

Exploring Gratitude as a Protective Factor for Athlete Mental Health and Well-Being

By

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Abstract

Gratitude entails a sense of appreciation and recognition that this feeling comes from an external factor (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). The following paper outlines the many positive benefits experienced on both individual and social levels when gratitude is adopted. Gratitude can be important for physical health, positive well-being, as well as in close relationships, work environments, and sport to name a few. While gratitude is promising for healthy well-being, factors that influence the propensity to being grateful, including individual and sociocultural characteristics, are explored. Gratitude interventions and skills to embody gratitude are also discussed. Overall, the objectives of this paper aim to offer an in-depth exploration of what gratitude is, why it is beneficial, the factors that influence it, as well as how to best cultivate it. As gratitude is a less researched area in the sport psychology field, the findings of this paper are utilized to propose a workshop that can increase resilience with the hopes of enhancing athlete mental health and well-being.

Keywords: gratitude, sport psychology, mental health, resilience, positive psychology, athlete

Acknowledgements

My hope with this research project is that it will enlighten people with newfound knowledge that they can both critique and spread into the world. I hope it helps people grow and flourish into who they strive to be. Gratitude may not always be relevant to one's situation, but I truly believe it can serve useful at opportune moments. If something or someone makes you feel good, let them know.

This paper has helped me grow in both personal and professional ways. Though words can't quite capture my appreciation, I'd like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for those who helped me along this journey. It can be easy to get caught up in the pursuit of our goals, forget to take a step back, and look at the broader life perspective. To Jenna Seitz, Hafsa Sadiq, Julia Hochstein, Olivia Chu, Jerry Xue, Anda Vintila, and my parents, thank you for keeping me humble and grounded these last couple years. Your insight and support, in both direct and indirect ways, are something I'll always recognize as pivotal to my growth during this time of my life. A special shoutout to Alex Hobbs, who has been a key influencer of this project from start to finish. Your insight, contribution of ideas, and attentive listening have always been so valued. You have been a key supporter in the final product of this project, and I will always cherish that. I look forward to continuing the collaboration together as a team on future projects.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Mental Health in the Sport Context

Due to increased stress, athletes report higher levels of depression symptoms, social anxiety, and alcohol use compared to nonathletes (Storch et al., 2005). While some studies have found that athletes face higher rates of depression (Hammond et al., 2013; Storch et al., 2005), other research has supported that nonathletes experience increased depression (Armstrong et al., 2009; Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010). Moreover, Yang et al. (2007) found depression rates are similar between athletes and nonathletes. Differences in mental health data may be due to underrepresentation of certain populations as well as underreporting by athletes (Currie et al., 2021; Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010). Currie et al. (2021) noted that there is lack of data distinguishing mental health symptoms from specific mental health disorders which may also contribute to discrepancies.

Regardless, athletes face unique risk factors compared to the general population that may increase risk of depression and suicidality. Some of these risk factors include injury, involuntary career termination, performance expectations, and overtraining (Smith & Milliner, 1994; Wolanin et al., 2015). Research shows that athletes face greater stigma when it comes to mental health which can contribute to less likelihood of seeking help (Hilliard et al., 2020; Kaier et al., 2015). Given the nature of athletic culture, athletes are more likely to deny mental health symptoms (Wolanin et al., 2015). They are expected to be mentally tough and can overlook help when needed (Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010). This can be problematic for those who require professional help to get better.

Although there is mixed research pertaining to rates of mental health, it is evident that athletes are significantly impacted by such issues. Wolanin et al. (2015) suggested female

athletes may face higher rates of depression, while male athletes report greater increased risk of suicide. Clearly, athletes are impacted regardless of gender and whether they meet diagnostic criteria. Collectively, the above research speaks to the importance of addressing athlete mental health.

One in five athletes face depression (Wolanin et al., 2015) which could be due to poor management of athlete stressors. If not managed properly by competitive athletes, athlete stressors can significantly impact athletic performance (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014), as well as mental health and well-being (Rice et al., 2016). Athlete stressors can be categorized into 3 main areas including organizational, competitive, and personal stressors (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). Organizational stressors might include coach behaviour or attitudes, cultural issues, training environments, or travel. Competitive stressors can include injuries, preparation for competition, underperforming, performance mistakes or failures, and self-presentation. Finally, personal stressors can entail work-life balance, family issues, finances, diet, career transitions, education, and personal relationships. Those who are in a retirement phase of sport, face performance failure, experience negative life events, or have low social support have increased susceptibility to mental illness in sport (Rice et al., 2016). Poor athletic performance can also lead to lack of external reinforcement, negative self-perceptions, and feelings of hopelessness (Wolanin et al., 2015).

Therefore, it is important to strategize and put supports in place that can help athletes manage the above. It is crucial to emphasize early detection of risk factors and implement interventions that target mental health in the sport context (Purcell et al., 2019; Wolanin et al., 2015). By doing so, both well-being and performance excellence can be optimized.

While one option to decrease stigma and increase help-seeking behaviours is through increased mental health literacy (Currie et al., 2021; Hilliard et al., 2020; Wynters al., 2021), this paper will emphasize a preventative approach rooted in positive psychology. If athletes can be equipped with skills and tools to reduce mental health decline and increase mental well-being, this might reduce the need to seek help. The above noted stressors will affect many athletes to some degree. By focusing on an approach rooted in positive psychology, this might prevent athletes from getting to a point where it becomes difficult to seek help. Currie et al. (2021) recommended implementing mental health services into daily training. This paper will aim to help athletes learn skills that they can incorporate into their training regimen with the intent of preventing mental health decline.

Positive psychology seeks to understand the factors that contribute to optimal functioning, flourishing, and overall well-being (Gabana, 2019). In sport, similar to traditional psychopathology, an improvement mentality that focuses on fixing what is going wrong is often emphasized (Gabana, 2019). While this can be helpful, focusing on strengths can also be effective for managing sport and performance concerns (Wagstaff & Leach, 2015). Gratitude falls under the umbrella of positive psychology and has been proposed as a promising avenue to pursue in hopes of improving athlete mental health, well-being, and performance (Gabana, 2019). As such, the focus of this research project will be on the subject of gratitude.

Purpose Statement

The current capstone project offers an in-depth exploration of gratitude with the intent of understanding how it can be best utilized for athlete well-being. As it is a less explored area in sport, a significant portion of the literature review will highlight research from the general literature. The literature review will aim to understand what gratitude is, how it operates,

influencing factors of gratitude, its benefits, as well as how to best cultivate gratitude. The following research questions will guide the review: (1) what is the importance of gratitude?; (2) what factors contribute to the process and cultivation of gratitude?; (3) how can gratitude be optimally implemented and influence athletes?

Theoretical Framework

Broaden-and-Build Theory

Broaden-and-build theory posits that positive emotions help people build resources and enhance coping (Fredrickson, 2000, 2004b). When individuals experience positive emotions, they have a wider range of possibilities to act and move forward in life. This awareness of more possibilities allows for accrual of personal resources which can be used for later coping and feeling other positive emotions. The term *upward spiral* has been proposed to explain this phenomenon of positive emotions contributing to enhanced emotional well-being and optimal functioning. In contrast, negative emotions create a sort of tunnel vision that do not allow for an upward spiral. As a result of *broadened* possibilities, positive emotions *build* psychological resiliency and the ability to bounce back quickly from negative emotions. This is supported in research that has found those who are primed to feel positive emotions tend to list more options for taking a course of action, as opposed to those primed with negative or neutral emotional states (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Basically, positive emotions offer more possibilities.

Not only are positive emotions useful for building resources, but they can also reverse or undo the lingering effects after experiencing negative emotions. This is known as the *undoing* effect. Fredrickson (2004a) described positive emotions as having the ability to loosen the hold that negative emotions have on people, by dissipating or undoing the preparation for a specific action. To support this, researchers have looked at cardiovascular activity, a measure of blood

flow redistribution to skeletal muscles (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Fredrickson et al., 2000). This was examined by measuring cardiovascular reactions from the beginning of a film until cardiovascular activity returned to baseline after introducing negative emotion. When positive emotions (i.e., joy and contentment) were evoked, cardiovascular recovery was quicker.

Gratitude is a positive emotion that can lead to development of coping mechanisms and behavioural options conducive to positive well-being. Through an *upward spiral*, gratitude might broaden people's cognitive processes, allowing for increased thoughts and actions. This can then contribute to increased personal resources, resiliency, and coping for adaptive functioning, in turn predicting future experiences of positive emotions. Furthermore, while positive emotions feel good in the moment and increase the likelihood people will function well and feel good in the future (Fredrickson, 2004b), gratitude might also mitigate or *undo* the maladaptive effects of negative emotions. Wood et al. (2007) found that trait gratitude was correlated with coping strategies for challenges including seeking support, reinterpreting events positively, and problem-solving. In summary, gratitude might broaden one's thinking, undo lingering effects of negative emotions, contribute to resilience, and trigger an upward spiral toward greater well-being and human flourishing.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory explains our interactions between others through the lens of evaluating cost versus benefit to determine if relationships are worth pursuing (Cook et al., 2013). From this perspective, Spence et al. (2014) suggested that individuals may show gratitude due to receiving gratitude from others and wanting to repay the favour. According to social exchange theory, when benefits outweigh costs, relationships are worth pursuing. In the context

of gratitude, when one shows appreciation for another, it may increase the likelihood of continued actions that evoke gratitude in a cyclical fashion.

According to McCullough et al. (2001), gratitude is both a response to moral behaviour and a motivator of moral behaviour. They proposed that gratitude has 3 functions. The first is that gratitude is a response to the perception that one is the beneficiary of another's moral actions. Second, this motivates the grateful person to behave prosocially both toward others and the benefactors. Third, upon expression of gratitude this encourages the benefactors to continue moral behaviour in the future. This conceptualization is further supported by other research that has found an increased inclination to help others when thanked for prosocial behaviour, which contributes to a cyclical positive reinforcement of gratitude (Grant & Gino, 2010; Michie, 2009). Similarly, Baker and Bulkley (2014) noted the importance of *generalized reciprocity* which is based on a "I help you, you help someone else" mentality. When individuals engage in such behaviour, it leads to feelings of gratitude when receiving favours from others. Thus, they propose gratitude operates as a function of generalized reciprocity mechanisms. Further echoed by Smith (2010), people are more likely to feel and express gratitude toward those who benefit them, succeed in benefitting them, and can resonate with the grateful feelings. Finally, McCullough et al. (2001) found that people often experience gratitude for people they have not met, but who they perceive performed some benefit for them. This is also true in the context of romantic relationships where receiving a thoughtful benefit from a partner was related to increased feelings of gratitude (Algoe et al., 2010). In turn, more gratitude predicted increased connection and satisfaction in the relationship for both partners. The above research offers sufficient support reflecting how gratitude can be beneficial from an interpersonal perspective.

Socioecological Model

Finally, this research project will be conceptualized through the lens of a socioecological model. This model offers a framework that is multidimensional in nature including individual or intrapersonal, interpersonal, community, organizational, and societal levels (Scarneo et al., 2019; Vella et al., 2014). A socioecological framework understands health and well-being from a multifaceted perspective. This means that health and well-being can be influenced at various levels and change can occur across different contexts. There is also an emphasis on the interplay between these different levels. With respect to gratitude initiatives, this can occur at the individual level, but also be influenced by environmental and interpersonal factors. By applying a socioecological framework, this offers multiple avenues to understand and implement gratitude.

Contribution to the Field

As previously discussed, there are barriers for seeking mental health help within sport. In addition, as with traditional psychopathology, a focus on fixing ‘what is wrong’ is often emphasized in sport rather than focusing on strengths and what is going well. While reducing barriers is one way to optimize athlete mental health, another option is to prevent athletes from getting to a point where they need help in the first place (i.e., taking a preventative approach). The current capstone project will contribute to the sport psychology field by exploring how gratitude can prevent mental health decline through a positive psychology lens. This project will be useful for coaches, athletes, sport practitioners, and mental health practitioners looking to enhance athlete well-being. By taking a preventative approach, this might not only enhance or preserve athlete well-being, but it may also free up mental health resources for those who are more severely impacted by mental health symptoms.

