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A Phenomenological Study: Experiencing the Unexpected Death
of a Teammate

Lauren Elberty

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY:
EXPERIENCING THE UNEXPECTED DEATH OF A TEAMMATE

BY

LAUREN ELBERTY

A Thesis submitted to the
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in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Movement Science
with a specialization in Sport, Exercise, & Performance Psychology

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MIAMI SHORES, FLORIDA

Date:

To the Dean of the School of Human Performance and Leisure Sciences:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Lauren Elberty entitled “A Phenomenological Study: Experiencing the Unexpected Death of A Teammate”. I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science with a major in Movement Sciences.

Dr. Duncan Simpson, Thesis Committee Chair

We, members of the thesis committee,
have examined this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted:

Chair, Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences

Accepted:

Dean, School of Human Performance and Leisure Sciences

Abstract

There has been a lack of research that has examined the experience of the death of a teammate. The present study involved conducting phenomenological interviews with 3 male and 6 female collegiate student-athletes who have lost a teammate to an unexpected death in order to understand the meaning of this particular experience. This study focuses on meanings and themes specified from the student-athletes in order to gain a deeper understanding of this experience. All participants were initially asked an open-ended question in order to acquire responses. The researcher expected that the findings from this study would allow future research in this field as well as provide athletes, families, coaches, athletic and academic faculty, and additional administrators with information that will help in preparing for such situations.

A total of 9 in-depth phenomenological interviews with current and former collegiate student-athletes representing a variety of sports (i.e., swimming, volleyball, basketball, soccer and marching band) were conducted. Participants ranged in age from 19- 31 years old ($M = 24.11$, $SD = 11$). All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and then were later analyzed. A total of 126 meaning units were revealed which were grouped into sub-themes and 6 major themes; *Emotional Response*, *Behavioral Response*, *Faith*, *Social Support*, *Team Cohesion*, and *Change of Life Perspective*. It is predicted that the findings will support and expand current literature on this topic. In addition, the findings can also be applied to athletes, coaches, faculty, families, and additional parties to assist in understanding what it is like to go through this experience in preparation of understanding how to handle this experience if it occurs within their team or facility.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Right now, I don’t know what to say. I’m shocked. Jerome was such an outstanding and dynamic guy. He had the biggest heart of any man I’ve ever known.”

Eagles head coach, Rich Kotite, in reaction to the death of defensive lineman, Jerome Brown (George, 1992).

“He was the best defensive lineman in the league. He wound the team up on game day. I went down and drafted him because he was our kind of player. He was a personable young man.”

Eagles assistant coach, Buddy Ryan’s statement in regards to Jerome Brown (George, 1992).

Statement of the Problem

Sudden death by nature is unexpected and unanticipated (Futterman, 1998), often creating feelings of shock and disbelief (Straub, 2001). As people are usually unprepared for such a traumatic experience (Margola, 2010) they often do not know where to seek help for coping which such an event (Wadland, 1988). Despite the negative psychological reactions usually associated with an unexpected death little research has focused on how people left behind experience this difficult time. Unexpected death, although it is rare, is does occur within the athletic population (Futterman, 1998) however; little research has addressed how teammates experience such a traumatic situation.

The research that has been conducted on the death of athletes is often focused on the medical conditions, which may have contributed to their death. For example, studies focus on what went wrong in regards to the athlete’s health and how each athlete can be screened in order to reduce preventable deaths (Patel, 2011). Previous research has

focused on the importance of screening high school athletes for heart problems, however not all heart or health complications can be seen or prevented through such physicals (Patel, 2011). This study ultimately explained that even if every student is screened, there is a chance that an athlete may die in an unexpected manner. Although, research has focused on the aftermath of medical related issues of athlete deaths, only a few studies have explored the aftermath of tragic events in regards to how teammates experience these deaths on a personal level.

One study that has been conducted on the athlete population looked at general emotional stages following a traumatic event. Vernacchia (1997) followed a male university basketball team after they lost a teammate due to an abnormal heart rhythm. To overcome feelings of shock, confusion, denial, and performance resolution, the team was given care services with a 'critical incident stress debriefing process' (Vernacchia, 1997). Although this was an insightful study it did not provide an in-depth examination of the personal experiences of teammates following the incident.

Other research has looked at coping mechanisms during a traumatic event within the general population. Margola (2010) looked at the specific technique of expressive writing (EW) following the death of a classmate. This study proved that EW helps with emotional disclosure, and alleviates posttraumatic stress disorder (Margola, 2010). Despite this article showing how emotional writing can assist in the coping process, it still has failed to specifically examine the emotional experience that each participant had voiced through his or her writing.

Dale, Mayer, Rosenfeld, and Gilbert (2013) conducted a study in which a family member had passed away unexpectedly. The primary focus of this qualitative study was

to examine how each family experienced the bereavement process in order to understand loss. After interviewing the participants, the researchers developed multiple themes including; sudden cardiac death, saying goodbye, grief unleashing emotional reactions, life goes on... but not back to normal, and the meaning in loss. This study explained that not only is this a challenging time for families, but more often than not, the family is unprepared for a situation like this to happen. Although this was a very informative study, all participants were male, and between the ages of 44 and 54 at the time of the family member's death. Thus, this population does not seem to generalize to all individuals that have to experience the grieving period after the sudden death of a family member.

Grief is often a common response to unexpected death and Rodgers and Cowles (1991) describe grief as experiencing loss and separation from something that is significant. Furthermore, experiencing unexpected death can often lead to irrational thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Such behaviors can range from violence to desperateness while grieving (Straub, 2001). When grief is studied within athletes, it is primarily done with interest in injury (Evans & Hardy, 1995). Although a severe injury can be emotionally difficult, it does not appear to be as traumatic as experiencing a teammate's death.

Some people may believe that athletes grieve and respond to death similarly to the normal population. However, throughout Vernacchia's (1997) study, one of the prominent findings was that athletes do not grieve in the same fashion because they are often not given an adequate amount of privacy. For example, when this team in Vernacchia's study lost their teammate they were bombarded with curiosity from media, fans, and fellow students. The players were forced to grieve in the "public eye" as they

were continuously asked what had happened to their teammate. Without the publicity and attention, these athletes would have been able to grieve in a more traditional manner as non-athletes do.

A research approach that has the potential to capture the experience of an unexpected death in sport is existential phenomenology. This approach can provide deep understanding of each athlete's experience through open-ended interviewing. Phenomenology is a theory developed by Edmund Husserl as a means of studying human consciousness. More specifically it was created in order to gain understanding of an individual's specific 'experience' (Solomon, 1980). Unlike phenomenology, existentialism is interested in philosophy of the human action and living. When combining these two concepts, existential phenomenology asks the question of, "What is it to be a person?" This question seeks to discover "universal concept features" that are needed to be a human being through actions, plans, and evaluations (Solomon, 1980, pg. 29). The power of the two theories combined creates a strong understanding of a distinctive experience. Due to the limited research of the experience of coping with the death of a teammate, this approach appears to be a viable approach with which to unveil some of these unique experiences.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how athletes experience the sudden loss of a teammate. With little information on how student-athletes within the collegiate community experience and cope with these specific situations, it is difficult for those closest to them (friends, family, coaches, athletic trainers, and sport psychologists) to understand how best to support.

Significance of the Study

When Jerome Brown, a former Philadelphia Eagles defensive lineman, was suddenly killed in a car accident, many people were affected. With media and fans bombarding the coaches and players (George, 1992), there is little privacy to cope, manage and understand emotions. Traumatic events such as these are challenging to understand emotionally, especially when they are unexpected. This causes issues that can create feelings of denial, grief, confusion, and shock that need to be addressed appropriately. The results of this study may help prepare athletic faculty for these situations, and also may assist future programs aimed at effectively helping athletes who experience the death of a teammate in the future.

Operational Definitions

- *Coping*- How the athlete is able to understand and manage particular internal and external commands or requirements (Nwankwo, 2012).
- *Coping Mechanism*- A developmental tool needed by an individual in order to care for his or her psychological health. (Gibbons, 2014)
- *Grief* – A specific response to psychological and physiological reactions that typically occur in three stages; numbness, disorganization, and reorganization (Straub, 2001).
- *Unexpected Death*- An unnatural death that occurs without notice, or with very little warning. This does not allow for any type of preparation by loved ones (Straub, 2001) or teammates.

Assumptions

Within the participation of each individual, it was assumed that each person spoke honestly and truthfully about his or her experience of unexpectedly losing a teammate.

Delimitations

Due to the sensitivity of this topic, this study did not include youth athletes. The study primarily focused on collegiate student-athletes. This study addressed both male and female athletes. This is important because males and females tend to react to all situations differently, therefore how they react to losing a teammate will most likely differ as well (Kastenbaum, 1991). Lastly, only in-depth interviews were used in order to gain the insight of only the athlete.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the athlete might have been unprepared or unwilling to talk about this subject, as it may have been too difficult for them at the time. Participants may have felt too vulnerable to talk about their coping mechanisms and experiences effectively. This may have affected the motivation of each participant regarding how much information he or she shared with the interviewer. Because of the nature of the study, the participants may not have been willing to fully disclose their experience. The athlete may have been nervous or reluctant to discuss such a personal experience.

Research Question

How have collegiate student-athletes experienced the unexpected death of a teammate in sport?

