

Resilience of NCAA Division I Women's Ice Hockey Players:

An Interdisciplinary Autoethnography

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“I will not glorify those aspects of my culture which have injured me and which have injured me in the name of protecting me.” – Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands*

Abstract

The well-being of NCAA student-athletes is a growing concern due to the demanding nature of collegiate athletics. This autoethnography examines the impact resilience has on the mental health and injury rehabilitation of NCAA Division I (DI) women's ice hockey players. While resilience is recognized as a vital coping mechanism for athletes to flourish, there is a lack of research specifically focused on NCAA DI women's ice hockey players. The author's first-hand experience facing significant stressors related to academic demands, training, competition, and recovery from injury as a DI women's ice hockey player negatively impacted their mental health—including the presence of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Findings suggest that these symptoms are common amongst elite female student-athletes. Future research on the connection between athlete well-being and resilience should focus on a holistic approach to resilience intervention implementation for NCAA DI women's hockey players' overall success both on and off the ice.

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Introduction

Searing pain. Rage. Disbelief. My mind tore through these moments, on November 15th, 2023, when I broke both bones in my right forearm. I had skated into one of my teammates, on the University of Minnesota Duluth NCAA Division I women's ice hockey team, before collapsing to the ice. My medical staff quickly brought me to a local hospital. I had surgery the next day to repair my broken bones with metal plates and screws. What followed was 11 weeks of rehabilitation, in the midst of my senior season, that sutured me back together. I had battled with depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation at previous times in my life but none of that prepared me to deal with the aftermath of feeling like a butcher's knife had pierced out of my skin.

I spent my remaining semester of undergraduate studies researching and reflecting on student-athlete well-being. My sports injury forced me to reconstruct what I knew to be true about mental health and opened my eyes to the reality of collegiate athletics. In the midst of the last and most tumultuous semesters of my collegiate career, I was to compile a Capstone project to bookend my participation in the University of Minnesota Duluth's University Honors program. While I was ruminating over concepts for the Capstone project, I came across the concept of autoethnography.

Autoethnography methodology has been used in scholarly contexts in a variety of disciplines and typically entails a researcher considering a culture, group, or phenomenon based on their experiences within that culture or group. Autoethnographers use reflection such as journal entries, personal narratives, and interviews to convey insights that may not otherwise be

accessible through traditional research methodology and to shed light on underrepresented perspectives (Nash & Viray, 2013). Autoethnography was the perfect opportunity for me to overlap my academic interest in well-being with my personal experiences as a DI student-athlete.

The goal of my Capstone project was to investigate how resilience can rescue a student-athlete from the depths of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. My understanding was that the pressures of student-athlete life can either make or break a female athlete depending on their ability to bounce back from hardship—depending on how resilient they are. Qualitative and quantitative methods were essential to research this phenomenon, especially since NCAA DI women's ice hockey players are historically underrepresented in sports psychology, clinical psychology, and sports rehabilitation science. I used the following methods to weave together my Capstone.

The backbone of my research was an extensive literature review while personal narrative and self-evaluation data collection offered supporting arguments for future research interventions. The literature review conducted considers resilience as a coping mechanism for student-athletes to use in the face of stress and mental health hardship. Sections delve into stress, burnout, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. The review also considers previous intervention methods for facilitating resilience in student-athletes including social support interventions, such as team dynamics and coaching support, and psychological interventions, including mindfulness-based strategies and cognitive-behavioral approaches. These show promise in enhancing athletes' mental well-being and should be applied to NCAA DI women's ice hockey players in the future.

Regarding my experience with resilience and athlete well-being, two key elements amplified this project by providing a qualitative perspective. One was my Connor-Davidson

Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) score from April 2024 (Connor & Davidson, 2003). This scale is considered the cornerstone for psychological resilience and will be discussed later. The other key data revealed itself when I had the opportunity to take the World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF) (World Health Organization, 1996) a week after I broke my arm, as a part of my coursework for an undergraduate health psychology course at UMD. My WHOQOL-BREF class survey results from November 23, 2023, and self-directed resurvey on April 23, 2024, will be further discussed later.

This health psychology class sparked my interest in well-being and introduced me to how stress has been found to positively impact people's health, depending on how positively one appraises their difficult circumstances (Bonanno, 2004; Crum et al., 2013; McGonigal, 2016). Before this class, I had come across resilience as a psychological tool children use when faced with adversity (Karatekin, 2018), which military personnel tend to exhibit throughout their careers (van der Meulen et al., 2020), and for people who are grieving (Bonanno et al., 2002; McLean et al., 2023). In athletics, as far back as I can remember, my coaches have been hyping up resilience: be the more resilient team during competition, and the most resilient player when it comes to handling the jam-packed life of a student-athlete. For my Capstone project, I sought to bridge the gap between resilience as a tool for sports performance and handling what life throws at my teammates and me. I focused particularly on finding light at the end of the tunnel that loomed over my last semesters of injury recovery. By doing so, I pondered to what extent resilience has directly impacted my health as a student-athlete.

Additionally, I relied on professional psychiatrist summary notes from five sessions of therapy I attended from November 2023 to January 2024 to share insight into my psychological state throughout my injury rehabilitation. Lastly, I included the end-of-year banquet speech that I

presented to the University of Minnesota Duluth's women's hockey program on April 24, 2024—to mark the end of my four years as a student-athlete in Duluth. After graduating from UMD with my dual degrees in Psychology and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies in May 2024, I will continue to play NCAA DI women's hockey for my fifth year of athletic eligibility at Northeastern University where I hope to obtain a Master of Applied Psychology.

My time as a student-athlete thus far has been incredibly taxing on my physical and mental well-being as well as incredibly rewarding. Summarizing the last four years of my life, emphasizing the ebbs and flows of my health for this project, has been just as challenging. The overarching aim of this study is to examine the lived experience of NCAA Division I women's ice hockey players by synthesizing existing literature and my personal experiences playing for the University of Minnesota Duluth. I hope to be a voice for this demographic and to pave the way for future athletes so that they have research-based support to lean on when they struggle.