Although gratitude has been introduced in sport settings, it is still an area that is in its infancy for athletes. A comprehensive review of gratitude will be presented to understand how it can be best utilized by athletes to maintain and improve their well-being. Athletes are immersed in a competitive culture that can make it difficult to reach out for help (Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010). This research project will also explore the cultural aspects and tackle barriers within sport that can affect athlete well-being. After presenting a thorough literature review, a workshop instilling these new learnings will be proposed. This workshop will offer a preventative way to decrease mental health decline through gratitude, including how to best implement it by keeping athlete culture in mind.

Reflectivity and Positionality Statement

It is important to identify the social location of the author to understand how this may influence his research. The author identifies as Asian-Canadian, middle class, able-bodied, a cis-gender male, and member of the LGBTQ2S+ population. He was also raised by immigrants in a Western-dominated society which has contributed to a unique duality of views on the world and controversial topics. He recognizes both positions of privilege and marginalization he may uphold in certain contexts, including how this influences his perceptions and views. He is a former competitive and collegiate athlete which sets the stage for his strong passion in the sport psychology field. He has first-hand experienced the difficulty of being immersed in a culture of toxic masculinity within sport, as well as faced the numerous demands and pressures of being a collegiate athlete. Some of his difficult experiences include being deselected (i.e., getting cut) from former teams, suboptimal performances influencing the outcome of high-stake competitions, and being overly self-critical. These are some of the experiences that provide

context for the author's desire to understand factors related to athlete well-being and performance, as he wishes he had been equipped with such tools during his time as an athlete.

This has inspired him to understand the factors that influence athletes' lives, including their well-being and performance. He has also completed a graduate degree specializing in sport psychology research. The author's previous thesis research study was focused on the area of self-compassion and compassion for others in varsity athletes. He is a strong advocate for athlete mental health and performance with the hope that the current research project will offer an additional avenue to optimize athlete well-being. He has seen the utility of gratitude in his personal life which sparked his interest to explore gratitude in the athletic context. The author is aware his biases influence this research project and sought to practice reflexivity throughout.

Outline of Capstone Project Chapters

This introductory chapter will be followed by two subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 will include a literature review of gratitude including what it is, theoretical bases for why it works, the individual benefits of gratitude, social benefits of gratitude, as well as factors affecting the propensity to being grateful. This will then be followed by gratitude research in the sport context and the benefits of gratitude interventions. The final sections of the literature review will present research on how to best cultivate gratitude.

Chapter three will propose a workshop rooted in gratitude to enhance athlete well-being. The research reviewed in chapter two will be incorporated to create a workshop that instills gratitude in athletes, while also considering relevant influencing factors and the effect of sport culture on athletes. The hope and intent of creating a gratitude-based workshop will contribute to the literature by proposing a way to optimize athlete well-being, as well as give insight for sport and mental health practitioners interested in working with this population.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

What is Gratitude

Gratitude is rooted in the latin term, *gratia*, which means graciousness, grace, or thankfulness (Emmons & Shelton, 2002). As described by Pruvser (1976), words deriving from *gratia* are related to generosity, kindness, giving, receiving, and getting something for nothing. Researchers have defined gratitude in various ways. It can be described as a life orientation of focusing and appreciating positivity in life (Tsang et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2010). Gratitude can also be explained as a feeling of appreciation or recognizing and responding with grateful emotion to an experience or others' benevolence (Emmons & McCullough, 2004; McCullough et al., 2002). Building off this, gratitude can stem from appreciation for nature, recognizing the gifts in our lives, or through interpersonal exchanges when an individual receives benefit from someone else (Emmons & Stern, 2013).

Fredrickson (2004a) stated that gratitude arises when one recognizes an appreciation of gain from a benefactor which can be human or non-human (i.e., nature, religion, spirituality, etc.). Thus, gratitude can be interpersonal (i.e., directed toward others) or it can be transpersonal where one has an appreciation for their experiences, the world, and what has happened (O'Connell et al., 2016; Pres et al., 2020; Young & Hutchinson, 2012). There is also self-focused, or intrapersonal, gratitude in which there is no social interaction, and where an individual is grateful inwardly for their own personal resources (O'Connell et al., 2016).

Gratitude can be conceptualized as being a state or trait (Geng, 2018; Wood et al., 2008). Whereas dispositional gratitude is a tendency to experience gratitude in daily life (i.e., personality trait; McCullough et al., 2002), state gratitude is a momentary experience of gratitude as an emotion (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). It is important to distinguish trait versus state

gratitude, as it highlights that cultivation of gratitude consistently is different than experiencing it momentarily (Emmons & Stern, 2013).

When further understanding gratitude, it is important to distinguish it from other similar emotions to avoid confusion and for consistency in further research exploration. Gratitude is a positive emotion amongst various others such as happiness, optimism, compassion, and pride. Fehr et al. (2017) outlined that these emotions can be distinguished along three key dimensions: the trigger event, the impact of the trigger on the self, and the prosocial action tendency that results. For example, gratitude is triggered when one is in receipt of something that is beneficial to the self. With compassion, however, it is an emotion that is triggered when there is a precursor of suffering. Furthermore, when one feels pride, the trigger is positive outcomes that can be attributed to the self. One might feel gratitude after receiving a gift, compassion when witnessing someone go through grief, or pride when they have accomplished a goal. Finally, happiness is characterized by a broad array of positive forces that can shape quality of life. Although these all fall under the umbrella of positive emotions, it clear that they each have their unique characteristics. Typically, gratitude is experienced when people are recipients of prosocial behaviour (i.e., interpersonally; McCullough et al., 2001); however, as outlined above there is both transpersonal and intrapersonal gratitude as well. Essentially, gratitude is characterized by a sense of appreciation.

Thus far, there is a common consensus that gratitude involves a sense of appreciation. For gratitude to come to fruition there are certain precursors that must precede. Many researchers have concluded a key factor in the gratitude process is the perception of an external stimulus, which can be human or non-human (i.e., nature), that sparks gratitude (Fehr et al., 2017; Hsu et al., 2020; McCullough et al., 2001). Although many researchers have identified a benefactor as a

precursor for gratitude it is not necessary. Gratitude can simply entail recognizing and noticing that one has obtained a positive outcome beneficial to oneself, as well as acknowledging that an external source produced this positive outcome (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Aligned with this, Lambie and Marcel's (2002) theory of emotion awareness posited that gratitude leads to increased life satisfaction, but only when there is awareness of these emotions. In simpler terms, Hussong et al. (2017) broke down the gratitude experience into four parts: (1) noticing what one is grateful for, (2) thinking about why one is given these things, (3) feeling what has been given, and (4) doing something to express appreciation. In summary, for gratitude to emerge there must first be an external factor that is perceived as offering something favourable or positive to an individual. This entails awareness and attending to the factors described above.

Components of Gratitude

The above general concepts are important for understanding the general premise of gratitude. According to researchers, gratitude can be broken into various dimensions which can be useful for understanding the nuances of gratitude.

Fitzgerald (1998) proposed a 3-component model of gratitude: warm appreciation for a person or thing, a sense of good will for that person or thing, and an inclination to act positively turning appreciation into goodwill. Watkins et al. (2003) also proposed a 3-dimensional model including *a sense of abundance*, *simple appreciation*, and *appreciation of others*.

Furthermore, an 8-dimensional model posited by Adler and Fagley (2005) might explain the intricacies that create the foundation for gratitude. These include *expression of gratitude* (i.e., expressing thankfulness), *appreciation of life in general*, *social comparisons* (i.e., feelings of positivity when comparing lives to others), *rituals of gratitude* (i.e., reminders of being grateful), *astonishment* (i.e., frequency one remained 'enchanted'), *present moment* (i.e., concentrating on

the here and now), *interpersonal* (i.e., evaluating appreciation of others), and *personal assets* (i.e., focusing on material and non-material goods).

This initial section provided a foundation for understanding what exactly gratitude is and its various components. Although there are slight variations in describing the concept of gratitude, it is evidently a useful area to explore and understand based on the abundance of research seeking to understand it. In summary, there is a main consensus that gratitude is characterized by a sense of appreciation evoked from an external source. In turn, this can lead to feelings of positivity and the inclination to reciprocate such feelings.

Understanding Why Gratitude Works

In chapter one, broaden-and-build theory, social exchange theory, as well as socioecological model were explained as they relate to gratitude. This next section will present additional theoretical bases to explain the utility of gratitude and how it can facilitate positive functioning.

Hedonic Adaptation

Hedonic adaptation, also known as the hedonic treadmill, refers to the phenomenon that one's emotional response to positive and negative experiences will dissipate over time (Okabe-Miyamoto & Boehm, 2020). It is the general tendency to return to baseline levels of one's happiness. Someone who wins the lottery will likely feel an extreme high shortly following their success but will eventually habituate to this feeling and it will wear off. Moreover, an increase in one's salary can feel like a huge accomplishment, yet this can often lead to acclimation to the new salary and an eventual sense of feeling as one did with the former salary. Allen (2018) suggested that gratitude can counteract hedonic adaptation by taking deliberate intention to focus on what is going well in one's life instead of taking things for granted. By making an effort to

reflect on the positive things happening in life, this can interrupt habituation and serve as a reminder to be grateful (McCullough et al., 2001).

Find, Remind, and Bind Theory

Algoe (2012) proposed the find-remind-and-bind theory which is similar to social exchange theory in that there comes a need to evaluate and know how to relate in social interactions. As suggested in the name of the theory, finding, reminding, and binding are three key proponents in strengthening interpersonal relations. Gratitude is experienced in response to perceived benefit. This perceived benefit is usually after noticing some sort of action from a benefactor. By noticing, understanding, and approving of this responsive action it can bind people closer together (Algoe, 2012). Repeated gratitude experiences can translate into a persistent gratitude schema. This can allow people to have a more consistent mindset shifted toward the positive events in life which can aid in coping with life's challenges (Fehr et al., 2017; Lambert et al, 2009).

Multidimensional Model of Gratitude

Finally, the multidimensional model of gratitude offers a conceptual framework for understanding how gratitude unfolds on a large-scale within an organization (Fehr et al., 2017). In this model, gratitude can occur at three levels. At the event level, gratitude is experienced as an episodic emotion in response to an experience that is beneficial to an individual, however this experience is due to someone or something else – not the individual themselves. For example, an employee might assist their colleague who has been overloaded with work tasks. If it is expected that everyone completes their own tasks without help, this can evoke a sense of gratitude. Following the event-level is the individual-level where persistent gratitude emerges. This conceptualization of persistent gratitude is predicated on the idea of an emotional schema.

Schemas, like road maps, allow us to formulate quick responses in specific contexts through default behaviour and strategies, directing our attention and regulating action (Bargh & Ferguson, 2000). Thus, an emotional schema is a mental structure in which we are predisposed to a specific emotion in a given context (Jenkins & Oatley, 1996). Simply put, it is a roadmap of how we will respond or feel emotionally toward people or events. Fehr et al. (2017) proposed the stable tendency to feel grateful (i.e., persistent gratitude) results from repeated episodic experiences of gratitude at the event level. They proposed that formulation of a gratitude schema requires individuals to reflect continuously and retroactively on their gratitude experiences. Thus, for us to have a grateful disposition, based on Fehr et al.'s (2017) proposition, two criteria are important: (1) an experience that has benefitted an individual and (2) continuous reflection and recognition of these experiences. Persistent gratitude is then believed to lead to collective gratitude at the organizational level. This is where a broad sense of shared gratitude is experienced amongst various members of an organization ultimately creating a culture of gratitude.