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sudden or unexpected death is defined as, “a witnessed or unwitnessed death occurring unexpectedly within six hours of a previously normal state of health” (Pigozzi, 2008, p. 153). Research on the unexpected deaths of athletes has focused primarily on their medical history (Patel, 2011), and has not provided sufficient information in regards to the reactions of individuals and teams that have lost a teammate unexpectedly. The purpose of the current study was to examine the experiences of athletes who have lost a teammate due to an unexpected death.

Death

People fear death, because there are no definite answers as to what happens when we die (Shiltz, 2014). Although death is a part of life and unavoidable, it is something that people are not familiar or comfortable with (Straub, 2001), even though death is commonly discussed and featured in the popular media (Vail et al., 2012). However, despite this media exposure the general population does not deal with these instances on a regular basis, therefore, they are generally not adequately prepared, nor are they able to support themselves or others emotionally during loss (Buglass, 2010).

Although the event is rare, the awareness of sudden deaths of athletes is becoming more heard of throughout the media today. A study conducted by Maron, et al. (2014) set out to identify causes of sudden death among collegiate student-athletes. Over the 10-year period (2001-2011), the study found 182 sudden deaths within NCAA organizations. Results of this study explained that the non-cardiovascular causes of death ranged from death during sleep, gunshots, drug abuse, suicide, blunt trauma, sickle cell trait, drowning,

and heat stroke. Cardiovascular related deaths were found to be the most common cause of death in the study. It was concluded that although it cannot be determined what the reasons are for some of these deaths, high intensity training sessions could be a considerable factor (Maron, et al., 2014). This study used both the NCAA and U.S. National Registry of Sudden Death in Athlete databases to acquire this information, creating a source of valid data. However, there were a high number of athletes that could not be accounted for because their toxicology reports were unobtainable. This may have created a slight skew in results. Over the 10-year study, the NCAA reported 18 athletic deaths on average per year.

Several theories have been proposed to explain how death influences a person. Terror Management Theory (TMT) is one theory that has set out to explain this issue. The Terror Management Theory was developed to help understand how death can shape human behavior (Vail et al., 2012). This theory is composed of two concepts; the ability to keep “faith in cultural worldviews,” and to maintain “self-esteem by living up to the standards of value that those worldviews provide” (p. 304). Cultural world-views are explained as the opportunity that people have to be something substantial while existing. Self-esteem, the second concept of this theory, is the perspective of how well the individual’s life compares to their world-view values. As death is unavoidable as human beings, it becomes an essential part of the worldview that an individual holds.

This theory highlights that although death is followed by a time of mourning and grief, it can create a better understanding of what death is, causing personal growth from loss. Although death can be viewed as a maturing experience, it is more traditionally seen as a negative situation that is difficult to overcome. People fear death, causing them

to become “defensive” and “aggressive” towards their worldviews (Vail et al., 2012, p.305). These negative feelings often lead to the experience of grief and complicated grief, which cause potential risk to ones’ psychological health (Vail et al., 2012).

A study composed by Lewis (2013), used the TMT as well as a TMT integrated existential (TIE) intervention. The TIE intervention consisted of clients being exposed to the anxiety of death as well as discovering different ways to cope with death. By using the TMT as a guide with the intervention, the clients were able to fall back on their cultural worldviews during the procedure. After conducting the intervention, the researchers were able to engage in discovering how coping with death varies between personal beliefs and values. This was a valuable study because it looked at how both young and older individuals react to death. Older individuals are more likely to accept death, while the younger population may not be so accepting, but are likely to experience the death of the older population. This study created an interesting intervention that can be used as a psychological aid in coping with both expected and unexpected death.

Sudden cardiac death is the number one reason for deaths among student-athletes of all ages (Pigozzi, 2008). Sudden cardiac death (SCD) is typically a silent yet fatal repercussion of a cardiac abnormality (Pigozzi, 2008). Symptoms of SCD can often be detected, but not 100% of the time. However, it is much easier to diagnose in a young athlete with heart abnormalities (35 years or younger) as opposed to an older athlete (over 35 years of age). Older athletes are more likely to experience sudden cardiac death than the younger athlete population (Schmied, 2014). Furthermore, research shows that athletes, compared to non-athletes have a much greater chance of sudden cardiac death . Even though there are extensive health benefits associated with physical activity, the high

intensity that athletes undergo increases the risk of cardiac malfunctions (Schmied, 2014). Sudden cardiac death can sometimes be detected early, but with the increasing numbers of athletes, it is very hard to screen and accurately detect any problems (Pigozzi, 2008). Although cardiac complications are the number one problem for death in athletes, there are other ways for athletes to die, just as any other non-athlete individual. Factors such as other health related issues, car accidents, overdosing on drugs or alcohol, and even violence may play a role in the sudden death of athletes.

Accepting that a highly trained athlete has died unexpectedly is not simple, especially when there are no prior symptoms to the event (Schmied, 2014). Between the heightened media and public attention, it becomes very difficult for all individuals involved to understand and cope with the situation (Pigozzi, 2008). Most research on a sudden death of an athlete is trying to figure out how to prevent it, but research seems to be ignoring how to cope with it in all regards. It also ignores the grief that all individuals experience that is involved with the particular athlete.

Even though having an athlete die is rare, this is a serious issue that needs to be addressed. Although it is an uncommon occurrence, it is important to discover ways to cope and ways to experience grief in a healthy way. This will allow athletes, staff, administration and families to understand the experience and their emotions during the grieving period.

Faith

Religion. Different religions hold different views and expectations when it comes to death. For example, The Old Testament explains that “human existence does not survive death” however, others feel that life does survive death, but in a diminished form”

(Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997, p. 324). The Old Testament also explains that death is a “barrier to meaningful human action” (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 324). Another interesting example of religion and death is Hinduism. This religion suggests that inconsiderate people will suffer an “endless series of births and deaths,” as a form of punishment, while the enlightened person is liberated from the cycle of life and death. Hinduism and Buddhism share commonalities when it comes to death. Buddha explained that because there is a process for everything in life and of becoming a person, there can be no “personal self” or “personal death (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 322). For those who believe in celebrating the life of Jesus, they also celebrate his death (Pollio et al., 1997, p.325). Therefore, death is a meaningful phenomenon for these people. In the Gospel of Paul, “A physical body dies and a spiritual existence is raised (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 325). With a vast number of religions, there can be many different ways that said religious views could influence how a person reacts after a death is experienced.

Spirituality. Some individuals do not have a specific God that they are involved with, but still feel that they have a spiritual essence or spiritual sensations. When people experience death, they are often graced with what they feel is the spirit of the individual who has passed away.

It is common for people to feel that they are still in communication with people that they have lost. Susan Kwilecki (2011) has compiled several instances and cases of people experiencing after death communications (ADC’s). Kwilecki’s intensive research has explained how ADC’s are often used to assist in accepting the loss of a loved one during times of bereavement. After death communications are defined as a ghost-like experience that both religious and non-religious people can experience. Individuals feel

that they are receiving a message from the presence of a person who has passed. Messages can be found in images, voices, odors, dreams, unusual activity in electrical appliances, meaningful timed appearances of animals, people, and symbolic phenomena (Kwilecki, 2011). This study revealed that ADC's assist in providing immediate relief of pain within the individual that is grieving, as well as comfort being sought after the use of an ADC. Although this was a very insightful and in-depth study, because spirituality is not believed in, or can be conflicting with other religious views, there may have been some information that was altered throughout the study.

Emotional Reactions

Grief. Initially, grief was thought to be a disease that was a disruption of an individual's spirit (Granek, 2010). The idea that grief may have been a disease can be supported with the fact that grief tends to show signs of psychological illnesses such as a depressed mood (Jakoby, 2010). Now, grief is considered to be a psychological disruption in need of an intervention in order to return to normal functioning after a stressful or traumatic experience (Granek, 2010). Grief is a difficult and timely process, with acceptance being the end goal (Schnider, 2007), as well as to have the ability to emotionally detach from the individual who has passed (Granek, 2010).

One study that explained emotional responses to grief was in response to a 1942 fire in Boston Massachusetts. The fire took place at the Coconut Grove Night Club, and tragically killed almost 500 people after a Boston College football game. Erich Lindermann (1979) interviewed survivors of the fire, and declared that grief was normal, identifiable, and can have an immediate response, or is more delayed. The severity of grief can vary amongst individuals. Although the collection of interviews from each

interviewee were brief, and not as detailed as they could have been, this study showed the importance of understanding how grief varies throughout individuals, and that the process of grieving is not always consistent.

Several studies have examined attachment theories and patterns found within grieving families. Family relationships can easily be related to a sports team. As a team bonds they begin to act in similar patterns, create history together, and interact with each other in ways similar to a family. In fact, athletes and coaches often discuss their relationship with each other by using the word “family”. Depending on how strong the bond is, these specific actions can define how a family will react to and cope with loss and the grieving process (Anderson, 2010).

Since the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center, experiences of grief have been given a new meaning, and new experience for many, just as the 1942 Boston Night Club study was. This terrorist attack has discovered that attachment and relationships are not the only foundation to how people grieve. Not only does grief stem from the relationship to the person or object, but it also depends on how the death occurred (Anderson, 2010). Whether the death was sudden, violent, or expected can determine the severity of grief (Anderson, 2010). The situation in which the death occurred can also create different emotional reactions to the grieving process.