Literature Review

In 2019, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) surveyed approximately 22,000 Division I, II, and III athletes focusing on various aspects of their academic, social, and athletic experience including health, injury, and well-being (NCAA Goals Study, n.d.). Female Division I athletes self-reported spending an average of 32 per week hours on athletic activities across the 13 NCAA sectioned sports, including women's ice hockey, on top of a weekly average of 38 hours on academic activities (“Five themes from” n.d.). These demanding schedules make stress an inevitable experience for student-athletes (Gray et al., 2023).

According to the 2019 NCAA survey (NCAA Goals Study, n.d.), an average of 28% of female DI athletes reported high perceived stress, indicating frequent difficulties they felt unable to overcome. Notably, this finding was over 6% higher than male DI sports participants (“Five

themes from”, n.d.). Female student-athletes are susceptible to numerous stressors and increased mental health risks compared to the general population (Johansson et al., 2023; Rao et al., 2015; Snedden et al., 2019). To address these challenges during their collegiate careers, athletes can employ resilience, a psychological skill that allows athletes to flourish regardless of hardships and challenges. Resilience has received extensive scholarly attention.

Scholars in the psychology field have diverse definitions of resilience. This paper defines resilience as the ability to ameliorate difficult circumstances by maintaining psychological stability in the face of adversity including stress and setbacks (Cowden et al., 2014; Dailey, 2022; Kuchar et al., 2023; Ma, 2021; Martin et al., 2021; Slatinsky et al., 202; Stamatis et al., 2020). Historically, resilience was not widely considered within athletics until recently, as the sports psychology discipline has grown and gained momentum. Resilience is a coping mechanism that increasingly facilitates optimal mental health, sports performance, and well-being. Within the literature, resilience is frequently referred to as mental toughness (Cowden et al., 2014; Stamatis et al., 2020), or psychological flexibility (Johansson et al., 2023). Resilience has been assessed with quantitative measures such as the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Ma, 2021; Slatinsky et al., 2022; Dailey, 2022). Also, a variety of methods have been utilized to cultivate resilience in athlete focus groups such as social support interventions (Theberge, 1995; Andler, 2017; Derda, 2019) and psychological intervention (Monsma et al., 2009; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Stamatis et al., 2020; Kuchar et al., 2023).

Despite the wealth of research on resilience in athletes, there is a lack of literature on NCAA DI female student-athletes, specifically women’s ice hockey players. This demographic faces stressors that underscore the need to address the underrepresentation of resilience and well-being within this population (Theberge, 1995; Pelak, 2002; Gilenstam, 2009; Andler, 2017;

Henriksson, 2017; Johansson et al., 2023). Importantly, the population of NCAA DI women's hockey players continues to grow in recent years—from 35 teams in the 2014-15 season (Team Rankings, n.d.) totaling approximately 800 student-athletes, to 44 teams in 2023-24 (Team Rankings, 2024) with over 1100 student-athletes competing today. These female student-athletes are susceptible to immense stress and mental health risks including depression, anxiety, burnout, and suicidal ideation (Johansson et al., 2023; Kuchar et al., 2023). Without the appropriate interventions, these players will not be psychologically equipped to overcome the adversities of DI student-athlete life. Thus, the overarching aim of this literature review is to examine the lived experience of NCAA Division I women's ice hockey players by examining existing literature regarding the relationship between stress, mental health, and resilience.

Mental Health and Resilience

Consistently in literature, resilience has an inverse correlation with most mental health issues (Cowden et al., 2014; Stamatis et al., 2020; Ma, 2021; Martin et al., 2021; Slatinsky et al., 2022; Dailey, 2022; Kuchar et al., 2023). Thus the following section of this literature review breaks down the contributing factors of DI women's ice hockey players' mental health. These include stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation and their subsequent connections to resilience.

Stress and Burnout

Stressors of undergraduate students have been studied extensively. Stressors often include adverse life events (Karatekin, 2018) and psychological responses to academics and social happenings (Hwang & Choi, 2016; Mofatteh, 2020; New, 2021 as cited by Derda, 2019; Kuchar et al., 2023). For student-athletes, additional stress involves constant pressure to perform and intense training and competition (Cowden et al., 2014). There has not been systemic research on

DI women's ice hockey players' relationship with stress. However, other facets of mental health within this niche have been explored and will be considered later.

Stress has often been conceptualized as negatively impacting one's health (Hwang & Choi, 2016; Karatekin, 2018; Contreras et al., 2023; Gray et al., 2023). Yet, other studies have found that high amounts of stress do not necessarily correlate with psychological distress or mental health issues (Crum et al., 2013; Cowden et al., 2014; McGonigal, 2015, Dailey, 2022) and that positive appraisal of stressors—resilience—allows elite athletes to flourish (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). Collegiate student-athletes have been found to report lower perceived stress compared to non-athletes—though the mechanisms behind these findings are still being researched (Avery et al., 2022). Thus a proposed link between student-athletes who report lower perceived stress than non-athletes is resilience. Resilience is chiefly relevant for the discussion on student-athletes' stress and burnout because resilience has been found to alleviate athletes' symptoms of overwhelming stress (Martin et al., 2021; Slatlinsky et al., 2022; Contreras et al., 2023), as well as lower perceived stress (Kucher et al., 2023).

Burnout amongst elite athletes can manifest in chronic fatigue, negative self-image, and poor performance due to stress overload (Dailey, 2022; Andrijiw & Pink 2023; Gray et al., 2023). Burnout amongst the focus group—DI women's ice hockey players—has not been extensively researched. However, Andrijiw and Pink (2023) studied burnout symptomatology among professional women's players from the former Premier Hockey Federation (PHF), some of whom were former NCAA DI players. The athletic-academic duality of DI women's ice hockey players is closely related to the dual career experience of PHF players that Andrijiw and Pink (2023) interviewed. Thus, burnout is likely to fester among DI women's ice hockey players, though there isn't literature investigating this. Following, Gray and colleagues (2023) delved into

DI women's athletes' reported experiences with burnout, but only athletes from 10 of the 13 NCAA-sanctioned DI women's sports were investigated, excluding women's ice hockey. The exclusion of women's ice hockey contributes to the research gaps because this target group has been overlooked. Likewise, since stress is often associated with burnout (Andrijiw & Pink; Contreras et al., 2023; Gray et al., 2023; Kucher et al., 2023), the interplay between burnout and resilience is suggested to have similar, positive effects on athlete health, though there is a need for future research to delve into this interaction further.