Individual Benefits of Gratitude

Health

According to Kendler et al. (2003), high levels of thankfulness are related to reduced risk of depression, phobias, bulimia, antisocial behaviour, and substance use dependence. Gratitude is also related to increased abstinence of substances and better coping (Krentzman, 2017; Leung & Tong, 2017). However, it is important to note that timing of when gratitude is utilized can be impactful. Following a substance use treatment program, higher gratitude was related to later sobriety only if people were sober after treatment (Krentzman, 2017). Conversely, for those who

continued to use alcohol following treatment, gratitude was lower. This implies gratitude may not be beneficial in all cases and timing matters.

In terms of physical health, gratitude has been linked to less inflammation and improved blood vessel function for hospital patients (Celano et al., 2017; Redwine et al., 2016). Those with chronic health conditions have also reported lower depression and anxiety symptoms when they have higher trait gratitude (Ng & Wong, 2013; Sirois & Wood, 2016). As well, higher gratitude is associated with greater adherence to medical recommendations which might help with increased recovery from medical conditions (Millstein et al., 2016). Finally, participating in a gratitude intervention can lead to increased progress on goals, fewer physical complaints, better sleep quality, and increased frequency of exercise (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Clearly, gratitude has important implications for positive health behaviours.

Ill-Being

Gratitude could be a protective factor against ill-being because of enhanced social relations, an attentional shift toward the good in life, and its emphasis on a compassionate, less critical attitude (Gabana 2019; Petrocchi & Couyoumdjian, 2016). Gratitude is related to less materialism and envy (Lambert et al., 2009; McCullough et al., 2002; Polak & McCullough, 2006). Materialistic people have lower life satisfaction which might be explained by lower levels of reported gratitude (Lambert et al., 2009; Tsang et al., 2014). Those who are grateful appreciate what they have rather than focusing on what is absent. Grateful people might be more satisfied with their lives and feel less of a need to acquire new things to be happier (Allen, 2018). Materialism and envy are related in that they are rooted in dwelling on what one does not have (Allen, 2018), the opposite of gratitude. Being envious and materialistic could impede positive

social interactions with others since there is a focus on comparing oneself to others. Gratitude could be the key to lessening these tendencies.

Gratitude is also protective against stress and depression (McCullough et al., 2002; Nezlek et al., 2019; Woodby et al., 2008). Increased stress is related to lower self-esteem, negative affect and increased depressive symptoms, but inducing a gratitude state can weaken this relationship (Nezlek et al, 2019). This makes sense since gratitude helps to reinterpret negative events and enhances resilience (Fredrickson et al., 2003).

Positive Well-Being

True gratitude is characterized by a tendency to intentionally focus on what is going well, the good things in life, and does not ignore negative life aspects (Gabana, 2019; Wood et al., 2008). Focusing on benefits one presently has can reduce taking things for granted (Young & Hutchinson, 2012) which can amplify positive emotions and maximize well-being (Gabana, 2019). Even in times of suffering gratitude allows people to find positive meaning since gratitude is associated with a positive outlook toward life (McCullough et al., 2001; Szczesniak et al., 2020).

Gratitude can predict increased subjective well-being (Geng, 2018). Several research studies support this finding. Individuals who express more gratitude show increased positive affect, optimism, feel better about life in general, and experience less negative affect (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). In this study, participants wrote about 5 things they were grateful for each day for 10 weeks. Thus, an induced grateful state can reap positive benefits. Other research has found that gratitude is related to increased positive emotions, enhanced optimism, higher life satisfaction, and can predict happiness (McCullough et al., 2002; Young & Hutchinson, 2012).

Finally, gratitude also has a strong relationship with having a sense of coherence, described as the belief that life is understandable, manageable, and meaningful (Lambert et al., 2009).

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity or stressful experiences (Fredrickson, 2001). Following a stressful task, resilient people return to baseline cardiovascular levels quicker (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Those who are resilient are optimistic, curious, open to new experiences, and experience greater positive emotions (Block & Kremen, 1996; Fredrickson et al., 2003; Klohnen, 1996; Ruini & Vescovelli, 2013). Resilient people even feel more positive emotions in both stressful and non-stressful situations (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2002) which might explain why they experience less depression (Fredrickson et al., 2003).

It is theorized that resilience cultivates positive emotions, but that resilience can also be a key outcome of positive emotions. In one study, people who were asked to find meaning and long-term benefits in positive experiences showed increases in resilience (Fredrickson et al., 2004). Previously, broaden-and-build theory was discussed. To recap, well-being can be maximized by harnessing the beneficial effects of positive emotions. Gratitude can be one way to regularly find positive meaning and build these positive emotions in life (Fredrickson, 2000). It is a significant predictor of resilience (Gupta & Kumar, 2015). Researchers have also suggested perhaps resilience prevents negative outcomes, while gratitude promotes positive ones (Vieselmeyer et al, 2017).

Specifically, gratitude in the context of trauma is important. Grateful people are more resilient and have greater posttraumatic growth following traumatic events (Kashdan et al., 2006; Ruini & Vescovelli, 2013; Zhou & Wu, 2016). Grateful reappraisal of unpleasant or negative

events can shift people to focus on positive consequences when dealing with such events (Watkins et al., 2008).

Social Benefits of Gratitude

Gratitude in Close Relationships

Based on Fredrickson's (2004b) broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions not only offer benefit for individuals, but they can also reverberate through others and create meaningful personal encounters. When positive emotions are evoked in people, they are more likely to help others (Fredrickson, 2004a). Interpersonal gratitude, as opposed to self-focused gratitude, can contribute to increased relationship satisfaction (Algoe et al., 2010; O'Connell et al., 2016), as well as strengthened social bonds and friendships (Emmons & Shelton, 2002). Expressions of gratitude to a romantic partner or close friend are also related to more positive perceptions of them which might explain greater comfort in voicing relationships concerns in the future (Lambert & Fincham, 2011). Gratitude seems to be key for nurturing and improving relationships. Related to find-remind-bind theory, Algoe et al. (2010) suggested that feelings of gratitude can act as a 'booster shot' in long-term relationships as it can reinforce the 'remind' component. They proposed that gratitude can serve as a reminder of the feelings felt in a relationship and inspire mutual responsiveness as well as an increased bond.

Expression of gratitude can be important for improving or maintaining close relationships. It is important to note that Gordon et al. (2011) suggested that felt versus expressed gratitude can influence interpersonal relations. They found that feeling gratitude was more important for satisfaction in relationships, rather than expressed gratitude. This is an important consideration that may affect its usefulness.

Gratitude in the Workplace

According to Losada and Heaphy (2004), business teams that have higher positivity in the work environment tend to display better performance, resiliency, flexibility, creativity, and adaptability. Gratitude might be utilized to increase positivity in work environments especially since it can promote prosociality, performance, loyalty, increased support, and high-quality relationships to create healthy organizations (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Di Fabio et al., 2017; Emmons, 2003; Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Since gratitude entails feeling appreciated and supported, people see others in a positive light which might increase the likelihood of strengthening a culture of gratitude.

Gratitude not only facilitates a positive work environment, but also has implications for productivity and success of an organization. Like romantic relationships, gratitude can increase the willingness of people to voice their concerns to other employees and strengthens employee dedication (Lambert & Fincham, 2011). Gratitude is also linked to trust (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005), which suggests employees can be more vulnerable with one another and take more risks in the work environment when working together. Finally, those who are more grateful are more likely to be committed and responsible to others (McCullough et al., 2002).

General Interpersonal Functioning

Gratitude is social and other-oriented, especially since people are more willing to spend time with others when feeling grateful (Algoe et al., 2008; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Fehr et al., 2017; Watkins, 2013). There are many social benefits of gratitude including increased prosocial behaviour, enhanced relationship satisfaction, feelings of connectedness to others, increased social support, humility, and cooperation (Bartlett & De Steno, 2006; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Fehr et al., 2017; Szczesniak et al., 2020; Tsang, 2006; Young & Hutchinson, 2012).

Grateful people are more likely to be empathic, more forgiving, less jealous, and pay attention to others' positive qualities (Algoe et al., 2008; McCullough et al., 2002; Rye et al., 2012; Young & Hutchinson, 2012). Grateful people are also rated as helpful, optimistic, outgoing, and trustworthy (McCullough et al., 2002).

Given these many positive outcomes, it makes sense high gratitude is related to feeling cared for and loved by others (McCullough et al., 2001), agreeableness (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and the tendency to help others in the future (Pres et al., 2002). Collectively, this research demonstrates the interpersonal advantage of engaging in gratitude. Much of this research is correlational in nature; therefore, causation cannot be implied, and it is unclear if gratitude precedes the positive outcomes or vice versa. However, a study by Bono et al. (2019) found that increases in gratitude over time predicted prosocial behaviour and vice versa. This is promising since a reciprocal relationship between gratitude and prosocial behaviour means that improving one can influence the other.

Gratitude offers a host of social benefits. It motivates people to be more prosocial as there is emphasis on mutual positive feelings for both givers and recipients of the gratitude process. Beneficiaries feel a sense of appreciation and are more likely to reciprocate, while benefactors feel appreciated and are more likely to repeat their behaviour. This dual and mutual process benefits both parties.

Propensity to Being Grateful

The initial sections of this paper have outlined the definition of gratitude, theoretical underpinnings explaining why gratitude works, and the benefits of gratitude. Gratitude can create an upward spiral of emotions and subsequent positive well-being. Therefore, it is worth exploring the factors that are pertinent to gratitude. This can allow people to understand what

contributes to feelings of gratitude and how to best implement it to experience its benefits.

Exploration of factors related to the propensity to being grateful will be looked at next.

The Role of Social Context in Gratitude

Individualistic and Collectivist Perspectives. One study found that German men were more likely to experience gratitude compared to American men (Sommers & Kosmitzki, 1988). While the American men preferred to hide gratitude, no German men reported this same behaviour. In contrast, Morgan et al. (2014) found that gratitude was related to guilt, indebtedness, awkwardness, and embarrassment for people in the United Kingdom versus the USA. This is especially interesting since happiness interventions including a gratitude aspect (i.e., writing letters of appreciation to loved ones) resulted in greater increased of life satisfaction for White Americans over Asian Americans (Boehm et al., 2011). Finally, it has been found that South Korean college students benefit less than US college students following a gratitude intervention (Layous et al., 2013). Collectively, these studies suggest there are cultural differences with respect to gratitude. Benefitting less from a gratitude intervention does not necessarily mean it was not effective. It could mean that certain cultures are already prone to a grateful mindset due to collective beliefs and values; thus, they may not benefit from interventions since they may already practice gratitude regularly. An explanation for the differences in cultures might be the idea of individualist versus collectivist values. While self-improvement and personal agency are emphasized in an individualistic culture, collectivist cultures focus less on the self and more on well-being on a broader level.

Organizational Context and Culture of Gratitude. Emotional schemas develop from persistent patterns of a certain emotion (Jenkins & Oatley, 1996). So if one constantly reflects on and practices gratitude, they are more primed and likely to experience it. For example, let's take

a scenario where an employee has contributed a new idea in a team meeting. Someone who is primed with a gratitude schema might perceive this as a helpful contribution to the team's collective goals, while lack of a gratitude schema might perceive this as stealing the spotlight.

Managers and leaders have the power to set the tone of group context, including the likelihood of group members being grateful to one another. Fehr et al. (2017) noted authoritative leadership and outcome-focused goals can negatively affect the work context. An environment that emphasizes success or performance over camaraderie can create competitiveness between employees and make it difficult for gratitude to emerge. If there is a lack of clear direction on how gratitude links to the group context, which is shaped by leaders, emotion schemas become less primed for gratitude (Fehr et al., 2017). Gratitude can be increased by consistently introducing gratitude in employee contexts to create a grateful culture (Fehr et al., 2017). A one-time initiative sends ambiguous signals of the importance of gratitude and creates variability in gratitude amongst employees. Consistency is vital.