Complicated Grief. Most people who experience loss are able to continue functioning after a short period of time (e.g., less than 6 months; Prigerson, et al., 1995), however between 10%-15% of people who grieve continue to live with pain for several years after a loss which is considered to be ‘complicated grief’ (Bonanno, et al. 2002). Complicated grief can be a result of an insufficient amount of emotional support within

the grieving individual (Schnider, 2007). Grief is a complex topic; therefore literature has tended to focus on the duration of a bereavement period in order to define the severity (Prigerson, et al., 1995). A lack of comprehensive literature discussing the process may play a role in why psychological support is not yet adequate (Prigerson, et al., 1995).

Complicated grief differentiates itself from traditional grief in that individuals cannot accept death, become “emotionally numb,” experience bitterness, frustration, and feelings of emptiness, and are challenged to continue on with their normal life (Schnider, 2007). As information about grief and bereavement is obtained, practitioners can begin to understand what kind of treatments and interventions are needed (Maciejewski, 2010).

A study conducted by Schnider (2007) examined a variety of coping mechanisms correlated with posttraumatic stress disorder and complicated grief among college students after experiencing a traumatic death. College students were chosen because as a young population, with new lifestyles, such as more independence and freedom, they are susceptible to experiencing this kind of trauma. The main finding of this study was that complicated grief and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder both showed similar characteristics of avoidance coping, problem focused coping, and active emotional coping. Even though collegiate individuals may react differently to death, it may be appropriate to look at all ages of coping with death in order to gain more depth in understanding this topic. This study was solely based upon surveys and questionnaires; therefore there was no personal insight from any of the participants as to how they experienced the bereavement period in a qualitative matter, creating a limitation in regards to unique experiences regarding a wider age of individuals.

Theories of Grief. Freud (1912) originally coined a basic concept of grief. He proposed that individuals had to accomplish the task of detaching himself or herself from the person who has died in order to return back to normal functioning. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1967) expanded on Freud's foundation with a deeper description of the grieving process and emotional detachment. She theorized five stages that all people experience while dealing with death, including: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Denial is a temporary action that people often turn to as a "buffer" when hearing unexpected information that they are not able to accept at the time. After the individual has preceded denial, and has come to terms with the shocking news, many people resort to feelings of "anger" or "resentment". Kubler-Ross (1967) explained that anger is a difficult emotion to deal with, as it can be projected in so many different ways and can ultimately be unpredictable. Anger has to be understood by loved ones in order to help decrease the emotion. Bartering via religious views is the third stage. Kubler-Ross explained this stage by stating, "If god has decided to take us from this earth and he did not respond to my angry pleas, he may be favorable if I ask nicely" (p.72). This quote identifies that if the individual can no longer be angry at the situation, they will now bargain hoping that something good will be able to come from the situation. The fourth stage is depression where, the individual is unable to "smile it off" anymore. This is the stage where loss is understood, and is able to express sadness in its entirety. Lastly, the fifth stage is where the individual accepts loss, and is no longer angry or depressed about what has happened. Acceptance does not mean that the individual is necessarily happy, but has "voided" negative feelings, and the initial pain has subsided. Throughout the five

stages that Kubler-Ross has put together, individuals experience coping, and coping mechanisms that lead to hope.

Kubler-Ross's five-stage theory has been used as the foundation of many studies focusing on grief. For example, Maciejewski (2007) conducted a study using a revised complicated grief inventory with individuals who have experienced the loss of a significant other. This study compared indicators between yearning, anger, depression, acceptance, and disbelief. Although these individuals did not experience unexpected loss, the difficulty of the individuals' grieving process was recorded and further studied. The results from this study showed that acceptance is more likely to occur than disbelief, and that depression is greater than anger. This study also showed that as disbelief and yearning decrease, acceptance increases. Overall, as each stage decreases, acceptance increases causing the process of grief to end. From this particular study, the stages of grief matched what Kubler-Ross had originally proposed. Although this study did a good job in comparing the different stages of normal grief, it failed to examine complicated grief. It also removed grief that was a result of traumatic reasons such as car accidents. Normal grief is an important factor to study, however it is also important to include traumatic events that result in complicated grief. This will allow comparison between normal and complicated grief, which may lead to different ways to cope and understand each process differently.

John Bowlby (1973) created the attachment theory, which parallels with Kubler-Ross's stage theory. This theory was made up of four stages: numbness, yearning, disorganization, and reorganization. Numbness is the initial reaction towards separation from a significant figure; this is the stage in which an individual is not emotionally ready

to accept the loss (Straub, 2001). Yearning is reported to be a constant desire that the deceased will eventually return (Kaplow, et al., 2013); the separation has yet to be accepted in this stage and the individual may express emotions of anger as well. After shock decreases, feelings of “alienation” (Maciejewski, 2007) and depression become apparent. Shame, fear, and helplessness are often found within this stage as well (Straub, 2001). Lastly, reorganization is when normal daily functioning begins to occur, as well as beginning to accept the separation or loss (Straub, 2001). Bowlby’s (1969) study aimed to make sense of relationships in times of stress or fear within children. Within the type of relationship that is formed, a certain attachment is created. From this specific type of attachment individuals can create specific values and beliefs.

Ainsworth et al. (1978) was one of the first to identify attachment patterns in adults. These patterns were secure, anxious, and avoidant, and Bartholomew and Horvitz (1991) used these patterns to create a self-report measure to identify attachment patterns in adults. The patterns were categorized as secure, insecure (preoccupied), insecure (dismissing), and insecure (fearful). Behaviors found within a secure attachment style are things such as being confident, working well with groups, and having high trust. This is considered to be a healthy relationship. The preoccupied insecure relationship involves behaviors such as low self-esteem, need for acceptance, and trust concerns. The preoccupied style differs from the dismissing attachment style because dismissing includes behaviors such as difficulty in coping and problem solving, and complete lack of trust. Lastly, the fearful attachment style is supported with intimacy problems, fear of others, as well as not being able to deal with criticism well.

A study conducted by Meier et al. (2013) examined attachment anxiety and avoidance during the grieving period by using the Relationship Structures Questionnaire and the Inventory of Complicated Grief. This study found that individuals who have increased attachment anxiety have poorer physical and mental health when dealing with death. This also predicted the severity of the grieving experience. This study created a clear understanding of how attachment anxiety can predict grieving and mental health, however, it failed to examine the cause of death, which may have a strong influence on these factors as well.

The Multi-Dimensional Grief theory (Kaplow, et al., 2013) is a newly developed theory that includes and goes beyond Kubler-Ross's five-stage theory, and looks at concepts such as identity distress, stress in relation to death, and separation anxiety. Within each domain, it is assumed that depending on the situation, there can be 'maladjustment' as well as a 'positive adjustment' period during grief. Either of these adjustment periods depends heavily on the individual's external resources (counselors, psychologists, additional social support systems) that they have, or are given immediately after loss. This theory has not been used in many studies, however, it has created a clear understanding of how individual and environmental contexts affect children in regards to coping with and understanding an array of emotions when experiencing grief (Kaplow, et al., 2013). This theory needs to be further researched with different ages, cultures, causes of death, and genders in order for it to become a more reliable theory. If more demographics are studied in relation to this theory, research can identify normal and abnormal reactions to stress while grieving. This may also lead to a better understanding of emotions that may cause stress while grieving.

Emotional Response to Grief. Grief is something that almost everyone will experience at some point after a death; however, the reactions and intensity will differ between individuals (Diminich & Conanno, 2014). For example, some people may initially be in denial, while others are in shock. Unexpected death can cause initial reactions of disbelief and shock (Jakoby, 2012). The death of an individual can cause confusion and an overwhelming amount of emotions that are difficult for athletes to accept and deal with (Jakoby, 2012). With so many emotions that can be fulfilled in terms of grief, its definition is often inconsistent (Jakoby, 2012). However, emotions such as sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, and depression are not uncommon in these situations (Vernacchia, 1997), and are intertwined with each other in regards to how they are experienced when grieving.

Sadness. Sadness is often times confused with depression, as there are many similar qualities that the two share. These similar qualities include lack of interest, loss of appetite, loss of sleep, lack of energy, and lack of focus (Leventhal, 2008). Sadness is not often discussed because it is not classified as a disorder, but is an emotion that all individuals experience. Sadness tends to last for only a brief period of time and is an emotion, while depression can be chronic and is classified as a disorder (Leventhal, 2008).

Depression. Symptoms of depression are common throughout the grieving process (Belitsky, 1986). Signs of depression when grieving include, but are not limited to excessive crying, fatigue, loss of appetite, significant weight loss, and sleep disruptions (Belitsky, 1986). Depressed mood can also cause restlessness, worthlessness, and a decreased self-esteem within the individual (Belitsky, 1986). It has been said that depressed individuals are often unable to express emotions, causing disruption in social

bonds that are essential in the coping process (Diminich & Conanno, 2014), and increasing the vulnerability for depression to worsen (Belitsky, 1986).

Anger. After death, individuals may experience anger towards themselves and others. Sometimes anger is not apparent immediately after an incident, but eventually surfaces due to an internal buildup of negative emotions and sometimes violence (Cerney & Buskirk, 1991). After death, anger may initially be experienced due to the sudden death of a loved one. The loss of an individual may also create a loss of certain dependencies (Cerney & Buskirk, 1991). Although feelings of anger may seem selfish for the individual that is grieving, the sudden change in mood may be a new feeling that is difficult to understand for the individual. Anger can create additional emotions and behaviors such as stress, exhaustion, and unhappiness (Cerney & Buskirk, 1991).