Depression and Anxiety

Symptoms of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation are prevalent among college students. Accordingly, research on undergraduate students and athletes' mental health tends to involve the assessment of depression (Miller et al., 2009; Rao et al., 2015; Johansson et al., 2021; Ma, 2021), anxiety (Cowden et al., 2014; Contreras et al., 2023), and comorbidity of these mental health issues (Ma, 2021; Johansson et al., 2023; Kucher et al., 2023). Researchers are studying the mechanisms between these aspects of mental health and resilience, particularly in the context of athletics (Cowden et al., 2014; Stamatis et al., 2020; Ma, 2021; Martin et al., 2021; Slatinsky et al., 2022; Dailey, 2022; Kuchar et al., 2023).

Foundationally, Johansson et al. (2023) discovered that women's ice hockey players are particularly vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and other mental health-related complications due to sports-specific and non-sport-specific factors such as gender discrimination. Their study surveyed players from the women's professional hockey league in Sweden (SDHL) using common scales for professional and research-oriented mental health measurement such as the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) (Spitzer et al., 2006) and the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) (Kroenke et al., 2001). Of the 182 athletes assessed, 20% met the cut

for clinical diagnosis of a generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)—moderate to severe anxiety from the scaling—while 18% could have been clinically diagnosed with a depressive disorder having moderate to severe depression based on the reports. Between 8-20% of respondents had comorbid depression, anxiety, and other mental health. Interestingly, Johansson et al. (2023) also evaluated players with a sense of flourishing—regarded as ideal mental health, tied to resilience among athletes in other studies (Kucher et al., 2023; Lundqvist, 2011; Martin et al., 2021). Of the SDHL players, 60% reported flourishing mental health, of which 40% had mild or no mental health issues, and 20% had moderate to severe mental health issues. For 40% of players that reported non-flourishing—or non-optimal mental health, 18% had mild or no mental health issues, while 22% had moderate mental health issues (Johansson et al., 2023).

These results suggest that there are other factors contributing to the lived experience of mental health amongst women's ice hockey players since 20% of players who met the criteria for moderate to severe mental health issues still perceived themselves as flourishing, compared to the 22% who also met criteria for moderate to severe mental health issues but perceived themselves more negatively as non-flourishing (Johansson et al., 2023). Most importantly, Johansson et al. (2023) attributed these distinctions to players' psychological flexibility—the ability to boost emotional distress, bounce back from adversity, and return to a stable mindset. The players that reported optimal mental health in the face of mental health issues, exhibited statistically significant resilience. This key study of SDHL players' mental health should be replicated for NCAA DI women's ice hockey players in the future. Thus Johansson et al. (2023) will be considered a standard for understanding and promoting resilience in the focus group.

Suicidal Ideation

Literature on suicidal ideation amongst college athletes is few and far between. This suggests that the cognitive processes involved in suicidal ideation have yet to be discovered. Two notable scholarly works that investigated suicidal ideation in collegiate student-athletes found that NCAA athletes are at lower risk for suicidal thoughts compared to their non-athlete counterparts (Miller et al., 2009; Rao et al., 2015). However, Rao et al. (2015) found that between 2003 and 2012, 17 DI student-athletes died by suicide, compared to 9 DII and 9 DII athletes. News coverage from 2022 shared that 5 athletes died by suicide in March alone (Waldman, 2023 via CBS). During the initial drafting of the current literature review, there were no online databases that covered the prevalence of NCAA student-athlete suicides. Then, a study published during the final stages of this literature review, in April 2024, found that suicide is the second leading cause of death for student-athletes behind motor vehicle accidents and ahead of cardiac events (Whelan et al., 2024). Whelan et al. (2024) conducted a longitudinal study on suicide in NCAA athletes between 2002 to 2022. These researchers found that suicide rates doubled from 2002-2012 to 2012-2022 for this demographic. There was no identifiable, statistical difference between sex, race, gender, and sport for the deaths considered (Whelan et al., 2024). This study went viral on social media in April 2024 (Hidden Opponent, 2024), leading up to National Mental Health Awareness Month in May (Biden, 2024). Though this publication fostered education and awareness efforts, Whelan et al., (2024) suggested that the suicide prevention standards within the NCAA are nearly nonexistent and must be adapted to change the increasing death rates.

The prevalence of suicide must be addressed in research on collegiate athletes. Applying these trends to the focus group of DI women's ice hockey players yields the question of how to examine who is experiencing suicidal ideation and who is not. It is unknown whether

student-athletes who lack suicidal ideation during their collegiate careers exhibit more psychological flexibility or resilience compared to others. To promote optimal mental health and prevent suicide among student-athletes, the mechanisms behind suicidal ideation must be further researched (Lundqvist, 2011; Johansson et al., 2023; Kucher et al., 2023; Whelan et al., 2024). Advanced research may enable NCAA personnel such as athletic trainers and coaching staff to more effectively facilitate their athletes' mental health and prevent suicidal ideation, attempts, and deaths.

Cultivating Resilience

Given that resilience is a coping mechanism crucial for enhancing athletes' mental well-being, the following section will explore contemporary approaches to cultivating this psychological skill in athletes. These strategies draw upon various social (Theberge, 1995; Andler, 2017; Derda, 2019) and psychological (Monsma et al., 2009; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Stamatis et al., 2020; Kuchar et al., 2023) foundations. The application of these current methodologies will be discussed concerning potential interventions tailored for NCAA Division I women's ice hockey players. Integrating both social support and psychological programs for resilience is imperative so that the mental health issues previously synthesized can be prevented.

Social Interventions

The concept of resilience building among athletes has been widely researched. One of the key themes that have emerged is the crucial role of social foundations in fostering resilience. Social support interventions are common because of the close-knit nature of team sports (Theberge, 1995; Andler, 2017; Derda, 2019). For example, team dynamics and the role of coaching and support staff are crucial to creating a nurturing environment for athletes. Coaching and support staff play an essential role in fostering resilience by providing mentorship, guidance,

feedback, and emotional support to athletes (Hwang & Choi, 2016; Andler, 2017; Erdner, 2018; Martin et al., 2021; Park & Shin, 2023;). These resources contribute to the overall well-being and performance of athletes. In this way, social support interventions establish a supportive ecosystem within the team, where athletes feel empowered and motivated to overcome challenges. A key element of social support for student-athletes is the establishment of a team atmosphere and cohesion. This involves creating cultural rituals and communication norms within the team to foster accountability and cohesion, creating an environment where athletes feel supported and valued (Theberge, 1995; Andler, 2017). This, in turn, enhances their resilience and ability to cope with adversity.