Norms are also important for the development of gratitude. Norms are beliefs of how one should act depending on the behaviour and context (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975). An exchange-based norm is based on giving benefits in return for benefits received and communal norms are based on need with no specific obligations (Fehr et al., 2017). With exchanged-based norms, there is an expectation that something will be received in return, and they are usually short-term focused. However, communal norms relate to trust and closeness (Clark & Mills, 2011). This is relevant to gratitude and the multidimensional model. At first, encouragement of gratitude practices might seem like exchange-based norms, but as they become persistent a gratitude schema might develop and lead to a culture of grateful communal norms. Although these ideas

are proposed in the organizational psychology context, they are worth considering in other settings.

The Role of Individual Characteristics in Gratitude

Self-Esteem. The role of self-esteem in gratitude processes is worth considering. Emmons (2007) believed that gratitude is based on the assumption that the other person (i.e., benefactor) wants something good for us. It was suggested if someone has a higher level of self-esteem then they may evaluate themselves as deserving good things. Conversely, an individual with lower self-esteem might perceive that someone ‘better’ (i.e., makes the individual feel inferior) offered help which can lead to decreased gratitude and lessen reciprocity of gratitude. This aligns with research that has shown those with low self-esteem can perceive receiving help as confirmation that they lack significant competency (Pres et al., 2020). Nadler and Jeffrey (1986) also showed that a decrease in self-esteem can result when one receives help from a person perceived as similar to them. They suggested that gratitude can have varying intensities depending on the level of equality between benefactor and beneficiary. Moreover, Lin (2015) found that gratitude was related to decreased depression, but only in those with higher self-esteem. Based on these studies, low self-esteem and how we view others in comparison to ourselves can affect gratitude. Perhaps then, increasing self-esteem can increase likelihood of a grateful mindset.

Emotional Intelligence and The Big Five traits. Emotional intelligence, also known as emotional quotient (EQ), is defined as the ability to process emotional information exactly and effectively (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It involves perceiving, using, understanding, and managing one’s own and others’ emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional intelligence is essential for gratefully responding to situations (Ludovino, 2017; Pres et al., 2020; Watkins, 2013) and is

dependent on an individual's level of conscious awareness of their internal attitudes (Chen et al., 2017). The more aware one is, the more likely they can appreciate and be grateful. Other researchers support this notion describing emotional awareness as a key component of gratitude (Lambie, 2008; Lambie & Marcel, 2002). Those with high EQ are more willing to help others and should be able to appreciate and recognize the contribution of benefactors, increasing the likelihood of feeling gratitude (Pres et al., 2020). Emotionally intelligent individuals are better able to recognize situations that demand a gratitude response.

Research has shown that high emotional intelligence can predict gratitude (Geng, 2018; Rey & Extremera, 2014). EQ can also predict subjective well-being (i.e., life satisfaction, positive affect), and this is partially mediated by gratitude (Geng, 2018). Personality traits can also predict dispositional gratitude (Szczesniak et al., 2020). The big 5 traits are known as openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. All traits can predict gratitude except for neuroticism. What was particularly interesting was that emotional intelligence also mediated the relationship between gratitude and these personality traits. This means that these personality traits predicted greater gratitude partially due to higher emotional intelligence. Since personality traits are typically stable, this is an exciting finding as it suggests that EQ is a key player in cultivating gratitude. This makes sense since EQ contributes to establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Szczesniak et al., 2020). These research studies suggest that gratitude is influenced when people can better understand others' emotions, experience empathy, and can self-monitor their own emotions in social situations. Thus, enhancing emotional intelligence can be an effective way of increasing people's accuracy and acknowledgement with respect to gratitude.

Ambivalence Over Expression. Ambivalence over expression (AOE), or emotional ambivalence, might present as being inexpressive, as people may be inhibiting the desire to express feelings, or as expressing emotion but regretting it later (Chen et al., 2012; King, 1998). Those with emotional ambivalence may want to express emotions but are unable to do so (Chen et al., 2012). AOE can be reflected in the following statements (Chen, Wu, et al., 2015): “I find I am not able to tell others how much they really mean to me”; “I’d like to show others how I feel, but something seems to be holding me back”; “I want to express emotions honestly, but I am afraid it may cause embarrassment or hurt”; “I cannot bring myself to express what I’m feeling, it is hard to find the right words to indicate what I am feeling”; and “I would like to be more spontaneous in my emotional reactions but I can’t seem to do it”.

Ambivalent individuals tend to perceive receiving less support from others even when their social network does provide support (Emmons & Colby, 1995). Chen et al. (2012) proposed 2 perspectives that AOE might be understood from. Emotionally ambivalent people might either misinterpret social interactions or display incongruent verbal and nonverbal behaviours. Ambivalence over emotional expression can impact the flow of social interactions. With respect to gratitude, if beneficiaries receive help and fail to be aware of or acknowledge benefactor actions (Chen et al., 2012) this can interrupt the upward spiral proposed in the broaden-and-build theory. Not only might the beneficiary fail to feel gratitude, but the benefactor might be less likely to help in the future or feel the positive effects of gratitude.

Ambivalence has been shown to weaken the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction (Chen, Wu, et al., 2015), as well as disrupt the relationship between gratitude and happiness (Chen et al., 2012). Moreover, gratitude does not predict happiness if one is emotionally ambivalent. Interestingly, ambivalence does not play a role between gratitude and

loneliness or depression, suggesting gratitude can play an integral role in protecting against illbeing. So, while gratitude might not lead to happiness in those who are emotionally ambivalent, being grateful can still reduce feelings of depression or loneliness. These studies highlight the potential complexities of the relationship between gratitude and positive outcomes. Gratitude may not simply result in immediate well-being and there are nuances that must be considered such as ambivalence over expression.

Self-Compassion. Self-compassion entails treating oneself with kindness, bringing awareness to the present moment, and recognizing that humans experience similar suffering (Neff, 2003). It is comprised of three main components including *self-kindness*, *mindfulness*, and *common humanity*. Neff (2003) has proposed self-compassion as a healthier way to conceptualize oneself as opposed to increasing self-esteem. Those with higher self-compassion are more motivated for self-improvement (Breines & Chen, 2012), have increased social connectedness (Neff et al., 2007), and are more likely to express their problems as well as accept others' differing opinions (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). Self-compassionate people are also more likely to compromise in the face of conflict (Yarnell & Neff, 2013). Along with these benefits, self-compassion can also predict gratitude (Yang et al., 2021). It has been suggested self-compassion and gratitude might enhance one another (Homan & Hosack, 2019). Though more research is needed, these research findings suggest the importance of self-compassion for social benefits, as well as its potential importance in relation to gratitude.

Gender. Gender can influence the emergence of gratitude. Gratitude behaviours are more commonly seen in women (Gordon et al., 2004; Kashdan et al., 2009) who display higher levels of gratitude and emotional intelligence compared to men (Pres et al., 2020). Men are more likely to encounter negative reactions when talking about feelings (Emmons & McCullough, 2004).

This could explain why gratitude is one of the least desired emotions in American adult men, as it is perceived as humiliating and feminine (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). Women are socialized to value social contacts and interdependence, while men appreciate material goods and fear interdependence (Pres et al., 2020). Gratitude can place someone in the role of being in need, which is not consistent with gender norms of men who are supposed to be independent and self-sufficient (Bono et al., 2009).

These gender scripts contribute to variation in gratitude expression. Whereas both women and men express gratitude through financial resources, women tend to utilize methods that also invest in sharing time with the benefactor (Pres et al., 2020). For example, men tend to repay with verbal thanks or money, which reduces the chances of further contact and limits further interdependence compared to how women express gratitude. For women, gratitude expressions include offering help in the future or inviting the benefactor to hang out, both of which are adaptive for increased positive social interactions in the future.

Gender is clearly an important factor to consider when examining gratitude processes in the social context. In summary, researchers have typically found women to be more grateful, or at least express it in more overt ways. However, as discussed earlier there are also cultural considerations at play and gender should not be considered alone.

Gratitude in Sport

Sport psychology practitioners and researchers are discovering that the positive psychology field can be valuable in the sport domain (Gabana, 2019). Specifically, gratitude is worth exploring with athletes as it may protect against psychopathology (Petrocchi & Couyoumdjian, 2016). Gabana (2019) also suggested gratitude may be beneficial due to possible mechanisms such as attending toward the good in life, awareness of support networks, enhanced

relationships, increased compassion, and the broaden-and-build effects of positive emotions. The general literature related to gratitude was previously outlined and the following section will look at gratitude as it relates to the sport context.

Individual Benefits

Though less studied in sport contexts, gratitude is useful for athletes. Higher levels of gratitude are related to increased self-esteem (Chen & Wu, 2014), greater sport satisfaction (Chen & Kee, 2008; Gabana, 2019), decreased psychological stress (Gabana, 2019), increased coach-athlete relationships (Ruser et al., 2020), and increased athletic performance (Howells & Fitzallen, 2020). It is also related to increased life satisfaction (Chen, 2013; Chen & Kee, 2008; Gabana, 2019).

In many of these studies, dispositional gratitude was measured; however, sport-domain gratitude also exists. Dispositional gratitude pertains to expressions of gratefulness, appreciation in daily life, and receiving benefits from other people in a general sense. Sport-specific gratitude relates to appreciation for coaches, teammates, and other factors that contribute to sport experiences (Chen & Kee, 2008). Sport-specific gratitude is a better predictor of team satisfaction (Chen & Kee, 2008), suggesting the potential nuances of gratitude in sport.

Burnout entails withdrawal from a formerly enjoyable activity. In sport, it is composed of three main components: a reduced sense of accomplishment, devaluation of the sport experience, and emotional or physical exhaustion (Raedeke & Smith, 2001). Burnout is more prevalent in competitive, high-level athletes, as well as in adolescent athletes who specialize in sport (Giusti et al., 2020; Gould & Whitley, 2009; Gustafsson et al., 2007). Gratitude relates to lower burnout in athletes (Chen & Chang, 2014; Chen & Kee, 2008; Gabana, 2019; Ruser et al., 2020; Yukhymenko-Lescroart et al., 2021). Gabana (2019) specifically found that higher trait gratitude

was related to lower devaluation of sport, suggesting a grateful disposition can preserve an athlete's value for sport. This has important implications for sport retention rates and athletes' experiences of sport. Moreover, in Chen and Kee's (2008) research both trait and sport-domain gratitude predicted lower burnout. However, sport-specific gratitude may be more important as it has been found to be a stronger predictor of athlete burnout compared to general gratitude (Ruser et al., 2020). Interestingly, dispositional gratitude did not predict burnout in a longitudinal study of athletes; however, athletes who reported higher burnout at the start of the study did report less gratitude 3 months later. Although there are mixed findings, research shows gratitude and burnout do influence one another.

Though gratitude is a more novel area in the sport context, these benefits portray the important contribution to athletes' individual experiences. Next, the benefits of gratitude in relation to the team and social environment will be outlined.

Social Benefits

Especially since gratitude has been found to be key for individual sports (e.g., high jumping, triathlon, diving; Howells & Fitzallen, 2020), the implications for team sports (e.g., hockey, volleyball, or soccer) is promising. Interpersonal gratitude rather than self-focused gratitude might heighten relationship satisfaction (O'Connell et al., 2016). Positive experiences and kindness within a team can precipitate gratitude and a team culture of gratitude may be useful for promoting team harmony in sports (Chen & Kee, 2008). Gratitude is related to increased team satisfaction (Chen & Kee, 2008), greater social support (Chen, 2013; Gabana, 2019), and greater team cohesion (Gabana, 2019). Since higher team cohesion is related to athletes' intention to return to their teams (Spink et al., 2015; Spink et al., 2010) and increased

performance (Gioldasis et al., 2016), gratitude might be important for team cohesion or vice versa.