Guilt. After death, there may be a time when individuals reflect on and mourn the lost individual. During this time, a feeling of guilt may be experienced (Wilson, Drozdek & Turkovic, 2006). Guilty feelings may be experienced because the individual may feel that they could have done something to prevent the death or save the individual. This often results from a form of guilt referred to as bystander guilt (Wilson, Drozdek, & Turkovic, 2006). This is when there is regret, or thoughts that the death could have been prevented. The individual experiencing bystander guilt immediately understands what actions could have been taken in order to save the person (Wilson, Drozdek & Turkovic, 2006).

Anxiety. People who suffer from general anxiety problems may have a greater risk of experiencing death anxiety (Furer, 2008). Death anxiety is when a person has constant thoughts or fears about themselves or family members dying (Furer, 2008).

Death is a fear that many people have, which can create anxiety; therefore, thoughts about death can trigger anxious feelings (Furer, 2008). Anxiety from fear can also make people panic, creating more negative emotions such as restlessness, irritability, tension, and distress (Furer, 2008). With death, the concept of immediate separation anxiety becomes an issue while grieving. Most research has presented separation anxiety as a disorder found within children, however it is becoming more recognized in adults (DSM-IV-TR, American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Death can be considered to be “bittersweet” as it seems like it is a time where negative emotions become overwhelming (Belitsky, 1986), however, it can also create feelings of inspiration and motivation to better one self (Lewis, 2014). By understanding how grief can affect different aspects of different people, a strong coping process can be established (Kaplow, et al., 2013)

Coping

Coping is a general term that is used when describing a process to overcome a stressful situation. Coping is usually specified to either be problem-focused or emotion-focused (Folkman et al., 1986). Problem-focused coping is a way to behave in a specific way in order to adapt to the stressful situation however, problem-focused coping is difficult to implement if the stressor is uncontrollable, such as death. Emotion-focused coping refers to how an individual is able to reframe their mindset in order to overcome stressors. For example, if one receives news that someone has died, they can assess the situation, and figure out a way to change his or her perspective on the situation, rather than denying what has happened. While both of these styles of coping have shown to be beneficial to overcome a stressful or traumatic experience, many people turn to what is

known as avoidant-coping, which is a negative coping mechanism (Folkman, et. al, 1986). Avoidance coping is when the individual removes himself or herself from the situation in order to bypass dealing with the challenge. Avoidance may suffice for a short period of time, but has a negative affect on an individual's health in the long run and the stressor is never actually dealt with (Folkman, et al., 1986). Although these three styles of coping have been studied in different contexts such as family members, friends, and coworkers, it is unknown as to which style is most beneficial in instances of posttraumatic stress disorder or complicated grief (Schnider, 2007).

A study done by Folkman et al (1986) focused on the relationship between cognitive evaluation and the coping process when dealing with stress. By using an intra-individual approach within married couples, the study was able to compare all individuals across five different stressors. Individuals were interviewed once a month for six months. Husband and wife were not interviewed as a couple, but rather separately. Primary and secondary appraisals were used to pick specific questions for each to answer. The primary appraisal referred to evaluation of what was at stake during a stressful experience, while the secondary appraisal focused on coping options during a stressful experience. The results of this study show several things. First is that coping can vary when people are aware of what is at stake, and what options they view to cope with what is at stake during stress. The second finding was that individuals often find themselves experiencing internal conflict when coping with stress. For example, individuals may be concerned for the welfare of a loved one while thinking about how they may be dealing with the stress in a different manner. Lastly, this study showed that people might have been embarrassed to seek social support while coping with stress. They may be fearful that their behaviors

were not appropriate, or the subject matter causing the stress was not significant, causing avoidance. This study went into great detail about coping with a stressful experience and coping strategies, but only for stressors that were short term. It may be interesting to conduct a similar study but with long term stressors to see if the results vary. It also may be beneficial if the stressors throughout this study were more serious, or traumatic. The stressors that were used were personal issues that the participant had experienced during the past week which were probably not comparable to death.

People who experience complicated grief are often found to have a sense of separation with people, as well as a feeling of being excluded (Maciejewski, 2007). This ultimately causes the individuals to separate and avoid their social supporters. Social support and social bonds are important in assisting the coping process (Diminich & Conanno, 2014). Due to depressive emotions that can be found in grief, these social bonds often break out of frustration, lack of patience, and overall rejection between individuals that are experiencing grief (Cole, Michel, & Teti, 1994). Social support can often be found within the individuals' own team. When experiencing a tragic or challenging situation, several teams experience a change in team cohesion.

Cohesion

Team Cohesion. Team cohesion can be defined as, “a dynamic process that is reflected in the group’s tendencies to stick together and remain united in pursuing its instrumental goals and or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (Carron, 1998, p. 213). Goals are supported with two types of cohesion; task and social. Task cohesion is how a group or team comes together to achieve a specific goal, while social cohesion is how strong the personal relationships are between teammates (Horn, 2012). Task and

social cohesion are both needed in order to reach team goals, which results in signs of progression and success. Achieving team goals as a group is an illustration of how cohesion can be created positively.

Carron's (2002) study measured the correlation between the perception of team cohesion and success rate of a team. With male and female collegiate and club athletes, this study utilized the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ; Carron, et al. 1985), in addition to recording and calculating the winning percentage of the team. This GEQ was created in order to look at team cohesion based upon four subcategories: (1) individual attractions to the group-task, (2) individual attractions to the group-social, as well as (3) group integration-task and (4) group integration-social. These categories look at social interactions, feelings about social interactions, perception of cohesion related to the task at hand, as well as feelings about the overall cohesion of the team. Each athlete completed the questionnaire individually, without any assistance from or conversation with other teammates. The findings of this study indicated that there is a positive correlation with cohesion and success throughout teams. Also, different types of cohesion are found to be similar between athletes of the same team. This study did not include athletes from individual sport teams, which may be beneficial for future research.

Negative experiences can also create strong team cohesion. Through such experiences, teams gain the ability to manage difficult situations to create a stronger bond throughout the team (Gersick, 1988). The early stages of a team may undergo conflict, or a storming stage in order for each individual to adapt to the culture of the group, and know his or her specific role in the group. Once the storming stage is over, trust begins to develop, and the team can proceed to working towards accomplishing goals (Tuckman, 1965).

A study by Tekleab, Quigley, and Tesluk (2009) examined the relationship between task and relationship conflict with conflict management to see how it affects team cohesion. The first thing that this study looked at was whether or not task conflict during early stages of a team is beneficial for the team's cohesion or not. The results from this study differed from prior studies in that early conflict did not necessarily support team cohesion. This hypothesis may not have been supported with the idea that task conflict interferes with relationship conflict, and throughout early stages of a team's career, relationships and task conflict may be blended together at first. However, another hypothesis within this study was that there is a relationship between conflict management and cohesion. This was supported, in that cohesion may stem from understanding that conflict can be managed and accomplished, rather than creating cohesion during the actual task at hand. This study represented cohesion through conflict well, however the conflict that each team had to work through was given to them, and it was not a natural occurrence happening during practice or competition. Thus, dealing with real challenges on the field may result in different experiences for the team.

Adversity is defined as, "A state or condition contrary to one of well-being and or of continued difficulty," (Brooks, 2006). Adversity is a negative situation that involves a challenging adjustment period. In the team setting, adversity can be experienced on several different levels. Studies have shown that athletes have found significance when experiencing adversity (Howells & Fletcher, 2014). Athletes have realized that this is an opportunity to grow and improve within their sport and even in their lives in general (Howells & Fletcher, 2014).

In a 2014 study that analyzed several elite swimmers' autobiographies, it was revealed that all the participants experienced adversity at one point or another in their lives and swimming careers (Howells & Fletcher, 2014). In order to accomplish psychological, physical, and behavioral challenges; athletes were faced with depression, fear, and wanting to quit. Each swimmer was able to take the challenge and learn from it in order to grow within the sport. Some swimmers explained that after a traumatic event, they would try to continue training normally, but it was not a solution in the long run. With social support, spirituality, and positive performances, these athletes were able to progress to be better than they were before (Howells & Fletcher, 2014). Therefore, it can be concluded that if a team can overcome adversity together, they will be able to use both social and task cohesion to overcome challenges.

Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research has become more popular in the health care setting compared to quantitative research because it provides personal insight about a particular phenomenon. It has been said that qualitative studies help keep the development throughout sciences up to date, creating a stronger knowledge of natural settings (Sofaer, 2002). Qualitative research requires an in-depth understanding of a certain experience or phenomenon across multiple individuals, which ultimately creates a significant meaning to the research at hand (Creswell, 2007). The present study will collect qualitative data in order to discover how experiences may differ between athletes in the event of an unexpected death of a teammate. There has been few research studies that have focused on qualitative factors in regards to understanding and capturing the essence when experiencing the death of a teammate in sport, therefore this study will provide insight

and meaning for future studies as well as information athletes, coaches, faculty, and families can use if they find themselves in this unfortunate situation.