Within the context of women's ice hockey, Theberge's (1995) sport sociology fieldwork and Andler's (2017) bachelorette thesis are some of the only scholarly works that delve into team culture and staff influence on the livelihood of these athletes. However, their inquiries into social support systems within women's hockey teams do not involve resilience and instead focus mostly on team dynamics. In her early work with women's ice hockey programs, Theberge (1995) examined the construction of a community within a women's hockey team in Canada. This fieldwork and interview-based project suggests that the sense of community on a woman's hockey team is grounded in members' shared identity as hockey players and their commitment to the sport, regardless of hardships such as gender discrimination and physical demands of the sport (Theberge, 1995). This common focus and interest unite women from diverse backgrounds and social locations. Theberge's (1995) work serves as foundational knowledge of the culture of women's ice hockey. Next, Andler (2017) suggests that the Finnish Women's National Ice Hockey team was having success during the time of the study because the players' psychological needs were being met by their coaching staff—these included competence, autonomy, and

relatedness to others. The Finnish athletes reported optimal mental health when they were supported by their coaching staff as well as by their teammates—to which they attributed their prevalence as a compatible unit during hardships throughout the season (Andler, 2017). Both of these studies are key to understanding the social dynamics of women's hockey and can be used as frameworks for future studies. As with the Finnish program's psychology needs study (Andler, 2017), social support interventions chiefly address the mental health needs of athletes. The high pressure to perform at a high level can take a toll on athletes' mental health, leading to issues such as anxiety (Cowden et al., 2014), depression (Johansson et al., 2023), and burnout (Andrijew & Pink, 2023). By providing emotional support and guidance, coaches and support staff can help athletes cope with these challenges and maintain good mental health.

In conclusion, social support must be considered when making resilience and mental health interventions for NCAA DI women's ice hockey players and other athletes alike. By fostering a nurturing and supportive environment within the team, coaches and support staff can help athletes cope with the challenges of competitive sports. With the right support and guidance, athletes can overcome adversity and achieve their full potential, both on and off the ice.

Psychological Interventions

Research has shown that resilience can also be developed through psychological interventions. Psychological interventions focus on equipping athletes with strategies to develop resilience at an individual level compared to in group settings. Recent studies have highlighted the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions in enhancing resilience and mental well-being among elite athletes, including women's ice hockey players (Lundgren et al., 2021; Myall et al., 2022; Kuchar et al., 2023). These mindfulness-based programs have been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and burnout symptoms among elite athletes. For example, Myall et al.

(2022) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis, highlighting the positive effects of these programs on athlete mental health. Though this meta-analysis was not hockey-player specific, it provides the groundwork for implementing mindfulness-based interventions.

One such approach is “Acceptance and Commitment Training” (ACT), which was found to significantly improve psychological flexibility and performance outcomes in male ice hockey players (Lundgren et al., 2021). This randomized control trial assessed the effectiveness of mindfulness and suggests that athletes can change and become more psychologically flexible with training. The mindfulness-based training program participants took aimed at enhancing athletes' ability to accept and cope with negative emotions while committing to valued actions (Lundgren et al., 2021). Another example of a psychological intervention focused on mindfulness-based strategies is the “Resilience and Enhancement in Sport, Exercise, & Training” (RESET) method, which emphasizes self-awareness and present-moment attention to build resilience (Kucher et al., 2023). The RESET program was designed to help NCAA athletes navigate stressors efficiently and was found to lower levels of self-criticism, depression, and anxiety. This intervention method (Kucher et al., 2023) facilitated performance for athletes similar to Lundgren et al. (2017), which suggests that resilience can be learned and integrated into elite athletes' toolkits for success. Both of these studies involved structured sessions with professionals and athletes who learned mindfulness techniques and self-awareness strategies to build resilience and enhance mental well-being (Lundgren et al., 2021; Kuchar et al., 2023). Though these studies were completed with male hockey player participants (Lundgren et al., 2021) and non-hockey players (Kuchar et al., 2023), future replications could involve NCAA DI women's ice hockey players.

Cognitive-behavioral approaches encompass a variety of techniques aimed at enhancing resilience by modifying thought patterns and promoting positive outlooks on adversity. For instance, visualization techniques, as explored by Monsma et al. (2009), involve mentally rehearsing successful performances or desired outcomes to enhance confidence and resilience. In their study, Monsma et al. (2009) conducted a controlled experiment to investigate the effectiveness of visualization in improving athletic performance and resilience among collegiate athletes. Results indicated that athletes who underwent visualization training demonstrated greater resilience in the face of setbacks and reported higher levels of confidence during competitions compared to the control group (Monsma et al., 2009). This suggests that visualization techniques can be a valuable tool for fostering resilience among athletes. Similarly, “Mental Fortitude Training”, as studied by Fletcher & Sarkar (2012), focused on cultivating a positive outlook on setbacks and challenges. Fletcher & Sarkar (2012, 2016) conducted a longitudinal study to assess the impact of optimism training on resilience and performance among Olympic athletes preparing for the 2012 and 2016 Olympics. These researchers developed a structured training program aimed at enhancing athletes' ability to interpret setbacks in a positive light and maintain optimism in the face of adversity. Athletes underwent regular training sessions—similar to Lundgren et al.'s (2021) ACT sessions—and received personalized feedback to reinforce optimistic thinking patterns. The results revealed that athletes who participated in the optimism training program demonstrated greater resilience, characterized by a quicker recovery from setbacks and a more positive attitude toward challenges. Additionally, these athletes exhibited improved performance outcomes compared to those who did not undergo the training (Fletcher & Sakar 2012; Fletcher & Sakar 2016), which aligns with the aforementioned psychological intervention research (Monsma et al., 2009; Lundgren et al., 2021;

Kuchar et al., 2023). This highlights the potential of mental training as an effective intervention for enhancing resilience and performance among athletes. Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention that both the ACT method, studied by Lundgren et al. (2021), and the RESET program, investigated by Kuchar et al. (2023), are considered health cognitive-behavior change techniques. This niche within health psychology is a growing field of scholarship that may yield insightful research into resilience, athlete, and non-athlete well-being. These studies collectively underscore the importance of cognitive-behavioral approaches in cultivating resilience and promoting optimal performance among athletes.