Yukhymenko-Lescroart et al. (2021) have also found that better coach-athlete relationships are related to both general and sport gratitude. They suggested general gratitude might buffer the effects of lower coach-athlete relationships. They also noted the importance of distinguishing sport versus general gratitude, as each may play different roles in athletes' lives. Of important note is that this study did not test for causality and relationships were correlative in nature. The sample also mostly consisted of female athletes; therefore, generalizability is limited. Overall, gratitude is a promising avenue to positively impact athletes by strengthening team bonds which can lead to subsequent positive collective outcomes.

Propensity to Being Grateful

Ambivalence Over Expression. Ambivalence over expression (AOE) in athletes can impede the gratitude process. As a reminder, AOE describes those who are inexpressive due to inhibiting the desire to express feelings or those who are expressive and regret expressing their feelings (King, 1998). Twenty-nine elite student athletes were asked to complete weekly questionnaires measuring state gratitude, AOE, and life satisfaction over 10 weeks. Weekly gratitude positively predicted life satisfaction, but this relationship was weaker when AOE was higher. When thinking of gratitude from an interpersonal perspective, this would make sense since inhibition or regret of showing gratitude would prevent others from experiencing the positive benefits. Hesitation to express emotion might lessen the likelihood of gratitude being transferred.

However, perhaps AOE is not as important for intrapersonal or self-focused gratitude where an emphasis is placed on what is felt on an individual level. With self-focused gratitude,

one does not need to outwardly express gratitude. For example, teammate A may appreciate teammate B (without overt expression) for staying longer after practice for extra one-on-one training. This felt sense of gratitude is still beneficial as this could lead teammate A to return the favour in the future. However, if teammate A is high on AOE, then teammate B may not recognize appreciation in the moment which could subsequently lead to less help in the future and mitigate the chances of gratitude reciprocity. Although AOE can mitigate the chances of gratitude being relayed, it may not totally impede the benefits of gratitude. Ambivalence over expression might only be important for immediacy in situations, or where overt or interpersonal gratitude is expected.

Mindfulness. Chen et al. (2017) conducted a study on 190 college athletes looking at gratitude, life satisfaction, and mindfulness. Life satisfaction and gratitude were positively related to one another. However, this relationship only existed in those who scored high in mindfulness. The researchers theorized that high mindfulness allows athletes to be aware of their gratitude states, subsequently transforming these inner states into deliberate actions via Fredrickson's (2004b) broaden-and-build mechanism to create life satisfaction. Furthermore, they explained mindful awareness enhances the consistency between one's inner orientation and external tendency. Ultimately, this congruence of internal awareness and the intention or behaviour of gratitude translates outwardly with positive effects. It seems then that the integration of gratitude and mindfulness may be an important relationship to reap positive benefits.

Gender. Described earlier in this review, expression of gratitude may be more common for women and difficult for men to express. However, in their study which comprised mostly of males, Chen, Kee, et al. (2015) found that gratitude related to life satisfaction. Moreover, in

another study, higher levels of gratitude in life and sport were examined in male athletes (Yukhymenko-Lescroart et al., 2021). Females athletes have expressed difficulty with expressing gratitude (Howells & Fitzallen, 2020). This is interesting given the previous discussion that there could be a stigma with expressing gratitude in men. It is possible that gratitude can have a profound impact in sports for men when it does occur or that there are different implications of gratitude for sport given the competitive nature.

Social Context or Culture. Athletes have expressed challenges they face when trying to implement gratitude in their lives (Howells & Fitzallen, 2020). Concerns included being part of a competitive sport environment that is not conducive to expressing gratitude, which also related to the idea of being perceived as a ‘suck up’ to those in leadership positions. Other barriers included determining what is appropriate or meaningful to the athlete when expressing gratitude, uncomfortableness of giving or receiving gratitude due to the sport context, and lack of perceived value from others. These speak to the importance of normalizing gratitude and creating a culture where gratitude is valued.

Interpersonal Factors. There are various relational factors that could alter the impact of gratitude. Sources of gratitude include parents, family, coaches, teammates, friends, sponsors, training and education systems, as well as religion (Hsu et al, 2020). Collectively, the studies in this next section highlight the importance of gratitude in relation to the social context and its value in shaping positive outcomes.

Social support seems to be a key element in gratitude for athletes. Social support can be described as informational (guidance or advice), emotional (listening and comforting), esteem (related to athlete competence), or tangible (concrete; Holt & Hoar, 2006). Emotional support is important during a stressful event, while tangible support is more relevant when stress persists

chronically (Jacobson, 1986). By showing gratitude, athletes can evoke different types of support within their social environment; however, it might matter where and when the gratitude is directed. By expressing appreciation for specific types of support, this might increase the likelihood of receiving that support again in the future or encourage the athlete to reciprocate. For example, an athlete expressing gratitude to a teammate for emotional support after a critical mistake in a big competition might receive that same support in the future, after a similar incident or vice versa. This can be explained by a broaden-and-build mechanism where gratitude broadens one's attention to the benefits received from others, thus building more social resources (i.e., support from coaches or teammates; Chen, 2013).

Gratitude and athlete well-being are positively related, but this is partially mediated by perceived coach and teammate support (Chen, 2013). Simply put, gratitude can lead to greater perceptions of coach and teammate support, which in turn contributes to increased well-being. Moreover, there are distinct differences in coach versus teammate support as they relate to gratitude. While athletes perceive more self-esteem support, emotional support, and informational support from teammates, they perceive more tangible support from coaches. Similarly, Gabana et al. (2017) found that gratitude predicted lower burnout, but this was mediated through perceived social support. Finally, high gratitude is related to increased self-esteem, but only when there is high trust in one's coach (Chen & Wu, 2014).

Team cohesion has also been found to mediate the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction (Chen, Kee, et al., 2015). This means that gratitude can improve perceived team cohesion thus leading to increased life satisfaction. What is noteworthy about this study was that it consisted of mostly athletes in individual sports (i.e., track and field, swimming, judo, tennis). If higher gratitude can have an impact in sports where athletes typically compete for themselves,

there could be even greater benefits for team sports where success depends on athlete interdependence. It is also worth mentioning the sample was taken from an Asian population where cultural influence could account for the higher gratitude. Nonetheless, Chen, Kee, et al. (2015) suggested these findings provide an exciting avenue for sport populations as enhanced gratitude can lead to increased team cohesion and overall well-being.

Gratitude Interventions

Gratitude can be learned, incorporated, and implemented in people's daily lives. The final sections of this chapter will focus on literature related to interventions, both in general and for sport specifically. Potential skills that can be used to cultivate gratitude will also be discussed. These next sections will serve as a foundation for the next chapter which will propose a gratitude workshop that can be beneficial for athletes.

General Benefits

Gratitude interventions can help those who are less neurotic (Ng, 2016), more self-critical (Sergeant & Mongrain, 2011), and those with lower positive affect (Froh et al., 2009). Implementation of a gratitude exercise can also increase feeling better about life in general, feeling more connected to others, and concurrently increase positive affect while decreasing negative affect (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). In research studies conducted by Witvliet et al. (2019), they concluded that gratitude could predict hope and happiness by being prompted to write about a past hope (i.e., gratefully remembering condition). Thus, not only can gratitude enhance feelings in the present moment, but it can also lead to future hope.

Chen et al. (2012) suggested that gratitude interventions are more likely to prevent illbeing rather than promote wellbeing; however, Emmons and Stern (2013) have found gratitude interventions can enhance mental health as well as reduce mental illness (Emmons & Stern,

2013). Perhaps this discrepancy depends on how gratitude interventions are applied, whom the target population is, and what specific exercises make up a gratitude intervention. For example, while many gratitude interventions have predominantly aimed at helping people recollect events from the past to induce gratitude (Emmons & Stern, 2013), other interventions might also seek to reframe current problems or shift toward the positive (Lambert et al., 2009) which does not necessarily have to be focused on the past.

Sport Benefits

Gratitude interventions have also been successful for athletes. Hsu et al. (2020) suggested situations that prompt gratitude might include comparison to others (i.e., helpful versus past unhelpful coaches), transition to new roles that give a new perspective (i.e., from player to coach), and facing a low point in one's career.

Introduction of gratitude interventions that emphasize interpersonal gratitude may strengthen social bonds and have positive implications for athletes in both individual and team contexts (Gabana 2019; Yukhymenko-Lescroart et al., 2021). Gratitude interventions may be advantageous for providing athletes with skills and strategies to increase their sport experience, mental health, and mental well-being (Gabana et al., 2019; Hsu et al., 2020). Feelings of gratitude in athletes can also lead to a pay-it-forward mentality and positive rumination on pleasant experiences (Hsu et al., 2020). Implementing a one-time gratitude workshop for athletes can lead to increased well-being, decreased ill-being, increased awareness of contribution of others (e.g., coaches), better capacity to deal with stress, improved attitude, increased confidence and frequency with expressing gratitude, increased resilience, as well as improved performance (Gabana et al., 2019; Howells & Fitzallen, 2020). These outcomes can persist at least 4-6 weeks post-intervention based on these studies. After a gratitude workshop, athletes show higher levels

of state gratitude, perceived social support, and sport satisfaction as well as lower burnout and psychological distress (Gabana et al., 2019). However, sport satisfaction and perceived social support may not last over time. Perhaps this is due to the nature of a one-time workshop and suggests the importance of repeated gratitude practice to maintain gains. This would align with Fehr's (2017) model of gratitude that outlined the importance of persistent gratitude for long-term effects of collective gratitude.

Keeping the above studies in mind, whereas one workshop encouraged athletes to open-endedly reflect on things they were grateful for (Gabana et al., 2019), another prompted retroactive reflection in sport specifically (Howells & Fitzallen, 2020). With open-ended reflection, it is unclear if gratitude was general versus sport-focused which researchers have shown can make a difference in outcomes. Yukhymenko-Lescroart et al. (2021) advised gratitude interventions should specifically target sport-domain gratitude when exploring certain outcomes.

Whereas much gratitude research has placed emphasis on present-moment gratitude, using intentional reflection to acknowledge past events can also lead to grateful feelings. Athletes have been shown to experience gratitude years later upon reflection of a past event (Hsu et al., 2020). Gratitude can be used as a positive resource virtually at any time, suggesting athletes should not only pay attention to gratitude that arises in the moment, but also recognize past events that can contribute to feeling grateful.

Caution should be noted as samples consisted of mostly Caucasian people throughout the research in this section, and this may not be generalizable. Nonetheless, gratitude can be a powerful tool for evoking positive feelings, improving well-being, and optimizing interpersonal dynamics. These studies portray the utility of gratitude as well as unique factors to consider when examining the role of gratitude in athletes' lives.

Cultivating Gratitude

There are various methods to induce gratitude which have been utilized in many of the above gratitude interventions. This section will summarize gratitude activities and skills that can be used to cultivate gratitude.

Gratitude Exercises

Gratitude exercises might look like listing things one is grateful for (i.e., counting blessings), writing a gratitude letter, arranging a gratitude visit, or keeping a gratitude journal (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Gabana 2019; Gregersen et al., 2014; Young & Hutchinson, 2012). When creating a list of things, one is grateful for, feelings can be further enhanced by encouraging deeper reflection and describing in detail. This could include identifying the cause of those things (Seligman et al., 2005). Gratitude letters entail writing and delivering a letter to someone who was never properly thanked which can also be replaced with a gratitude visit (Seligman et al., 2005). Finally, a gratitude journal can be kept daily or weekly (Young and Hutchinson, 2012). Gratitude journals can embody some or all of the above methods. Of interesting note is also Naikan, which originates from Japanese culture. Naikan involves ‘looking inside’ and is a form of self-reflection (Young and Hutchinson, 2012). It embodies ideas of gratitude and helps people recognize the interconnectedness of life. Questions one can use to practice Naikan include the following: “what have I received from people today?”, “what have I given others?”, and “what troubles and difficulty have I caused to others?”.