Phenomenology. The present study followed a phenomenological approach in order to understand the experience that collegiate athletes had to undergo when experiencing the death of a teammate. Interviews that follow a phenomenological structure allow for several perspectives to be studied in order to understand the essence of each lived experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). With a focus on specific descriptions from an individual in regards to the experience, the present study will allow for collegiate athletes to portray themselves with their own descriptions and representations from the experience. Even though each experience is unique, the phenomenological approach will find commonalities within each individual (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological interviews not only provide the researcher with information, but also give the participant an opportunity to reflect on and understand the situation that they experienced.

The theory of phenomenology is the idea of intentional human consciousness contributing to research, as well as any additional information that is important in order to understand the essence of the experience. This highlights what can be known about human beliefs and cognitions (Solomon, 1980). German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, founder of phenomenology asked the question of, “What it means to be a person” (p. 2). Husserl believed that by understanding the “natural attitude” of an experience, it would allow people to discover the foundations of human values (Creswell, 2007; Hopp, 2008). Existentialism is the theory about “who we are, and how we may come to live an authentic life,” with an understanding of personal freedom and responsibility across each experience (Polio, p. 9; Langer, 1989). Kierkegaard’s original idea for existentialism

stemmed from the thought of wanting to “explore the difficulties of existence” (Bretall, 1946).

Martin Heidegger brought both Kierkegaard’s existentialism and Husserl’s phenomenology together to create existential phenomenology. This theory was created in order to acquire knowledge about human action by finding universal concepts that are needed to essentially be a human being (Solomon, p. 1). This theory has a strong influence of self-identity. The fundamentals of self-identity from this theory are supported with information such as how a man acts, plans, uses language, and evaluates specific situations (p. 29). This was significant for the present study because it was important for each participant to evaluate the situation that they were faced to cope with, as well as explain how they reacted to the experience.

For this study phenomenological interviewing was used in order to explore the experience and phenomenon of the situation at hand. This research methodology ultimately provided the understanding of the natural experience that Husserl believed. This gave detail and personal insight of the coping experience, as well as a deeper understanding of the process. The interviewing process was open ended, with very few structured questions asked. The interview was lead by the participant with a natural flow. Through phenomenological interviewing and qualitative analysis, the present study ultimately allowed for a strong response and understanding about this specific phenomenon.

Chapter III

METHODS

Methodology

In order to appropriately conduct this study with an existential phenomenological approach, the format of the interviews allowed the participants to respond in an open-ended manner. Since the initial question was broad (Thomas & Pollio, 2002) the participant was able to respond broad with the hopes of eventually narrowing down his or her discussion to describe specific information about the experience.

Participants

The chosen sample of individuals that who participated in the study were a total of 9 student-athletes (*6= females, 3= males*), ranging from ages *19-30* years old (see table 1). All participants had previously experienced losing a teammate due to sudden or unexpected death during his or her athletic career. Participants were accumulated until the research reached saturation. Saturation is when information has been completely developed, and no new information arises from the participants (Creswell, 2012).

Participants were either collegiate athletes at the Division I, II, or III level.

Table 1. *Demographic Information*

Pseudonym	Age	Current/Former	Year of College at time of death	Sport Type
Sarah	19	Current	Freshman	Basketball
Kara	20	Current	Senior	Basketball
Emma	20	Current	Senior	Basketball
Emily	24	Former	Junior	Marching Band

Sophie	25	Former	Junior	Volleyball
Zach	25	Former	Sophomore	Swimming
Sandra	27	Former	Sophomore	Soccer
Carey	27	Former	Sophomore	Swimming
Christian	30	Former	Junior	Soccer

($N = 9$) ($M = 24.11$, $SD = 11$)

Procedures

Exploring researcher bias, Selection of co-participants, Data collection, Data analysis, and Developing a Thematic Structure are components that comprise what Thomas and Pollio (2002) suggest for an appropriate research study. These steps directed the procedures taken in the present study.

Researcher Bias. In order to avoid any preconceived notions on the topic, a bracketing interview was performed. Bracketing is defined as, “an intellectual activity in which one tries to put aside theories, knowledge, and assumptions about phenomenon” (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p.33). This created an awareness of any understandings and feelings about the specific experience in order to avoid any influences during the interview conduction with the participants of this study. This also kept the primary researcher mindful about any specific biases throughout the interviews with participants.

Some potential issues that arose from the bracketing included that the researcher has personally experienced a situation of coping with a death of a teammate during her athletic career. This may have caused the researcher to have strong personal reactions, resulting in a difficult time hearing and understanding how other people have dealt with a similar situation in a different manner. The researcher may have felt that this is always

something that the student-athlete has a difficult time coping with, and that it is a life changing experience. The researcher may have assumed that the student-athlete had or has a support system in order to overcome this challenging time. With these factors in mind, the researcher tried to avoid asking leading questions about topics, and let them come up naturally if the participant decided to do so.

Selection of Co-Participants. Participants who volunteered to participate in this study played a major role in creating this research, therefore they are considered to be co-participants. Co- participants assisted the primary researcher in developing data as well as themes and sub-units (Creswell, 2007). Once this study received acceptance from the Barry University Institutional Review Board, recruitment of participants involved email, social media, and a sport psychology list-serv. The sport psychology list-serv is a compilation of individuals' emails who are involved in the profession in which information is discussed and shared throughout. Each source included a detailed cover letter and a consent form to be filled out. The information given to each of these sources outlined what the study was about, the purpose of the study, the actions that a participant would take, as well as contact information if they decided to participate. Individuals that decided to participate were briefly interviewed in order to assure that they were appropriate for this study.

Data Collection. Once the participant had accepted to take part in this study, the individual was asked to choose a convenient time and location where they would be comfortable to partake in the interview. After obtaining consent from each student-athlete, a pseudonym was created in order to protect the identity of each student-athlete.

An in-depth phenomenological interview was conducted with each student-athlete. The length of the in-depth interviews was determined by the willingness of the participant to discuss his or her experience. Each interview was digitally audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. The primary researcher began the interview by asking the student-athlete, "Thinking back on your experience to coping with the death of a teammate, what stood out to you?" After this initial question was prompted, additional open-ended questions were asked as a guide in order to have the student-athlete clarify a response, or explain a response with more detail (Creswell, 2013). The participant primarily lead the discussion, and the researcher used follow-up questions to ensure that the participant was on task and focused on the particular experience. Once the participant began to show saturation from his own experiences, the researcher asked if there were any additional thoughts that would like to be shared in regards to the experience. Saturation was shown when no new information could be taken from the data (Creswell, 2013).

The participants were asked to choose a location and time of their own convenience. If the participant was unobtainable due to distance, the interview took place over Skype in a private setting. No matter where or how the interview was conducted, all interviews were recorded with the use of an electronic audio device. Once the interview concluded, the audio file was uploaded to a password-protected computer. The safety and confidentiality of the participants was one of the main concerns throughout the data collection process. To keep the participants' privacy and information safe, no information from the interviews that allows the individual to be easily identifiable was used. Dealing with death is often an uncomfortable situation, and something that is difficult to talk about. While dealing with strong emotional reflections throughout participation, the

participants were allowed to stop or withdraw from the interview at any point in time if they did not wish to continue speaking about their experiences.

Data Analysis. The interviews were transcribed verbatim once all data from the participant had been collected. Once all of the interviews had been transcribed, they were presented to the appropriate student-athletes in order for the transcription to be reviewed by the student-athlete. The student-athlete was asked to provide feedback in regards to the transcription in order to obtain the utmost accuracy within the transcriptions. If feedback was presented, changes were made accordingly. Once the changes were made, this process continued until each student-athlete was satisfied with his or her transcription until the information had been exhausted. After all of the participants had approved his or her transcript, the researcher was able to use accurate quotes and personal experiences from each student-athlete causing a strong validity and reliability throughout the study. Once all transcriptions were deemed acceptable, the process of developing a thematic structure occurred. The transcriptions were discussed between the primary researcher and thesis chair in great detail to ensure that the chosen themes accurately represented the experience of each participant.

Developing A Thematic Structure. After the interviews had been transcribed, the primary researcher and thesis chair carefully went through each transcription to pick out important information. The information included words or phrases, which allowed the development of meaning units. Once this was done, the participant had the opportunity to go through his or her own transcript and make any changes to assure that all information was presented appropriately. This process would validate all material that was being included in the present study. Meaning units are specific information categorized into

themes that are found within the transcribed interviews (Creswell, 2012). After several strong meaning units had been declared, smaller units, or subthemes were formed in order to support the six main themes. With detailed meaning units and subunits, the experience that is being explained was described with great detail and understanding via quotes and specific thoughts that the participants expressed in order to provide an essence of the experience they dealt with when they lost a teammate unexpectedly.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Thematic Structure

After analyzing a total of 9 phenomenological transcripts, a total of 126 meaning units were discovered, then were ordered into different themes (see table 2). The structure resulted in six higher order themes; Emotional response, Behavioral response, Faith, Social support, Team cohesion, and Change in life perspective. Each higher order theme created a vivid explanation from the participants in his or her experience of dealing with the unexpected death of a teammate.