Increased self-compassion has emerged as a crucial factor in resilience-building, offering individuals a supportive internal dialogue that fosters acceptance and kindness toward oneself during challenging times (Lundgren et al., 2021; Stamatis et al., 2021; Kuchar et al., 2023). Kuchar et al (2023) and Stamatis et al (2020) conducted interventions aimed at cultivating self-compassion among athletes and examining its impact on resilience and mental well-being. The RESET program designed by Kuchar et al. (2023) encouraged athletes to practice self-compassion by offering themselves kindness and affirmations when facing difficulties. Through a series of guided exercises and reflective activities, participants learned to recognize and challenge self-critical thoughts, fostering a more nurturing attitude toward themselves (Kuchar et al., 2023). Similarly, Stamatis et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between self-compassion, mental health, and mental toughness among NCAA athletes. They conducted a survey involving nearly 600 athletes to assess their self-compassion beliefs and mental health outcomes. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between self-compassion, mental health, and mental toughness, indicating that athletes who demonstrated higher levels of self-compassion also reported better mental health and greater resilience. These findings suggest

that cultivating self-compassion can enhance athletes' ability to cope with stress and adversity—promoting their resilience and mental health. Moreover, while these self-compassion findings have yet to be specifically applied to the context of women's ice hockey, they hold significant implications for future research and interventions within this population. Given the benefits of self-compassion in promoting resilience and mental well-being among athletes in other sports, there is a strong likelihood that similar effects would be observed among women's ice hockey players. Incorporating self-compassion training programs tailored to the unique needs and challenges of NCAA DI women's ice hockey players could offer valuable support in enhancing their resilience and mental health.

To summarize, it is essential to consider the role of psychological interventions in developing resilience among student-athletes, particularly among NCAA DI women's ice hockey players. Mindfulness-based interventions, cognitive-behavioral approaches, and self-compassion strategies have all been found to effectively enhance athlete mental health and performance outcomes. The importance of these interventions cannot be overstated, as they not only benefit individual athletes but also contribute to the overall success of the team.

Discussion

This literature review has provided an examination of resilience and mental health among NCAA Division I women's ice hockey players, shedding light on the multifaceted factors influencing athlete well-being and performance. Through an analysis of key themes and findings from various studies, several important insights have emerged. Firstly, the demanding schedules and stressors faced by female Division I athletes, particularly women's ice hockey players, underscore the critical need for resilience-building interventions tailored to their unique experiences ("Five themes from", n.d.). The exploration of stressors such as stress, burnout,

depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation highlights the intricate interplay between these factors and resilience. For instance, while stress is often associated with adverse mental health outcomes, resilience has been identified as a protective factor that mitigates the negative effects of stress and promotes optimal mental health and performance (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Contreras et al., 2023). Resilience is a critical psychological skill that the adverse effects of stress and bolsters mental well-being and performance. Current research suggests that social support mechanisms, team dynamics, and individualized psychological techniques are essential components in the cultivation of resilience within the student-athlete population (Monsma et al., 2009; Andler, 2017; Kuchar et al., 2023). Psychological interventions such as mindfulness-based strategies and cognitive-behavioral approaches have shown promise in enhancing resilience and well-being among athletes, offering practical avenues for resilience cultivation among DI women's ice hockey players (Lundgren et al., 2021; Myall et al., 2022). These interventions equip athletes with practical tools to navigate the complex landscape of collegiate athletics while fostering adaptive coping strategies and emotional regulation skills. By addressing these research needs, scholars can gain deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying resilience and develop more targeted interventions tailored to the unique challenges faced by NCAA D1 women's hockey players. This will enable this demographic to overcome challenges and thrive in the face of adversity.

Personal Experience

In exploring resilience and athlete well-being within the context of my collegiate career at the University of Minnesota Duluth, several pivotal elements provided a both quantitative and qualitative lens to this project. Firstly, background on my mental health experiences and insights from five therapy sessions between November 2023 and January 2024 provide a deeper

understanding of my mental health, particularly during injury rehabilitation. Next, the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) score from March 2024 offers insight into my capacity to navigate adversity (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Additionally, my World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF) assessment, both in November 2023 and as a self-directed resurvey in April 2024, following a significant sports injury, provided invaluable data (World Health Organization, 1996). Finally, my end-of-year banquet speech to the UMD women's hockey program on April 24, 2024, marks the culmination of my four years as a student-athlete in Duluth, offering a reflective narrative of growth and gratitude. Against the backdrop of my athletic career, where resilience was often integrated through coaching pathways, I aim to illuminate the intersection between resilience, sports performance, and personal well-being. The following section of this autoethnography outlines these self-evaluations and reflections, intersecting them with the previous research considered in the literature review portion.

Personal Narrative on Mental Health

As a student-athlete, my journey has been intertwined with mental health struggles, an aspect of my life that began as early as 12 years old. Throughout middle and high school, I grappled with depression and anxiety, exacerbated by family stressors and the challenges of navigating my sexual orientation. In my sophomore year of high school, in 2018, I attempted suicide. This depressive event was sparked by a concussion I had been diagnosed with a few weeks beforehand, having had a blow to my head during an ice hockey game. At the time, I wondered what would happen if I didn't go through with my plan to end my life. I know now, that one of the main reasons I'm alive today is because I am meant to share my story and advocate for athletes' mental health.

I spent years in therapy recovering and forgiving myself for getting so close to death. I entered college knowing I'd likely face mental health issues again but I had no idea what was coming my way. Though I had intermittent periods of emotional stability, my mental health took a severe turn during my senior year of college, compounded by personal hardships and the intense demands of being a DI athlete. A traumatic injury, shattering my right ulna and radius, not only sidelined me physically for 11 weeks—forcing me to miss half of my team's competitions in the 2023-2024 season—but also triggered a resurgence of depressive and anxious symptoms. From November 15th, 2023 when I broke my arm, to date, my resilience and mental toughness have been tested like never before.