Embodying Gratitude

This section will look at specific techniques that may help embody and cultivate gratitude including elevation, benefit finding, mindfulness, savouring, and contrasting. The purpose of outlining these offers ways in which gratitude can be enhanced in one’s life.

Elevation. The feeling of elevation results from witnessing people perform a good deed and involves a warm feeling as well as the desire to be morally better (Haidt, 2013; Schnall et al., 2010). Elevation can inspire others to be altruistic (Schnall et al., 2010). It is possible gratitude can result from or produces feelings of elevation. Speaking from the perspective of broaden-and-build theory, when one feels or expresses gratitude, the experience of elevation can broaden thought-action tendencies (Fredrickson 2004a). Moreover, by feeling gratitude people consider a wide range of options to repay or pass on the grateful act. This may be due to feeling elevated from positive emotions. Simply said, acts of gratitude can inspire others to feel good and pass on the favour, thus causing a potential chain reaction of further similar feelings.

Benefit Finding. Benefit finding entails seeing the positive effects in the face of adversity, such as through illness or trauma. It has been noted that those who experience more traumatic events tend to report finding more benefits (Cordova et al., 2001). Benefit-finding can increase closeness to others, lower depression, and enhance well-being (Helgeson et al., 2006; Young & Hutchinson, 2012). Finding the benefits in difficult situations can also be a useful coping strategy for personal growth, give clarity about the future, as well as lessen fear, anxiety, and stress (August & Dapkewicz, 2021). It is important to note that benefit finding can be associated with negative consequences depending on one's quality of life and their given circumstances (Tomich & Helgeson, 2004). Thus, the timing of benefit-finding may be something to consider as it may not always be appropriate. Benefit appraisal teaches people to think gratefully as they focus on the gifts that are given to them (Allen, 2018) and can be one way to embody and cultivate gratitude.

Benefit finding is similar to positive reframing. Gratitude has been shown to decrease depressive symptoms through positive reframing (Lambert et al., 2012). Positive reframing is

similar to cognitive reappraisal which involves changing the meaning of an event (i.e., altering negative thoughts into positive ones) to alter an emotional experience (Gross & John, 2003). Gabana (2019) also explained positive cognitive reframing as an attentional shift toward good things. She explained that this can enhance interpersonal relationships, social connectedness, increase compassion, and broaden-and-build positive emotions. To support this, research has found that beneficiaries can turn negative emotions into grateful emotions for a benefactor by positively reframing the situation (Lambert et al., 2009). When difficult situations come up, a grateful reappraisal of a negative event might help individuals cope better by mitigating negative emotions (Watkins et al., 2008; Young & Hutchinson, 2012).

Mindfulness. Integrating mindfulness can enhance the effects of gratitude by bringing awareness to gratitude states (Chen et al., 2017). Mindfulness might be a key skill related to the cultivation of gratitude. It can be described as the ability to be intentionally in the present moment with non-judgment, openness, and curiosity (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). With gratitude, perhaps mindfulness is a precursor that allows individuals to attend to the positive things happening in life with intention. Mindfulness allows people to make deliberate choices about emotions and thoughts; therefore, they may focus on optimal experiences for themselves which may include gratitude (Swickert et al., 2019).

There is ample support that mindfulness can be a key skill for optimizing gratitude. Mindfulness can lead people to feel positive affect which can prompt more gratitude and subsequently lead to helping behaviours (Sawyer et al., 2022). In their research, Swicker et al. (2019) also showed mindfulness can increase gratitude which can then lead to positive moods (i.e., gratitude was a mediator). Similarly, gratitude was found to be an important mediator between mindfulness and important well-being dimensions such as purpose in life, personal

growth, self-acceptance, and positive relations with others (Voci et al., 2019). What is even more promising is that this finding was coherent across a meditating versus non-meditating group (i.e., more versus less experience with mindfulness), suggesting that even those with less formal mindfulness experience can still benefit from gratitude and its positive outcomes. Furthermore, the sample population represented people from all walks of life such as office workers, teachers, students, and retail workers suggesting the generalizability of mindfulness as a skill.

Savouring. Researchers have proposed the idea of savouring, reminiscing, or positive rumination which will be described as savouring for the purpose of this paper. Typically, rumination is thought of in terms of dwelling on negative experiences. Rumination can magnify and prolong negative mood states (Watkins & Roberts, 2020), as well as contribute to depression (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). However, rumination can be positive (Kross et al., 2005). Positive rumination is the tendency to respond to positive states with recurring thoughts of positive self-qualities and emotions (Gilbert et al., 2013). It can also be explained as consciously thinking about positive emotions after they occur (i.e., reminiscing or basking; Martin & Tesser, 1996). This is similar to savouring which entails extracting as much appreciation one can from the good things in life (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Savouring entails being aware that a pleasant experience is occurring and making a deliberate attempt to make it last as long as possible (Gregersen et al., 2014). It is being totally immersed in the pleasure of that moment, blocking out everything else (Allen, 2018).

Earlier, the idea of emotion schemas was explored. Fehr et al. (2017) hypothesized that savouring at the individual level can facilitate a gratitude-based emotion schema which in turn can increase the chances of experiencing and noticing gratitude on a relational level. Eventually this can create a collective culture of gratitude. Research has suggested that savouring can lead to

higher self-esteem and lower depression (Feldman et al., 2008). It can also be a protective factor against depressive symptoms (Ford et al., 2017). When individuals fail to savour this may lead to persistent negative moods (Rottenberg et al., 2002). The tendency to savour positive emotions can increase the likelihood of feeling those emotions later (Quoidbach et al., 2010). A plausible reason for this can be explained through studies conducted by Biskas et al. (2019). Their research found that savouring experiences in the present moment predicted later nostalgia of that event, where nostalgia refers to emotional reflection of past experiences. Furthermore, being in a setting that prompted thoughts of that savoured moment was related to greater nostalgia, and nostalgia was related to increased optimism. It appears savouring can be key for adopting gratitude in both present and past experiences. Finally, Samios et al. (2020) suggested savouring might be utilized as a coping response following stressful life events. Perhaps savouring enhances gratitude and helps to cope with stress.

Contrasting. Finally, gratitude might be induced via contrasting. Frijda (2017) explained the law of habituation as the tendency for people to become accustomed to their situations which is like the idea of hedonic adaptation which was discussed earlier in this review. This can increase the likelihood of experiencing emotions less intensely when receiving benefits. For example, a youth athlete might get a ride from their parents to practices and competitions regularly. The athlete might fail to realize how important and helpful this is to them until they are forced to take a bus or ask for a ride from a teammate. Due to habituation, they forget how grateful they are. Contrasting can rejuvenate these feelings. Moreover, Koo et al. (2008) proposed the idea of mental subtraction, which is imagining what a situation would be like if the positive event had not occurred.

Emmons and Stern (2013) noted that contrasting sets the stage for experiences of gratitude. They explained that contrasting the present with negative experiences from the past can increase happiness and well-being. The idea is that losing aspects in one's life can lead to an appreciation for and increased value of other aspects in life. For example, an athlete winning a championship game might enhance victorious feelings by contrasting their win with the heartbreaking loss in the previous season's championship game. Likewise, a coach who recruits a new star player might appreciate it more when reflecting on the loss of an athlete earlier that season to a career-ending injury. Contrasting allows people to increase awareness of how fortunate they are and recognize what could have been otherwise (Fehr et al., 2017).

Fehr et al. (2017) proposed a similar idea known as attentiveness to alternative outcomes. To help recognize the benefits of a situation, people can also consider other outcomes. Attentiveness to alternative outcomes might entail reflecting on past similar experiences that did not go well. Feelings of gratitude can be heightened by reflecting on past challenges (Fehr et al., 2017). After making the national team, a soccer player might reflect on past years where they were constantly deselected (i.e., cut from the team) to further bask in their new achievement. When implementing the contrasting technique, it is important to remember that certain situations can make alternative outcomes more salient. For example, a player who desperately wants to join a basketball team might feel more grateful when they make the team, if there is only one team to try out for in the community versus someone who has many other options. Similarly, scoring the game-winning goal in a 1-0 championship game likely feels different than scoring the third goal in a 3-0 championship game. The alternative to the former is that the game may have ended in a tie which would have gone to overtime, whereas the alternative in the latter would have still resulted in a win.

Summary

The above literature review offered a thorough description of gratitude research. Though there has yet to be a formally accepted definition of gratitude, there is consensus that it is marked by a sense of appreciation for someone or something that benefits the self. A key component of gratitude is awareness that this benefit originates from a specific source. Thus, gratitude can emerge as interpersonal, intrapersonal, or transpersonal. Various theoretical bases were described that offered explanations for how and why gratitude works, including hedonic adaptation, broaden-and-build theory, as well as social exchange theory. There are a host of benefits related to gratitude, both on an individual and social level. It can protect against ill-being, promote positive well-being, as well as enhance social relationships. The propensity for one to be grateful is influenced by various factors including the social context, culture, norms, and leadership. An individual's self-esteem, emotional intelligence, personality traits, and gender can also influence gratitude. Finally, gratitude interventions have proven successful at increasing gratitude and producing positive outcomes. This highlights the possibility that gratitude can be improved and induced to increase well-being.

Within sport specifically, gratitude has been less studied in comparison to other contexts. Nonetheless, gratitude can have important implications for athlete burnout, team cohesion, social support, sport satisfaction, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and athletic performance. Athletes face unique factors when considering how gratitude emerges and difficulties with expressing it, as they are immersed in a competitive atmosphere that can make it difficult to practice. Researchers have also highlighted the importance of distinguishing sport-specific versus general gratitude depending on intended outcomes. This literature review provided a foundation for the next chapter which will propose a gratitude-based workshop to enhance athlete well-being.

Chapter Three: Building Resilience Workshop

Before diving into the proposition of a gratitude-based workshop for athletes, the beginning sections of this chapter will offer a rationale for such a workshop. Resilience will be discussed as a concept that can mitigate the negative effects of stressors to prevent mental health decline. Self-compassion and gratitude will then be introduced as concepts related to resilience, including the benefits of each in sport. An exploration of why the two are complementary to one another in the development of resilience will then be discussed. Workshop considerations for optimal implementation, as well as workshop content will then be provided.

Resilience

Psychological resilience can be utilized in response to various types of adversity ranging from ongoing daily stressors to major life events (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). It is key for combatting negative experiences and setbacks in sport (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). Resilience can be defined as “the role of mental processes and behaviour in promoting personal assets and protecting an individual from the potential negative effect of stressors” (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012, p. 675). In their review of psychological resilience, Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) concluded that it is a dynamic process which can evolve over time. It also influences the stress process mainly one’s appraisal of stressors, meta-cognitions in response to emotions, and selection of coping strategies (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013) all of which are important for effectively managing stress.

Self-Compassion and Gratitude in Relation to Resilience

Resilience often consists of other psychosocial constructs that promote strengths and protect against negative effects of stress (Fletcher & Sarker, 2013). Perhaps self-compassion and gratitude are included amongst these. According to researchers, self-compassion and gratitude are key for resilience. For example, self-criticism is a major risk factor for depression and

increased self-compassion is a key resilience factor in protecting against depression (Ehret et al., 2015). Other researchers have found self-compassion development can increase resilience and that the two are positively correlated (Bluth et al., 2018). Furthermore, self-compassion is an important resource for developing mental toughness in athletes and dealing with sport-related adversity (Wilson et al., 2019). In terms of gratitude, it has been shown to predict resilience, which can in turn lead to greater well-being (Kong et al., 2021; Shabrina et al., 2022). The current capstone project proposes that self-compassion and gratitude are key constructs for resilience based on these research studies. The next section will give a summary of self-compassion and gratitude in sport to understand their relevance for athletes.