Table 2. *Higher and Lower Order Themes of Participants' Experience of the death of a teammate and Sample Representative Meaning Units*

Higher Order Themes	Lower Order Themes	Representative Meaning Units
Emotional Response	Explainable	I went straight into denial I would say I was pretty in shock. That's when the grief came I was scared, very very scared
	Unexplainable	I was probably still in shock I think I experienced every emotion known to man It's an emotion or feeling that I had never experienced and it was tough to deal with I seriously felt like I was in a movie for parts of it
Behavioral Response	Isolation	I locked myself in my room I just wanted out I wasn't really prepared to listen to anybody talk about it I didn't need to talk to anybody
	Coping	But then it [basketball] did become a coping skill There is a lot of running and not much time to sit and think
	Tributes	My go to stress reliever is exercise There is a tree planted for him We got a bench dedicated in his memory

		<p>We all just recently got her number tattooed</p> <p>We wore ribbons with her initials</p> <p>We had a patch on our jerseys</p> <p>God had his plan</p> <p>All I could do was pray</p> <p>Those who religious were able to seek more comfort</p> <p>I was mad at God</p> <p>I talk to him every now and then whenever I think about him</p> <p>I do believe that he is still talking with me</p> <p>She was shining out through me q sometimes</p> <p>I still see signs from her</p> <p>She is watching over us</p> <p>But they were strong. They let us do what we needed</p> <p>He was very open and was very warm</p> <p>But in reality, she was our wall</p> <p>She was very accommodating. She knew that it was bigger than basketball</p> <p>My teammates and I wanted to be around each other</p> <p>If someone needed a person to lean on, we were there</p> <p>My supervisor sent me an email, and she was checking in</p> <p>Someone would photo copy their notes and give them to me</p> <p>The other team came over during warm-ups and said a prayer</p> <p>We condensed and became one again</p> <p>When one person broke down, we were always there</p> <p>We were just each other's rock through the whole situation</p> <p>We had each other as silent support</p> <p>I took this role to be strong for everyone</p> <p>But when you are grieving, does leadership matter?</p>
Faith	Religion	
	Spirituality	
Social Support	Coaches	
	Teammates	
	Others	
Team Cohesion	Unity	
	Leadership	

		It was necessary for myself to lead in a way that was strong
	Team As A Family	Your team becomes your family
		We are close almost like a family
		All she wanted was for use to be a family
Change of Perspective- Motivational		Your teammates become your sisters
		How I am going to get there and make the guy upstairs smile
		The memory of him motivated me to work hard
	Reflective	We have to do this for him
		I can really honor her in a way I feel like she would want me to
		From a life perspective, is you can't really control when you go
		Looking back with more of a positive light than feeling sorry
		You should always live your life to the fullest

Table 3. *Number of Participants Contributing to each Lower Order Theme*

Higher Order Themes	Lower Order Themes	N
Emotional Response	Explainable	9
	Unexplainable	7
Behavioral Response	Isolation	5
	Coping	9
	Tributes	8
Faith	Religion	5
	Spirituality	9
Social Support	Teammates	9
	Coaches	7
	Other(s)	9
Team Cohesion	Unity	9
	Leadership	6
	Team as a Family	7

Change in life Perspective	Motivational	8
	Reflective	7

Emotional Response

The higher order theme of emotional response is what the participants were feeling and thinking internally when going through the experience. The explanation of emotional responses was the most prominent theme throughout data collection. This theme also included two lower order themes; explainable and unexplainable emotions.

Explainable. Participants provided many explanations of emotional responses that they clearly understood and were able to explain during the interview process. Many of the participants stated that one of the initial emotions that they experienced was denial. “You know, like that makes no sense, I saw him yesterday, it was his birthday yesterday. Like these things happen, but they don’t happen here, they don’t happen at this school, they don’t happen to me, this isn’t real,” (Carey, former swimmer, 27 years old), and “I went straight into denial. I was like no... you are lying. This is a stupid joke, what are you thinking. Why would you play this kind of joke on anybody?” (Sarah, current basketball player, 19 years of age). Shock was also a theme that almost all participants discussed “I would say I was pretty in shock. And then the funeral hit, and that’s when the grief came, and just the emotion and realization that I am never going to see my best friend again... we are never going to play together again”, (Sophie, former volleyball player, 25 years old) as well as, “the realization hit me all at once. I was scared, very very scared. And then I was probably still in shock”, (Emma, current basketball player, 20 years old).

The levels of sadness that individuals experienced were new. One participant explained what sadness meant to him during that time and still in his current state:

Something that I have always thought about a lot since that event was how much of my life with him would he be involved in. To what extent would we still be in touch? You know, we had planned to go to his place in the summer time. What would happen the next year? So many good times if we had him here. I always think about that. It's incredibly sad to not be able to live that out or have the opportunity to do all of that. But it is certainly something I think about a lot (Zach, former swimmer, 25 years old).

Unexplainable. As the participants spoke on behalf of their emotions, they often could not explain the sensation that they had to go through. Due to the overwhelming number of emotions and intensity, participants were not able to explain all emotions clearly, but did feel that they were important during the experience. "I think I experienced every emotion known to man...like, mad confused, sad. I don't even know how to explain it. It's all like so unexplainable" (Sarah). One participant spoke of how long it took her to get rid of these overwhelming emotions, "I had gotten to a point about three years ago, where I can think about him and not always become overwhelmed by the thought of him. I can talk to him and check in with him from time to time. But it took a long time" (Carey).

As young collegiate student-athletes, many of the participants had never had to deal with a death before in their lives. For this reason, there were new and unfamiliar emotions that were experienced. As some participants tried to talk about them, there was no specific clarity for what was being experienced. "... It's an emotion or feeling that I

had never experienced and it was tough to deal with. I didn't know how to react. "I didn't know where to seek comfort or how to get over it" (Christian, former soccer player, 30 years old). For others, this unfamiliar feeling felt dreamlike or movie like. "It was just... it was so bizarre because I seriously felt like I was in a movie for parts of it." (Emily, former marching band member, 24 years old), and "I remember walking home and just having no idea what was going on. Like this must have been a terrible dream, or a terrible nightmare rather" (Zach).

Although emotions were prominent throughout data collection, emotions tend to lead into how a person reacts or behaves. Therefore, the behaviors that individuals were able to remember throughout this experience become important to discuss as well. The relationship between emotions and behaviors is one of the most important factors to consider when going through this kind of experience.

Behavioral Response

It is important to note the behaviors that each participant recognized himself or herself doing when dealing with the death of a teammate. Many behaviors were said to be out of the ordinary from normal routine. Within this higher order theme, there were three supportive lower order themes: Isolation, Coping, and Tributes.

Isolation. Many of the participants felt that they could deal with this experience alone; therefore, many of them shut themselves out from the world and from their teams. They felt that by isolating themselves, they would be able to come to terms with what had happened and understand what to do next. "I was very very sad. I locked myself in my room that evening. I tried to find positives that could come out of it. But nothing ever

showed itself for a long time,” (Carey) and “I didn’t want to accept it and I wasn’t really prepared to listen to anybody talk about it any longer. I just wanted out,” (Zach). Another participant thought, “I don’t need to talk to anybody, no one is going to understand what I am going through,” (Sandra, former soccer player, 27 years old).

I literally shut people out for two weeks. I stayed in my room by myself. I would only go out to eat. But I usually would go to the cafeteria, get my food and bring it back to my room. I just kind of isolated myself for a good two weeks. Just tried to cope with it alone. Initially I shut them [teammates] out. They would send me text messages asking if I was okay, if they could come over and see how I was doing. And I said no, I wanted to be alone and that I didn’t want to see anybody (Christian).

Coping. Behavioral responses were actions that participants took in order to help themselves cope with the situation at hand, however there were several other ways that were used to cope. Collegiate athletes spend a lot of time in practice and competition. These are places where they become comfortable and do more than participate in sport, they also use these times as a place to think and reflect. Therefore, many student-athletes explained that they used their sport as a way to get their mind off of the lost teammate; “It was tough at first, but once you get into sport, you kind of forget outside factors. Once you are in the games, you are fine,” (Christian), as well as “but then it [basketball] did become a coping skill. I was with my whole team and we were playing a sport that we knew she loved. We could finish her dream for her” (Sarah). Another participant explained that due to the nature of the sport, she was able to distract herself from the situation as well:

I mean, luckily we play a sport that is very fast paced. So there is a lot of running and not much time to sit and think, like in golf or something. So it's almost better because we aren't thinking about anything but the game, and that helps. (Sandra)

Some student-athletes also found relief in exercise outside of his or her designated sport:

My go to stress reliever is exercise. I would go run. One time I went to go to the gym to shoot. I didn't actually shoot the ball; I just ended up kicking it around the gym. So I am very much a physical person when it comes to stress relief. So I was doing any exercise that I could get my hands on (Emma)

In addition to sport and exercise, participants found other ways to cope as well. "I guess I made myself occupied so I didn't really think about it," (Kara, current basketball player, 20 years old). This particular participant used a form of coping to help others and distract her mind in order to avoid her own emotions. Others used food to cope, "I would drink chocolate milk, and eat a lot of chocolate," (Emma), as well as drugs and alcohol, "So at least I had a 'drug' [marijuana] to fall back on and mellow out and calm down ..." (Sandra).

Tributes. After participants were able to accept that they had lost a teammate, all of them did something in order to keep that teammate with them during competition and training. Some tributes were meaningful and significant to the team and campus community, "his legacy lives on at the College, there is a tree planted for him,"(Carey), and "we got a bench dedicated in his memory on campus" (Emily). While others had tributes that were honorable within just the team, "We all just recently got her number tattooed on us. Every single player, and even the coaching staff...and it was just like... it seems like a simple tattoo, but it really shows that we have each other's backs" (Kara).