During this period, I sought professional help, engaging in psychiatry sessions to address my escalating mental health concerns. These sessions provided a window into my psychological well-being, capturing my struggles, progress, and resilience amidst adversity. One week before my sports injury, I expressed concerns about increasing anxiety and dysphoria, mindful of the potential for a downward spiral given my past experiences. I detailed my emotional journey, describing how my mood would fluctuate and impact various aspects of my life, such as sleep patterns and appetite. My initial mental health assessments, including the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7), revealed moderate depression and significant anxiety, with specific symptoms such as depressed mood, anhedonia, and sleep disturbances. Despite this, I demonstrated resilience, maintaining a stoic demeanor while acknowledging the emotional turmoil beneath the surface. Following the injury, subsequent sessions documented my evolving mental state as I navigated the challenges of recovery and academic pressures. Despite setbacks, including relationship issues and the loss of a scholarship, I demonstrated adaptive coping strategies and a commitment to mental health

treatment. the weeks that followed saw a resurgence of suicidal thoughts, signaling the depth of my struggles and the need for ongoing support. Through professional intervention and self-awareness, I actively engaged in therapy, implementing strategies to manage distress and improve emotional well-being. Over time, my mental health screenings showed gradual improvement, with decreased scores on the PHQ-9 and GAD-7, reflecting my progress toward remission and emotional stability. By January 2024, I achieved scores indicative of minimal depression and anxiety, with specific symptoms such as fatigue, poor concentration, and suicidal ideation significantly reduced or absent. This significant shift in my mental health underscores the efficacy of therapeutic interventions and highlights the importance of psychological support systems within collegiate athletics.

Moreover, my longitudinal data provides a unique perspective on the interplay between mental health and athletic performance. Despite facing setbacks, including a career-threatening injury, I demonstrated resilience and determination. My journey this past year has fueled me to advocate for mental health resources for student-athletes and destigmatize asking for help. My experiences as a student-athlete navigating mental health challenges highlight the complexities inherent in balancing athletic pursuits with personal well-being. Through professional intervention, resilience, and a commitment to self-care, I have embarked on a journey of healing and growth, emerging stronger and more resilient than before. My story serves as a testament to the power of resilience in overcoming adversity and the importance of prioritizing mental health within collegiate sports.

In retrospect, my experiences as a student-athlete navigating mental health adversities have profoundly shaped my identity and outlook on life. While the road has been fraught with obstacles, it has also been a crucible for personal growth and self-discovery. Through resilience,

self-awareness, and the unwavering support of my community, I have emerged stronger and more resilient than ever before. As I continue my journey beyond collegiate athletics, I carry with me the lessons learned and the strength gained from confronting my inner demons head-on. Armed with resilience and a renewed sense of purpose, I am poised to face whatever challenges lie ahead, knowing that I am capable of overcoming even the darkest of days. Armed with resilience and a renewed sense of purpose, I am poised to face whatever challenges lie ahead, knowing that I am capable of overcoming even the darkest of days.

Resilience Self-Evaluation

The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) is a 25-item rating scale designed to assess resilience as a measure of stress-coping ability (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The scale, rated on a 5-point scale with higher scores indicating greater resilience, was originally administered to various groups including community samples, primary care outpatients, general psychiatric outpatients, and individuals participating in clinical trials for generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The CD-RISC includes screening prompts such as “When things are hopeless, I don’t give up,” (Connor & Davidson, 2003). During the initial study the reliability, validity, factor structure, and reference scores of the CD-RISC were calculated for the different study samples (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The scale demonstrated good psychometric properties, with factor analysis revealing five distinct factors: personal competence, self-trust, positive acceptance of change, sense of control, and spirituality. Additionally, Connor & Davidson (2003) found that an increase in CD-RISC scores was associated with greater improvement during mental health treatment, particularly in subjects with the highest levels of psychological well-being. These findings suggest that resilience, as measured by the CD-RISC, is modifiable and can improve with mental

health intervention programs (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The CD-RISC has been widely popularized in psychology research, including the assessment of athlete resilience (Ma, 2021; Slatinsky et al., 2022; Dailey, 2022).

As previously reviewed, athletes with higher levels of resilience demonstrate greater adaptability and ability to bounce back from adversity. As an athlete, my self-evaluated CD-RISC score in April 2024 holds particular significance. Scoring slightly above the average results investigated by Connor & Davidson (2003), who sampled 577 participants with an average score of 80.4 out of 100, my score of 83 reflects not only my resilience but also my ability to navigate the challenges inherent in my athletic pursuits. Moving forward, my CD-RISC results prompt reflection on the importance of resilience in athletics and suggest avenues for future research to explore the relationship between resilience and athletic performance outcomes—particularly in the aftermath of injury rehabilitation. These contributions to resilience studies are one of the only instances of research on elite women’s ice hockey players alongside Johansson et al., (2023) survey of Swedish professional players that was elaborated on in the literature review.

As a limitation of this portion of my self-evaluation, I was not able to analyze my CD-RISC score over time. Future studies on athlete’s reported resilience would benefit from longitudinal research design. If I were to do this study again, I would have had a screening of my resilience in November 2023 following my initial injury, as my mental health declined. Though I do not have this particular data, the following qualitative section sheds light on my experiences.

Quality of Life: Longitudinal Data Throughout Injury Rehabilitation

In the study conducted by Goraczko et al. (2021), the focus was on exploring the relationship between self-efficacy and quality of life among elite athletes after spinal cord injury

(SCI), including the WHOQOL-BREF (World Health Organization, 1996). Through an investigation utilizing self-report measures, these researchers aimed to understand how perceptions of self-efficacy influenced various domains of quality of life in elite athletes recovering from significant surgical procedures (Goraczko et al., 2021). Similar to this study focused on SCI, the surgery I had to repair my right ulna and radius with metal hardware was an adverse life event. Goraczko et al., (2021) findings revealed a significant positive association between self-efficacy levels and overall quality of life, as measured by the WHOQOL-BREF, suggesting that higher levels of self-efficacy may contribute to better adjustment and functioning following SCI. This study adds to the growing body of literature highlighting the importance of psychological factors in promoting resilience and well-being among individuals facing significant life challenges, including those related to sports injuries such as my personal experience this past fall.