Based on the research in sport contexts, self-compassion is beneficial for coping with injury (Huysmans & Clement, 2017), athlete well-being (Jeon et al., 2016), and authentic versus hubristic pride. Authentic pride is rooted in success, confidence, and accomplishment rather than contingency on outcomes (Mosewich et al., 2011). Self-compassion is also related to less fear of failure, social anxiety, and negative emotions (Jeon et al., 2016; Mosewich et al., 2011; Reis et al., 2015). Self-compassionate athletes are more positive, perseverant, and are more responsible for their own actions when reacting to mistakes, falling short of personal goals, and poor performance (Ferguson et al., 2015). As suggested by Johnson (2020), self-compassion in athletes might allow access to a healthier version of mental toughness rooted in acceptance and taking wise actions, rather than a mental toughness characterized by poor decisions and pushing in unhealthy ways.

Gratitude was discussed at length in the previous literature review of this paper. To summarize, gratitude in sport is related to increased self-esteem, sport satisfaction, athletic performance, life satisfaction, appreciation for coaches and teammates, as well as team cohesion

and harmony (Chen, 2013; Chen & Wu, 2014; Gabana, 2019; Howells & Fitzallen, 2020; Ruser et al., 2020) Grateful athletes tend to also experience less burnout and psychological distress (Chen & Chang, 2014; Gabana, 2019). This research offers ample evidence for self-compassion and gratitude's relevance to resilience in athletes. Clearly, both can have a positive impact for athlete development.

Research has shown important relationships between self-compassion and gratitude that have implications for resilience development. Self-compassion can predict happiness, but only in those who are grateful (i.e., gratitude is a moderator; Latipun, 2019). Gratitude can amplify self-awareness of one's personal strengths, and can predict self-compassion (Homan & Hosack, 2019). An increased self-awareness along with a compassionate attitude toward the self allows people to accept their flaws and strengths (Homan & Hosack, 2019). Moreover, self-compassion can also predict gratitude (Yang et al., 2021). Especially since low self-esteem predicts lower gratitude (Emmons, 2007; Lin, 2015), and self-compassion has been proposed as an antidote for low self-esteem (Neff, 2003), self-compassion and gratitude seem to complement one another. Collectively, these studies suggest self-compassion and gratitude can enhance each other's effect. Concurrent development of both is a promising avenue for fostering resilience.

Purcell et al. (2019) outlined some of the main risk factors for athlete psychological distress as overtraining, low social support, coach relationship, and negative life events. Resilience is key for tackling these, among other athlete stressors, and this might include development of self-compassion and gratitude. There is an abundance of research supporting the use of both self-compassion and gratitude as key areas to develop for positive athlete outcomes. Therefore, the following workshop will be proposed as a way to increase athlete resilience fostered through development of self-compassion and gratitude. From this perspective, a

preventative approach is emphasized to reduce the decline of athlete mental health. The purpose of the workshop will be two-fold. By increasing resilience, mental health risk factors and poor athlete-well being might be reduced, while potentially indirectly also improving performance outcomes.

Workshop Considerations

Target Population

The target population for this workshop will be athletes ranging from youth to elite levels, as both gratitude and self-compassion can be beneficial for various populations. Both self-compassion and gratitude interventions are effective for youth (Bluth et al., 2016; Froh & Bono, 2011). Moreover, both have been introduced to university and elite-level athletes leading to positive results (Howell & Fitzallen, 2020; Hsu et al., 2020; Ingstrup et al., 2017; Mosewich et al., 2013). Thus, self-compassion and gratitude can be effective across populations. However, it is important to note that competitive athletes will be the focus, as many of the athlete stressors discussed are more prominent in competitive sport environments.

Gender Norms and Social Context

To attain the most success and buy-in from athletes, the delivery, design, and content of the workshop should aim to cater to this population. This includes understanding their world, as well as using language that is appropriate to them. This workshop will keep in mind gender norms and the sport culture that competitive athletes are immersed in.

Self-compassion, as well as gratitude, are typically exhibited and seen more in women (Gordon et al., 2004; Kashdan et al., 2009; Pres et al., 2020; Salazar, 2015; Yarnell et al., 2015). These practices are more easily adopted by women since they are socialized and expected to fulfill a role that is of a caring, soft nature (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983). In contrast, men are

prone to negative reactions when expressing these kinds of feelings, so these traits are less desired and viewed as more feminine by men (Emmons & McCullough, 2004).

For competitive athletes, barriers to practicing self-compassion include fear of being too easy on the self, losing elite athlete status, being perceived as ‘soft’, and fear that it can lead to mediocrity (Sutherland et al., 2014; Ferguson et al., 2014; Reis et al., 2019). Similarly, expressing gratitude is difficult for athletes as it is not conducive to a competitive environment. Athletes have expressed barriers to practicing gratitude including being a ‘suck up’, uncomfortableness practicing gratitude in sport environments, and lack of perceived value (Howells & Fitzallen, 2020). This includes female athletes, which is interesting given the general literature supporting increased gratitude expression in women. Male athletes have also attributed their emotionally difficult experiences to toxic masculinity which can be portrayed by the need to always perform at high levels despite difficulties, playing through injury, and ‘manning up’ (Reis et al., 2019). Keeping these barriers in mind, it is important to consider how self-compassion and gratitude can be presented in a way that can be useful for athletes.

Reframing Self-Compassion and Gratitude

Self-compassion and gratitude are particularly difficult to express for men, as well as in athletic environments. However, there is sufficient evidence that they also lead to favourable outcomes for athletes, both in men and women. Thus, it is important to introduce self-compassion and gratitude in ways that will be received well by athletes. Some male athletes have described self-compassion as representing ‘healthy’ masculinity because it portrays a mental strength that goes against masculinity-rooted pressures which can cause harm (Reis et al., 2019). Men in this study shared that lack of education on self-compassion led to negative views. This

emphasizes the importance of proper training on how to develop self-compassion as well as the benefits of it for dealing with adversity in sport. The same may be true of gratitude.

As the research suggests, informative psychoeducation is a key first step. Athletes are aware of the usefulness of self-compassion for persevering through difficulties and growing from experiences (Ferguson et al., 2014), as well as the utility of gratitude for shaping positive outcomes in sport (Howells & Fitzallen, 2020). This workshop will include a psychoeducation component that highlights the benefits for athletes to help them adopt both self-compassion and gratitude. As outlined by Geraghty et al. (2010a), when people have a higher expectation that an intervention will work they are more likely to complete it, highlighting the importance of psychoeducation.

Moreover, as self-compassion and gratitude might be viewed as ‘soft’ characteristics, language will be used interchangeably throughout that is best suited to athlete culture. This will aim to accommodate the ‘mentally tough athlete’ narrative that looms in the competitive environment. For the purpose of initial psychoeducation, proper terminology will be used; however, interchangeable, relatable phrasing will also be introduced to aid with athlete buy-in.

Rather than referring to it as a ‘self-compassion and gratitude’ workshop, it will be reframed as a ‘resilience’ workshop that teaches athletes to battle difficult experiences (i.e., self-compassion) and appreciate or find the positive (i.e., gratitude). Self-compassion entails *self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity* which will be referred to as ‘*helpful talk*’, ‘*moment-to-moment awareness*’, and ‘*coming together*’, respectively. This kind of language moves away from the feminine, softer perspective and utilizes phrases that might be more useful for athletes. Neff and Germer (2018) also suggested introducing self-compassion from a ‘yin’ and ‘yang’ perspective that combines both a feminine and masculine side.

Other Key Factors for Implementation

Many interventions in the literature have been delivered as one-time interventions that provided great results, but in some cases, gains dissipated over time. This suggests the importance of repetition. Therefore, this workshop will be delivered as a 6-part series preferably beginning before the start of an athletic season (See **Appendix A** and **Appendix B** for session outlines). The first session will be approximately 90-minutes and comprise of an introduction to self-compassion and gratitude, including their benefits in sport. In this introductory session, athletes will be prompted to reflect on past experiences and will start to understand how to cultivate both self-compassion and gratitude. Subsequent booster sessions will follow, where sessions will alternate between beginning with cultivating self-compassion versus gratitude. For example, the first booster session will begin with gratitude then self-compassion, whereas the following booster session will begin with self-compassion then gratitude. Having a 6-part series aligns with the multidimensional model of gratitude which emphasizes the importance of repetitive gratitude (Fehr et al., 2017). This is believed to contribute to persistent gratitude practiced regularly which can then result in a collective culture of gratitude.

Research has shown that when people have more agency, they are more likely to follow through with intervention recommendations (Geraghty et al., 2010b). The present workshop will ensure different options are provided when presenting self-compassion and gratitude exercises for the athletes. By offering choices, this will allow them to choose preferred exercises and give them the autonomy to make their own decisions for their goals. In addition, the workshop will include interactive aspects such as reflection and experiential exercises to keep athletes engaged.

Workshop Content

The following sections will outline the content making up this “Building Resilience” workshop. What is unique about this workshop is that typically self-compassion interventions have been utilized with female athletes; however, this workshop will target both male and female athletes. Gratitude interventions within the sport context have also predominantly focused on enhancement of well-being. While this will certainly be one objective of the workshop, utilizing gratitude in the context of a difficult experience (i.e., concurrently with self-compassion) introduces gratitude from a coping perspective.

Building Resilience Introductory Session

According to Layous and Lyubomirsky (2014), participants are more likely to benefit from gratitude interventions when the basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence are met. Basically, people want to feel connected to others, feel skilled in what is being done, and in control of their decisions. Thus, the first session will aim to target these needs starting by asking the athletes ‘what do you want to get out of this workshop?’ and ‘what are your reasons for this?’. This will help athletes find internal motivation and make them feel like their goals matter in the context of the workshop. Before jumping into the workshop, they will also be asked what traits or qualities make a successful athlete. The hope will be that they outline concepts related to either self-compassion or gratitude. This will be highlighted to make them aware that they already know what it takes to be successful and that this workshop will help them practice and hone these skills. In contrast, if nothing related to self-compassion or gratitude is raised then this will be a good opportunity to introduce something new for the athletes to learn. This preamble portion will take about 5-10 minutes and will facilitate initial discussion between

athletes, as well as the presenter. It will conclude with the overall purpose of this workshop and its use for athletes. An outline of the introductory session outline can be found in **Appendix A**.

Self-Compassion. Before psychoeducation on self-compassion, athletes will be invited to participate in a two-part reflection on a difficult experience they have had in the past pertaining to their sport experiences. In part one, they will be prompted to think about what they were feeling and thinking at that time. This will help athletes recall a difficult experience in which they can reference when learning about self-compassion concepts. Discussion will be encouraged for athletes who wish to share their experience with the others. Part two will ask athletes to reflect on what compassion means to them and what comes to mind when thinking of this concept. This will prompt them to think about how they could have used compassion in their difficult experience. The reflective experience aims to help athletes draw on personal experiences that they can relate to as they learn about self-compassion in the rest of the workshop. Including sharing and partaking in the exercise, about 10 minutes should be allotted for this part of the workshop.

After reflection, psychoeducation of self-compassion will take place. This will include a definition of what self-compassion is, its main tenets, the benefits, as well as potential barriers to practicing self-compassion. Throughout psychoeducation, athletes will be reminded to apply the experience they reflected on to the content being introduced. This will help to solidify knowledge and relate to self-compassion. This section will take 5-10 minutes.