We changed our warm up shirts that we wore from the memorial game on. It had her number and “forever family” on it. After every game, we would all come in and chant her name. Every championship we won, instead of holding up number one, we held up number 44 because that was her number. And most recently, the whole team got a tattoo with her number, or a quote she said or something relating to her. (Emma)

However, with the tribute and being a successful team, one individual had a bit more of a confusing experience in regards to the tributes that were given towards her teammate:

We wore ribbons with her initials; we had a patch on our jerseys, and all this stuff. It was really great to honor her in a way, but there was another side to it where like we kept bringing it back, and that’s what it was all about. And like, I don’t know it was conflicting. Like if we didn’t do that stuff we were forgetting about her, we aren’t honoring her. But then on the other hand, it was like everything is about the loss. So I don’t know, it was conflicting in my head. (Sophie)

All lower order themes described specific behaviors that the participants did that were out of the ordinary within each of their routines that played a large role in his or her experience. However, several participants expressed their views about faith and explaining how they spent time praying for their passed teammate. Participants discussed faith in regards to religious views and spirituality. Committing to a particular faith is an important behavior; therefore, it is discussed with further detail including both behaviors towards religion and spirituality.

Faith

Faith became a higher order theme for this study, as many participants touched upon how religion was influential through their experience. Some participants were not as religious, however they did find some spiritual sense in order to help guide them and overcome the challenging emotions and behaviors that they had initially experienced in these situations.

Religion. Several participants turned to what they considered to be a higher power in both positive and negative manners during the process of accepting the death of a teammate. One student-athlete explained, “we were all close, just saying that this was sort of the way it was meant to happen, and that God had his plan,” (Zach). Another student-athlete continued to use religion through the process in order to accept the situation, “I convinced myself that there is nothing that I can do. Me worrying about it is not going to help. All I could do was pray and go to sleep” (Kara). Those with a coach that was more religious also seemed to find more support as well knowing that there was relatedness that they could both agree upon, “so I think those who were a bit more spiritual or religious were able to seek more comfort from him [coach] because of his faith,” (Christian). However, some blamed God for such a tragic event, and were not able to accept the situation as easily. “I was mad at God. I was like why would he let something like this happen, and to have all of us go through this....She did no wrong to anyone” (Sarah). As religion was important to some individuals throughout the study, some did not see themselves as religious, but did see themselves as spiritual. Spirituality is not a commitment to a specific God, but an understanding of the presence of his or her lost teammate.

Spirituality. Many participants used religion to help in the coping process, however, those who were not as religious but still spiritual spoke about how their teammate may not have physically been there, but spiritually was. For example, Carey stated “I talk to him every now and then whenever I think about him. Just to do a little mental checkup.... I do believe that he is still talking with me, but I don’t know if I believe in heaven and hell and afterlife and stuff like that. But I do still feel like his presence is here.” One participant felt her teammates presence within herself while on the court, “It was definitely her... she was shining out through me sometimes. I felt that was special. I felt that I kind of knew the things that she would want or the things that she would say, in the games or during practices,” (Kara). Many people would see coincidences or odd moments reminding them of their teammates. They explained that this was a sign that their teammate was watching over them, “I always hope that she is watching. All of us do. She has a Facebook page and people still write on it. She was number 26. So people will be like, ‘Oh I was 26th in line,’ or ‘I was in seat 26’ and ‘I was thinking about you....’ I think we all do little things like that to remember her” (Sandra), explaining that the spirit of her teammate is found throughout the entire team at unspecified times. Another student-athlete explains the feeling of her lost teammate still communicating with the team:

I think she saw a bigger picture than the rest of us. I don’t know why it happened, but she makes me feel okay about the situation. Because I still see signs from her, our whole team did. And when our entire team is seeing signs, its like.... She’s telling us that she is still with us even though physically she can’t be there she is

still with us in our hearts. She brought us all together. She is watching over us,
(Kara).

Although participants found faith to be comforting and supportive throughout the experience of losing a teammate, support was also found in other facets. Other people and social aspects were significant throughout the coping process for several individuals. Participants spoke about how after initial isolation phases of this process, other people and social support were helpful in accepting the situation.

Social Support

For these participants, at the time of their athletic career in college, social support was a critical aspect that each of them spoke about, which was then created into a higher order theme. Social support was found from coaches, teammates, and other groups, which were lower order themes for this study. Other groups included family, parents, and the campus community (i.e., other athletic teams on campus and in the same sport). Academic faculty also played an important role for several of these participants as well, considering that being a student-athlete revolved around balancing academics as well as athletics year round. It is important to highlight that throughout all facets of social support given, social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat) played a large role.

Coaches. Coaches may be some of the most influential people that a student-athlete encounters during his/her collegiate career. Knowing that a coach and an student-athlete come in contact almost every day, a coach often times will provide student-athletes with more knowledge than just on the court, but in life as well. Several participants explained how motivational and supportive their coaches were throughout the process, “Our coaches did an absolutely amazing job. They went through it just like

we were. But they were strong. They let us do what we needed. If we couldn't practice, we couldn't practice" (Emma). Another participant explained how significant the coach's presence was, "he played a very big role.... he was very open and was very warm in the situation. So any time you needed something, he was always available no matter busy he was" (Christian). In addition to this, one individual explained how her coaches had a balance of comfort and strength:

My coaches they obviously haven't dealt with that before. They haven't coached when they have experienced that or had to handle it. I think they did well. One coach broke down in front of all us. But our head coach, you never knew what she is thinking. She is tough. People were kind of getting mad at that because they didn't feel she was showing emotion. But in reality, she was our wall. I don't think they saw that. People were crying and they didn't want to practice. And she handled it well. She told us that we could take things as slow or as quickly as we needed. She was very accommodating. She knew that it was bigger than basketball. (Kara)

However, some participants felt that the support their coach gave was not appropriate or what they needed in order to help process and cope during these difficult times. Some felt that the coach did not truly understand the situation, and was not able to relate the same way that the team did. "He wanted the team to be together. He didn't want anyone to be separated. And it was just like...that part was hard. And I am sure that he meant well by it... but he forgot that we are individuals in the process," (Sophie). One participant reflected on this experience in an extremely negative manner due to the way

that her head coach handled the situation. She explained how she disagreed with the approach that was taken by the coach and other athletic faculty:

They [coaches] can really make or break a lot of these kids. You can make things better or you can make things worse...I think that the head coach needs to understand that they have a lot of responsibility and that they need to be very sensitive to every player. It doesn't matter if they were involved, if they did this or that. They are working with kids....I would have to say the head coach, and the assistants and the trainers, they need to realize how to be sensitive about it and not twist the knife. (Sandra)

Teammates. As an athlete, the participants explained that they spent most of their time with their teams, on and off the court; therefore having social support from teammates was a crucial aspect in the experience of losing a teammate. One individual explained that all she cared about was the presence of her teammates, "My teammates and I wanted to be around each other. It didn't matter if you were there or not there. We just wanted to be around each other, whether we were at the bar crying, or we were at each other's dorm rooms. We just wanted to be around each other" (Sandra). Another individual explained, "We are all on the same floor and we are all together. So if someone needed a person to lean on, we were there," (Kara). One participant explained that just being in the presence of his teammates was a strong support system. Sometimes it wasn't necessary to use words when the people you were around understood the experience:

I can't remember talking about it at length with any member in particular. I think that most of us didn't really want to talk about it together because so many other

people were asking us about it, like how we were doing. So being together on the team was like a rest bit away from all of that, where we could just be with one another. We had each other as like silent support I guess. (Carey)

Understanding that each teammate had a different experience, teams were still able to support each other throughout the challenge whether it was during competition, practice, or outside of sport. Social support was also received from teammates by social media. Many individuals would text each other, use Instagram, Facebook and other applications in order to keep each other motivated and positive.

Others. Family members are usually some of the first people that a young person turns to in order to seek comfort during the grieving process. One participant explained her relationship with her mother during this time:

She was just like the shoulder to cry on. My mom was like... I could be fine in front of everyone when we were together, but when my mom comes and gives me a hug, like she is the person that I can break down to. And like just being completely robbed of emotion around her (Sophie).

Knowing that being a student-athlete is difficult, it was apparent that academic faculty did play a role in many student-athletes' experiences. One individual who attended a large school explained how she had several faculty members monitoring her:

I don't remember who messaged me first, maybe my new supervisor sent me an email, and she was checking in, and I didn't email her back for whatever reason. I just didn't want to talk about it. Then the dean of undergraduate students emailed me. There were so many people. And I didn't respond to him either. Then the Jesuit who was associated with the band called me saying that the dean and

my advisor hadn't heard from me. He just wanted to make sure that everything was okay. I explained that everything wasn't okay. (Emily)

Not only were faculty on campus concerned in regards to social support, but fellow students as well, "If I needed a hand, someone was always willing to help...if I would walk out of class because I was crying, someone would photo copy their notes and give them to me. Little things like that. It's the little things that make the situation so much easier" (Emma).

Some individuals explained that they received social support from opposing teams verbally as well as through Facebook, "the other team actually came over during warm ups and said a prayer with us and gathered us in a circle... it was very special to us" (Kara), "...even at NCAAs, teams would come up to us and be like, 'hey, I'm so and so from this school, I just wanted to check up and see how you guys are doing...'" and that was always appreciated" (Carey). Knowing that the teammate was in the thoughts of teams throughout other schools was something that many of these individuals did not ask for, but felt was extremely supportive and they were thankful for what other student-athletes did for them.

