your ideal professional hockey career trajectory.
 - c. Do you see yourself accomplishing these goals? Why or why not?

Concluding Questions

11. Is there something we didn't cover in the interview that you would like to add?
12. Do you have any final questions or comments you would like to share?

Probes: Key phrases to stimulate reflection

- Can you expand on that?
- Can you clarify that?
- That's interesting, tell me more about that.

Appendix D

Theme Development

Codes	Candidate Themes	Higher Order Themes
1 Background – hockey (32) 2 Female hockey mentors (3) 3 Love of hockey (34) 4 College athlete (27)	1 <u>Amateur Women's Hockey (96)</u> - Information regarding the amateur women's hockey context and culture in North America.	<u>Women's Hockey (166):</u> Background information regarding the women's hockey context and culture in North America.
1 Pro hockey contracts (19) 2 Pro hockey luxuries (7) 3 Growth of women's hockey (44)	2 <u>Professional Women's Hockey (70)</u> – Information regarding the professional women's hockey context and culture in North America.	
1 Lack of sleep (6) 2 Lack of social life (5) 3 Lack of resources (23) 4 Poor coaches (21) 5 Coach expectations (14)	1 <u>Stress Inducing Factors (69)</u> - Aspects of the athletes' lives, both in and out of sport, that contributed to feelings of stress.	<u>Stressors (141):</u> Aspects of the athletes' lives, both in and out of sport, that contribute to feelings of stress and negatively impact an athlete's performance.
1 Pressure to perform - general (22) 2 Pressure to perform – hockey (21) 3 Pressure to perform – work (29)	2 <u>Performance Stressors (72)</u> - The various psychological and emotional factors that can negatively impact an athlete's performance on the ice or at work.	
1 Support – family (5) 2 Support – teammate (14) 3 Support – work (11) 4 Support – therapist (4) 5 Support – general (9)	1 <u>Social Support (43)</u> - The various types of social support, outside of coaches and employers, that helped the athletes to balance multiple areas of their life.	<u>Aspects of Social Support (162):</u> The various types of social support as well as necessary accommodations made by supporters, including bosses and coaches, to help athletes balance their professional sports with non-sport jobs.
1 Adaptability – boss (39) 2 Adaptability – coach (19) 3 Coach caring (4) 4 Coach organization (10) 5 Coach understanding (35) 6 Player preferences – boss (12)	2 <u>Support Necessities (119)</u> – The necessary accommodations made by the athletes' supporters to help them effectively manage the challenges of balancing their professional sports career with their non-sport jobs.	
1 Schedule – daily (11) 2 Schedule – hockey (10) 3 Schedule – work (9) 4 Teammates' jobs (14) 5 Background – job (28)	1 <u>Schedule and Responsibilities (72)</u> - Information regarding the athlete's daily schedule and responsibilities balancing work, hockey, and other life responsibilities.	<u>Strategies for Achieving Life Balance (276):</u> The techniques used by athletes to manage the cognitive, physical, and emotional stress of balancing multiple areas of their lives, including their professional sports career, non-sport jobs, and other life responsibilities.
1 Adaptability – athlete (40) 2 Athlete communication (14) 3 Athlete organization (39)	2 <u>Athlete Adaptive Techniques (93)</u> - Techniques used by the athletes to manage the cognitive, physical, and emotional stress of balancing multiple areas of their lives.	
1 Long-term goals – life (9) 2 Long-term goals – work (15) 3 Long-term goals – hockey (27) 4 Personal well-being (44) 5 Benefit of dual career (16)	3 <u>Life Balance (111)</u> - Information about how the athletes could achieve a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction by striving for a well-rounded balance in multiple areas of their lives.	