Another key study by Vento et al. (2022) examined the quality of life among female athletes at different levels of competition. Their participants (N=159) were surveyed using the WHOQOL-BREF. Their research revealed notable differences in the reported quality of life between female athletes competing at community college versus various NCAA sport levels (DI, DII, and DII). Specifically, female athletes at the community college level reported lower quality of life compared to those participating in university-level sports. Vento et al., (2022) highlighted the significance of socio-environmental factors in shaping athletes' well-being and underscored the need for further exploration into the factors contributing to these disparities. By acknowledging the findings of this study, we gain a deeper understanding of the nuanced experiences of female athletes across various tiers of competition and can better address the

unique challenges they may face in optimizing their overall quality of life within the athletic context.

My journey from November 2023 to April 2024 reflects a remarkable trajectory of quality of life, resilience, and personal growth following my sports injury. This is directly supported by research-based WHOQOL-BREF results one week after my injury and resurvey five months later. My November 23rd, 2023, WHOQOL-BREF survey indicated lower scores across all domains—physical, psychological, social relationships, and environmental health—compared to the average scores for 20-29-year-olds reported by the World Health Organization (1996). However, by April 2024, having returned to play following full medical recovery, my quality of life scores substantially improved, surpassing the average World Health Organization (1996) scores for my age group in all domains. For reference, my WHOQOL-BREF overall score in November 2023 was 48 while my score in April 2024 was 89 out of 100. This transformation underscores the resilience I have demonstrated in overcoming adverse health experiences.

I remember taking the WHOQOL-BREF for the first time and feeling utterly miserable. My right arm and my dominant hand had been soft-casted after my surgery and the classmate sitting next to me had to fill out my worksheet. I was embarrassed and I tried to make light of the situation since I was at one of the darkest points of my life. I morbidly joked with my classmate that I hoped I would score above 20. In my head, I knew that I had once been as low as 1-5 when I attempted suicide six years prior.

I was pleasantly surprised to score 48. I remember thinking something along the lines of “I might not be as bad off as I thought,” though I had the lowest score in my class of those who shared their results when prompted by our professor. Later, I showed my psychiatrist my

WHOQOL-BREF worksheet and they gave me the idea of revisiting this scale as I recovered from my injury.

In April, I confidently screened myself using the very same WHOQOL-BREF worksheet, with my right hand. I glanced down at the two four-inch scars on either side of my forearm and silently congratulated myself for making it through the last five months. There had been moments when I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. Suddenly I felt soaked in sunlight.

This story highlights my resilience. The positive impact of my psychiatry sessions, my inner determination to prevail, and my adaptable well-being on my quality of life are captured by the WHOQOL-BREF longitudinal data. There is no similar research on NCAA DI women's ice hockey players reported quality of life, to date. This section seeks to fill this gap and promote further research for this demographic. As an athlete, my journey is an example of the importance of resilience in navigating challenges and setbacks and serves as an inspiration for others facing similar obstacles.

Self-Reflection (Banquet Speech)

As my senior year came to a close this spring, I spent time reflecting and putting together a speech for the University of Minnesota Duluth's end-of-year banquet. It was difficult to put into words how much my four years in Duluth as a student-athlete have meant to me and made me the person I am today. This year was unorthodox for me. I had several injuries, including concussions, and breaking my arm. Throughout these hardships, along with the ebbs and flows of a hockey season wins and losses, I was challenged as an athlete, as a student, and as a young person finding their way in the world. Much of the speech, in the appendix section of this study, is focused on gratitude instead of flashy moments from my collegiate career. This was important to me because I wouldn't have been able to prevail through life as a DI student-athlete without

the support of my teammates, coaches, and support staff—all of whom have become near and dear to my heart. With that said the speech I shared with the Bulldog hockey program encapsulates my growth as a student-athlete. There wasn't a dry eye in the event after I spoke.

Future Needs and Limitations

Future research on resilience and mental health among NCAA Division I women's hockey players should encompass a holistic approach that considers various factors influencing athlete well-being and performance. One avenue for investigation could focus on brain injury, including concussions and non-concussions, and resilience among athletes (Brainard et al., 2012; Ma, 2021; Martin et al., 2021; Johansson et al., 2023). Understanding how brain injury rehabilitation and return-to-play processes contribute to resilience could provide valuable insights into the psychological mechanisms underlying athletes' ability to overcome adversity (Monsma et al., 2009). As an athlete who has had multiple concussions throughout my collegiate career, I can attest that these injuries impact players' mental well-being and ability to handle the stressors of student-athlete life. I suggest that this area of sports rehabilitation and psychological research be studied in depth.

Additionally, exploring the impact of sleep disruption on mental health is essential to future research since sleep has been found to impact sports performance (Hwang & Choi, 2016; Andler et al., 2017; Csata-Szekely, 2023; Johansson et al., 2023; Park & Shin, 2023). As I mentioned in my psychiatry survey results from the past semesters, I have direct experience with changing sleeping patterns throughout my mental health ebbs and flows. Traveling for competitions regularly, training in the early hours, and experiencing various stressors keeping me up at night, I believe that the psychological and physiological effects of poor quality sleep synonymous with student-athlete life must be researched more.

Further, this study failed to include nutrition and disordered eating. Anderson & Petrie (2012) conducted a study investigating the occurrence of disordered eating and harmful weight control practices among NCAA DI women's gymnasts and swimmers, revealing alarming frequencies of these behaviors within these athletic cohorts. This study is an example of the need for additional research efforts aimed at comprehensively comprehending and mitigating the obstacles NCAA DI female athletes face when it comes to nutrition and toxic body image. I've observed teammates grappling with disordered eating throughout their collegiate careers, and I find there is an inadequacy of resources and research dedicated to addressing this aspect of athlete well-being.

Also, future investigations into how the factors of holistic well-being interact with sports performance metrics—such as player's points, physical fitness, heart rate during training and performance, and team wins and losses—could offer a comprehensive understanding of athlete well-being (Andler et al., 2017; Johansson et al., 2023). Given the lack of prior research specifically focused on hockey metrics, there is a need for studies that explore hockey-specific outcomes and performance metrics (Lundgren et al., 2021) to explain the role of resilience in enhancing athletic longevity and success throughout a season (Cowden et al., 2014; Slatinsky et al., 2022; Johansson et al., 2023). These could include a player's time on ice during competition, shots on goal or save, and heart rate levels during training and competition.