Finally, after athletes have learned about self-compassion, the next part of the workshop will entail practical exercises and tools to cultivate self-compassion, some of which are borrowed from Neff (n.d.). Athletes will be presented with a brief description of various options to practice or explore self-compassion. These will include a self-compassion mantra, ‘what would you say

to a good friend' exercise, and a self-compassionate letter to the self. Keeping the three main tenets (i.e., self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity) in mind, athletes will be taught how to develop a short 3-statement mantra. This will give athletes a pocket tool to utilize in times when they need to be reminded of or require self-compassion. Often, self-criticism can be prevalent when it comes to evaluating oneself, yet it is easier to be compassionate to others. One way to help athletes embody self-compassion can be prompted by asking athletes to imagine what they would say to a good friend. The last option will invite athletes to write a self-compassionate letter to themselves regarding a previous difficult experience they have had. Five minutes will be required to introduce and explain the options, while 10 minutes will be set aside to engage in the athlete's chosen exercise. Upon completion, there will be time provided for athletes to break into small groups to share their experience engaging in a self-compassion exercise. Concluding the self-compassion part of the workshop, 5 minutes will be provided to debrief, share, and discuss the athletes' participation and inquiries thus far. A 10-minute break will follow before engaging in the gratitude portion of the workshop.

Gratitude. Now that the athletes have reflected on a past hardship and learned about self-compassion, gratitude will be introduced. Athletes will again first engage in a 2-part reflection. Part one will ask the athletes to think back on a positive experience they have had in sport. They will be encouraged to think about the specific details of the experiences, including thoughts and feelings they can remember. If anyone would like to share, they will be offered an opportunity to do so. In the second part of the reflection, athletes will be asked to think of the word 'gratitude' and what comes to mind when doing so. What does gratitude mean to them, how do they like to show it or receive it, and how can they apply it to the experience they have just reflected on? The

reflection exercise should take about 10 minutes maximum including reflection time and sharing experiences.

The reflection period will serve to help athletes think of the relevance of gratitude in their lives and make the content relatable. Upon reflection, psychoeducation on gratitude will be provided. This will include what gratitude is, the different types (i.e., intrapersonal, interpersonal, transpersonal, general versus sport), its benefits, and potential barriers to practicing gratitude. Psychoeducation should take about 5-10 minutes.

The final formal portion of the workshop will teach athletes how to cultivate gratitude. Hopefully with an increased knowledge following psychoeducation, they will be asked to reflect on what they are grateful for. Prompts will include inquiring about general versus sport gratitude, as well as recognition of a source or benefactor. Ways to enhance gratitude will be explained to the athletes (i.e., increased frequency, regular practice, benefit finding, savouring, contrasting). After this basic introduction of cultivating gratitude, the athletes will then be asked to recall the difficult experience they reflected on in the self-compassion part of the workshop. They will use this to generate a gratitude list, including detailed responses on why they are grateful and where this source of gratitude comes from. Alternatively, they can choose to write a gratitude letter addressed to whom or whatever they would like. During the exercises, athletes will be encouraged to hone in and really feel the sense of gratitude, as Gordon et al. (2011) suggested felt versus expressed gratitude can be important for positive interpersonal relations. This section should take about 15 minutes in total.

Debriefing. This concludes the introductory workshop of the “Building Resilience” 6-part series. At the end of this first session, a summary of what has been discussed and learned will be provided. Athletes will be given the chance to share overall thoughts, experiences of the

workshop, and perhaps what they would like to see more of in the upcoming booster sessions. Feedback will be taken into consideration to shape sessions that suit the athletes' needs. Finally, athletes will be encouraged to apply what they have learned with respect to self-compassion and gratitude and incorporate it regularly to their athletic routines.

Building Resilience Booster Sessions

Subsequent booster sessions for the “Building Resilience” workshop will take place biweekly after the introductory session. These sessions will serve to encourage continuation of and maintain gains regarding the self-compassion and gratitude learnings from the introductory session. Booster sessions will start out by asking the athletes to recall and share what they remembered from the previous session. There will also be an opportunity provided for athletes to share how self-compassion and gratitude learnings have been applied to their lives including what has or has not worked. Athletes may borrow ideas from one another after hearing what others have gone through. This will also be a good opportunity to highlight the commonalities of barriers as well as positive impact through practicing both self-compassion and gratitude. This should take 5-10 minutes.

Booster sessions will mimic the structure of the introductory session. This format will include the two-part reflection, brief psychoeducation, and a cultivation exercise. Whereas the first booster session will begin with gratitude followed by self-compassion the next booster session will begin with self-compassion then gratitude. This alternation will continue for subsequent booster sessions. This will offer variety and change the order of session delivery, as introducing one concept may impact how the second concept is learned or experienced. Especially for gratitude, depending on the timing of when it is utilized, this may evoke an *upward spiral* or *undoing effect* as proposed by broaden-and-build theory. Total time for both

booster sessions should be approximately 60-75 minutes each, including break times. The outline for booster sessions can be found in **Appendix B**.

Summary

Resilience has an integral role in combatting stressors and mitigating negative outcomes for competitive athletes. Research supports self-compassion and gratitude as both valuable and positive factors impacting athletes. The current workshop proposes self-compassion and gratitude as key constructs that contribute to resilience development in this population. Although there is sufficient research supporting the advantages for athletes, there are also barriers that impede adoption of self-compassion and gratitude. Keeping gender and sport norms in mind, the workshop has been structured to accommodate and best serve competitive athletes to increase receptivity of these concepts. A 6-part interactive series aimed to invoke self-reflection, deliver psychoeducation, and teach cultivation of self-compassion and gratitude is presented. Overall, the intent of this workshop is aimed at increasing resilience via self-compassion and gratitude to improve athlete well-being and prevent mental health decline.

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Appendix A Building Resilience Introductory Session Outline

Preamble (5-10 minutes)

- What do you want to get out of this workshop?
- What are your goals as an athlete? Why?
- What traits or qualities make a successful athlete?
 - o *Relate concepts to self-compassion or gratitude if possible*
 - o *If not, introduce opportunity for athletes to learn something new*

Self-Compassion

- Reflection part 1 (5 minutes)
 - o Can you think of when you have gone through a really difficult time? Dig deep and reflect when you may have felt in a rut. It can range from simple to complex, and be emotional or physical. What were you thinking or feeling? What was your behaviour like?
- Reflection part 2 (5 minutes)
 - o What does compassion mean to you? What comes to mind when you hear this? How could compassion have been used to help your situation?
- Psychoeducation (5-10 minutes)
 - o What is self-compassion
 - o Benefits of self-compassion
 - o Barriers
- Cultivating self-compassion (15 minutes)
 - o Self-compassion mantra with three components *helpful talk, moment-to-moment awareness, and coming together* (i.e., self-kindness, mindfulness, common humanity)
 - o What would you say to a good friend exercise
 - o Self-compassionate letter to self in a previous difficult experience
- Breakout into small groups to share (5 minutes)
- Group debrief (5 minutes)

10-minute break

Gratitude

- Reflection part 1 (5 minutes)
 - o Think of a positive time / experience you've had in your life regarding sport
 - o What was so great about that experience?
 - o What thoughts or feelings come up when you think of it?
- Reflection part 2 (5 minutes)
 - o When you think of the word gratitude, what comes to mind?
 - o What does gratitude mean to you?
 - o How do you like to show gratitude?
 - o How can you apply this to the experience you just reflected on?
- Psychoeducation (5-10 minutes)
 - o What is gratitude?

- Benefits of gratitude
- Barriers
- Cultivating gratitude (15 minutes)
 - What are you grateful for?
 - Where did that come from?
 - Recognition of a benefit / source /benefactor is key
 - Interpersonal? Intrapersonal? General vs sport?
 - Benefit finding, savouring, contrasting
 - Gratitude list with description
 - Gratitude letter to something or someone

Summary and group debrief (5-10 minutes)

Appendix B Building Resilience Booster Session Outline

Booster Sessions 1, 3, and 5

Group reflection (5-10 minutes)

- Reflect on previous session
- Group sharing re: self-compassion and gratitude learnings
 - o What has worked? What hasn't worked?
 - o Provide opportunity for athletes to borrow ideas / share common barriers or positive experiences

Gratitude

- Reflection part 1 (2.5 minutes)
 - o Think of a positive time / experience you've had in your life regarding sport
 - o What was so great about that experience?
 - o What thoughts or feelings come up when you think of it?
- Reflection part 2 (2.5 minutes)
 - o When you think of the word gratitude, what comes to mind?
 - o What does gratitude mean to you?
 - o How do you like to show gratitude?
 - o How can you apply this to the experience you just reflected on?
- Psychoeducation (5 minutes)
 - o What is gratitude?
 - o Benefits of gratitude
 - o Barriers
- Cultivating gratitude (15 minutes)
 - o What are you grateful for?
 - Where did that come from?
 - Recognition of a benefit / source / benefactor is key
 - Interpersonal? Intrapersonal? General vs sport?
 - o Benefit finding, savouring, contrasting
 - o Gratitude list with description
 - o Gratitude letter to something or someone

5-minute break

Self-Compassion

- Reflection part 1 (2.5 minutes)
 - o Can you think of when you have gone through a really difficult time? Dig deep and reflect when you may have felt in a rut. It can range from simple to complex, and be emotional or physical. What were you thinking or feeling? What was your behaviour like?
- Reflection part 2 (2.5 minutes)
 - o What does compassion mean to you? What comes to mind when you hear this? How could compassion have been used to help your situation?

- Psychoeducation (5 minutes)
 - o What is self-compassion
 - o Benefits of self-compassion
 - o Barriers
- Cultivating self-compassion (15 minutes)
 - o Self-compassion mantra with three components *helpful talk, moment-to-moment awareness, and coming together* (i.e., self-kindness, mindfulness, common humanity)
 - o What would you say to a good friend exercise
 - o Self-compassionate letter to self in a previous difficult experience
- Group debrief (5 minutes)

Summary and group debrief (5-10 minutes)

Booster Sessions 2 and 4

Group reflection (5-10 minutes)

- Reflect on previous session
- Group sharing re: self-compassion and gratitude learnings
 - o What has worked? What hasn't worked?
 - o Provide opportunity for athletes to borrow ideas / share common barriers or positive experiences

Self-Compassion

- Reflection part 1 (2.5 minutes)
 - o Can you think of when you have gone through a really difficult time? Dig deep and reflect when you may have felt in a rut. It can range from simple to complex, and be emotional or physical. What were you thinking or feeling? What was your behaviour like?
- Reflection part 2 (2.5 minutes)
 - o What does compassion mean to you? What comes to mind when you hear this? How could compassion have been used to help your situation?
- Psychoeducation (5 minutes)
 - o What is self-compassion
 - o Benefits of self-compassion
 - o Barriers
- Cultivating self-compassion (15 minutes)
 - o Self-compassion mantra with three components *helpful talk, moment-to-moment awareness, and coming together* (i.e., self-kindness, mindfulness, common humanity)
 - o What would you say to a good friend exercise
 - o Self-compassionate letter to self in a previous difficult experience
- Group debrief (5 minutes)

5-minute break

Gratitude

- Reflection part 1 (2.5 minutes)
 - Think of a positive time / experience you've had in your life regarding sport
 - What was so great about that experience?
 - What thoughts or feelings come up when you think of it?
- Reflection part 2 (2.5 minutes)
 - When you think of the word gratitude, what comes to mind?
 - What does gratitude mean to you?
 - How do you like to show gratitude?
 - How can you apply this to the experience you just reflected on?
- Psychoeducation (5 minutes)
 - What is gratitude?
 - Benefits of gratitude
 - Barriers
- Cultivating gratitude (15 minutes)
 - What are you grateful for?
 - Where did that come from?
 - Recognition of a benefit / source /benefactor is key
 - Interpersonal? Intrapersonal? General vs sport?
 - Benefit finding, savouring, contrasting
 - Gratitude list with description
 - Gratitude letter to something or someone

Summary and group debrief (5-10 minutes)