Another key gap in this literature review is that of the sociological experience of NCAA DI women's ice hockey players. Gender and discrimination were not deeply delved into and these are arguably essential components of the lived experience of elite female athletes in contemporary sports (Theberge, 1995; Johansson et al., 2023). Feminist frameworks such as intersectionality and standpoint theory can guide future research on NCAA female athletes'

well-being. Diversified perspectives on power dynamics within sports and the institutionalization of women's bodies could dismantle barriers to mental health resources that the current study fails to address.

Overall, this is a proposal for the holistic well-being of NCAA DI women's ice hockey players—comprised of a critical analysis of concussions among other significant injuries, sleep, nutrition, sports metrics, and sociological experiences. The current study is a needle in the haystack of athlete well-being. Hopefully, the insights through this project can provide the foundation for future research.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the synthesis of my self-evaluation and literature review provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between mental health, resilience, and athletic performance among NCAA DI women's ice hockey. Through personal narratives and quantitative assessments, I have illuminated the challenges faced by student-athletes, particularly in the context of collegiate sports. My journey highlights the importance of psychological support systems and resilience-building interventions in promoting well-being and success on and off the field. The literature review supports the need for tailored interventions and research initiatives to address the unique mental health needs of NCAA female athletes—including the niche demographic of athletics I've dedicated the last four years of my life to. Studies reviewed examined factors such as stress, burnout, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation are valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of athlete well-being.

By using a non-traditional research method, autoethnography, I bridged the gap between personal experience and empirical research, to advocate for elite female athletes' lived experiences. Moving forward, it is imperative to prioritize these athletes' well-being. By

amplifying the voices of student-athletes and advocating for evidence-based interventions, we can create a culture of support and resilience within NCAA women's athletics. Through collaboration between athletes, coaches, administrators, and mental health professionals, we can pave the way for a brighter and more inclusive future for student-athletes across the nation.

While this study has focused on resilience within the context of NCAA DI women's ice hockey, these implications extend far beyond the realm of sports. Resilience is not just important for student-athletes facing the rigors of competition but also for individuals navigating real-life adversities (Crum et al., 2013; McGonigal, 2015). I am excited to follow the research on resilience, mental health, and well-being as these fields continue to develop. Hopefully, somewhere out in the world of sports, there will be other athletes who find comfort in my story. I hope to reach these athletes who have struggled as deeply as I have with mental health. Together we can educate and empower one another towards more resilient lives. May we all thrive in the face of adversity.

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Appendix: UMD Women's Hockey End-of-Year Banquet Speech*

**Note that this documentation has been edited to exclude the names of individuals for their privacy.*

“Hi everyone,

As we gather here tonight to celebrate the culmination of another hockey season, it's with a mix of emotions that I stand before you as a graduating senior. Tonight is about the moments that have woven together the fabric of our collegiate experience. Tonight, I am celebrating the friendships that I've formed over the past four years, that have helped shape me into the person I am today.

Reflecting on my journey from when I first moved onto campus, I can't help but smile at the incredible growth we've undergone, both as individuals and as a team. The pre-season of my freshmen year, when we couldn't use the locker room because of COVID-protocol, and the first time I wore the Bulldog jersey was for an intrasquad scrimmage—since we had no schedule, and no idea when we would play our first game. We had COVID testing so often that we started collecting spit in our mouths as we drove down 21st, on our way down to the DECC. If you had told me in those early weeks of my freshman year that we'd make history, by getting back to Frozen Four that spring, and the following one, I probably wouldn't have believed you. All that mattered to me then was not puking on the assault bike (again).

Whether we were screaming at the top of our lungs in the locker room after beating Colgate to head to the Frozen Four in Erie, watching [Coach A] get down on 1 knee and chug a bottle of water, or making [Coach B] crowd surf after we beat Wisconsin this past December, what I'll remember most about being a Bulldog is how we celebrated our wins and learned from our losses.

As I stand on the brink of a new chapter, I'm filled with gratitude for every one of you who has been a part of this incredible journey. To the coaches and support staff who have pushed us to our limits and believed in our potential even when we doubted ourselves, thank you for your unwavering dedication and guidance.

I don't think that in the past 3 years that [Coach B] has been here any of us have done as much schoolwork as she has done video. [Coach B], though I'm sure we've aged you during our nail-biting games over the years, your spirit and passion for the game keep you young—I couldn't be more proud to have been one of your students of the game.

[Coach C], I'm going to miss trying to beat you out onto the ice for practice. I appreciate your kindness and your attention to detail. Thank you for passing me so many pucks when I was returning to play, and for showing me the ropes of the press box when I wasn't.

[Coach D], thank you for your constant positivity and for being a key asset to the weekly rebound games this year. I can't wait to see your coaching career continue to blossom, especially since you've got the whole game-day fit thing dialed.

[Coach A], thank you for taking a chance and recruiting me. Growing up, I didn't have any queer women to look up to, certainly not in leadership positions, or with the confidence you have. Watching you and [confidential] raise [confidential] over the past couple of years is always going to be one of my favorite memories of college.

[Coaching Staff] have given me the queer representation that I needed when I was young, and I couldn't stand here today and not vocalize how much that's meant to me. I can only hope that my teammates and I's relationships and families someday have what you have. Thank you for showing me what is possible and allowing us to have a team culture that celebrates our sexualities, our mental health, and our stories.

That said, I also wanted to thank [Medical Staff] for helping me through my injury-riddled season and for getting me back onto the ice to finish my senior year. I'm not sure I should say that everyone should get a chance to work with both of you as closely as I did, but I'm so glad I did. Thank you for meeting me at my worst and helping me become the strongest version of myself—alongside [Strength Trainer] killer rehab workouts.

To [my fellow graduates], I'm super excited and hopeful to watch all of you play [professionally] next year and to follow in your footsteps eventually. I admire each of you for your character and the individual qualities you bring to being a teammate and more importantly a good friend. I'm so proud to be recognized tonight alongside the three of you.

To the returning players and staff: good luck next year and beyond. I will be cheering you on—unless I'm playing against you. And with that, Go Dogs!”

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