Participants explained that having their teammates around and supporting them was crucial for understanding and accepting the death of a teammate. However, there was more than social support found throughout teammates. Team cohesion became an interesting factor throughout many interviews. There was an idea of being family, and wanting to stay strong as a team in memory of the lost teammate thought multiple interviews.

Team Cohesion

Knowing that there was a significant amount of social support found within the team, this led into a strong development of social cohesion as well. Team cohesion became a higher ordered theme comprised of both unity and leadership as supporting lower order themes. Throughout the experience of losing a teammate, social cohesion became significant for all participants. They felt that the team became solidified and leadership qualities stood out more than normal.

Unity. For most participants this was a life changing and challenging experience, however, being a member of a team had a lot to do with the way that each individual coped, and came to accept the loss of his or her teammate. Unity, or togetherness was a common factor throughout many of the individuals “it brought everyone back into a tight group.... we condensed and became one again. It helped” (Emma). In addition to this, another individual explained that, “That is how we met, she brought us together and now she is keeping us together,” (Kara).

We were all each other’s strengths. Always there for each other we never left each other’s side. When one person broke down, we were always there. Telling each other that everyone was okay. We were just each other’s rock through the whole situation” (Sarah).

Not only did it bring teammates together, but it also made some realize that the team was mourning together, and that was significant, “it opened my eyes to realize that we are in this together, we are going through the same thing, and we have all lost a teammate, a good friend,” (Christian).

Leadership. Several of the participants who were interviewed were team captains, seniors, or had some sort of leadership role throughout the team. The information that was given from these individuals was significant in order to see how leadership was maintained throughout the experience of losing a teammate, or if they were abandoned “I took over this role to be strong for everyone right now, and that I’ll have my time to grieve later” (Kara). A few individuals did not realize how significant their role of being a captain was, and how it would also help themselves, “I think a lot of people were looking to me for respite. To be able to talk to for a bit of guidance.... I think I was able to help people a little bit, as well as help myself in talking to them” (Christian). Others took it upon themselves to watch after their teammates to assure that everyone was safe and able to get back to training and normal life, “we had to watch everyone and make sure that everyone was okay. We basically had to bring everyone back in. We had to let everyone know that we are still here supporting everyone. This is our role, but we have to move forward” (Emma). Lastly this individual felt that she had no other choice but to be a leader, as it is her natural reaction to do so:

It was just hard. Because in every other thing, everything that was tough, as a team captain, you are looked at for your leadership. But when you are grieving.... Does leadership matter? I guess for me, at the time it did. But looking back on it, I didn’t have to do that. It was just instilled.... Like everything else we did as a team, that was my role, a leader. And so like I guess in the grieving process, I felt that it was necessary for myself to lead in a way that was strong and not be vulnerable and emotional. And I was emotional with the team, don’t get me wrong. I didn’t let it go like I needed to. (Sophie)

Team As a Family. Throughout multiple interviews, individuals would explain that being on a team was more than just a team, but closer to being a part of a family surrounded by brothers or sisters that were there for them no matter what happened. One individual stated, “Your team becomes your family...” (Sophie), and, “we are close almost like a family. He was a member of it” (Carey). Some explained that even being from different cultures, this idea of being a family was something that would always be there, “we always said that we were a family....we are all from different areas around the world. But we will always have each other’s backs” (Emma). And lastly, many explained that they wanted to remain a family in remembrance of their lost teammate, “all she [passed teammate] wanted was for use to be a family” (Kara). Another participant compared losing a teammate to losing a family member:

I guess like the fact that it wasn’t just a teammate.... you’re a college athlete, and like your teammates become your sisters. They are like your people; they are like your family. It’s just hard that it’s like a family member got taken away from you. (Sophie)

While team cohesion brought many of the teams together to practice harder and play stronger, it also created a sense of reflection and motivation throughout the team and throughout several individual student-athletes. This also brought many of the participants to change their perspective on life. The unexpected death of a teammate taught many of them new things that they were able to reflect upon now.

Change of Perspective

Due to the nature of this study, many participants reported that losing a teammate made them think in a different way, which is why the change of perspective is the last

higher order theme found throughout the study. Participants felt that they gained more of a motivational mindset in order to honor the teammate that they had lost, and carry out the dream that the teammate may have had. In addition to this, many of them acquired a different and more reflective outlook towards their sport and towards life in general. With this being said, both motivational and reflective topics are lower ordered themes.

Motivational. All of the participants throughout the study found motivation in order to make their lost teammate proud, or to fulfill the dreams that the teammate was no longer there to work towards. One student-athlete simply explained, “I would think about how I am going to get there and make the guy upstairs smile and be happy,” (Zach), and “his memory motivated me. The memory of him motivated me to work hard because that’s what he always did when he was there” (Carey). However, some used it verbally to motivate the rest of the team, “I remember in the huddle right before the game saying, ‘listen, we have to do this for him. He would be here with us right now, he would be playing and giving it his all. He would be lifting us up. He was a defender, he would be tackling...’ I tried to use him as motivation” (Christian). One individual described how she used basketball not only to cope, but as a motivational source as well, “So being able to continue to play for her... that was my outlet for everything. So I took everything out on the floor. Whatever I had, or as hard as I could or as long as I could” (Kara)

Reflective. After finding motivation, many participants found that they were very reflective towards the teammate that they had lost, which created a deeper look at why they were participating in sport as well as their perspective on life in general. Many participants were able to reflect on sport and life goals and use motivation to become more determined to reach their goals “...life is really unexpected. You should always live

your life to the fullest because that's one thing that she always said" (Sarah). "Now I want to be successful even more, because they are all things that she wanted, and she will never get.... I can really honor her in a way that I feel like she would want me to" (Kara).

I think the biggest thing from a life perspective, is you can't really control when you go. So being negative, and obviously you are going to feel sad, but if you are sad all of the time, in my opinion, I don't think you are really doing the person justice. You know, like I said it is good to reminisce and talk about the good experiences that you had. And laugh about the good in that person's life. So I think it has given me a different perspective on life. Instead of just dwelling on things, pay my respects, take time to mourn and then learn and try to move on. Not to completely forget about that person, but looking back with more of a positive light than feeling sorry for yourself because you have lost somebody.... It went from sadness to talking about the good times and the funny things. He was a good player. So all of that started to become more about not mourning the death, but let's celebrate a life (Christian).

Each participant shared his or her unique story, which resulted in understanding and capturing the essence of what they experienced when dealing with the unexpected death of a teammate. Within the six higher order themes that were found (i.e., Emotional response, Behavioral response, Faith, Social support, Team cohesion, and Change in life perspective), the results showed several different perspectives on how similarly and differently death can be experienced.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Through phenomenological interviewing, the present study was able to contribute to the understanding of the experience of the unexpected death of a teammate. Results revealed that while each individual experience is unique there are commonalities between those who experience a loss of a teammate. These factors include *emotional and behavioral responses, faith, social support, team cohesion, and change in life perspective*. While the themes are presented separately it should be noted that many of the themes are interrelated. For example, faith, or support of religion can be seen as additional social support. Also emotional and behavioral aspects are similarly related, as emotions thoughts and behaviors are constantly intertwined in most individuals.

New Findings

This study revealed new findings in regards to the social support given by coaches; support of the coach can be either positive or negative, as coaches can hold very influential roles throughout the team. Many of these student-athletes looked to their coach as a parental figure, and when the coach is not supportive or not understanding, the individual may feel that they are alone throughout the experience. This study showed that if a student-athlete is not positively supported in a sensitive way, the situation could become detrimental to the life of the individual.

This study also revealed that technology and social media were used throughout many participants' experiences. Most participants found out about the death of their teammate through text messages. Many participants were contacted through Facebook by other teams about the situation; others would use Instagram in remembrance of the

teammate. With social media continuously growing, this study shows the start of how it can play a significant role in different ways that an individual can be supported during tragic events such as the death of a teammate.

In regards to team cohesion, this study found that this strong bond meant participants considered the team more of a family than a team, which was a new finding throughout the literature and previous studies. More than half of the participants explained that their teammates were more than just teammates. Some considered them close friends, but most of them considered their team as a family. Losing a teammate was comparable to losing a family member for these participants.

A final unique finding of the present study involved participants using their sport, or different types of exercise, as a coping mechanism. Participants that were involved in fast paced sports felt that it was a good tool to get their mind off of the situation and help overcome grief. Many participants explained that when they were on the field, they would remember their teammate, however they would not have time to think about the sadness of this situation.

Connections To Previous Literature

The results of this study appear to be consistent with several other studies regarding death. The most prominent theory regarding the grieving process is Kubler-Ross's stages of grief (1967). This theory explained that grief is experienced in a specific order: isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The findings of the present study found what the Kubler-Ross theory has explained. However, no participants from the present study expressed any sort of bargaining, and there was no specific order in which these aspects were experienced. Maciejewski (2007) conducted a study using a

revised complicated grief inventory and found that acceptance is more likely to occur rather than disbelief; results from the present study were slightly different. Participants throughout the present study all experienced disbelief immediately, and found it challenging to be able to accept the situation. Although there were no significant new findings, the participants' inability to express grief specifically is an extension to the literature.

The results of this study also appear to be consistent with John Bowlby's attachment theory (1973), similar to Kublar-Ross's theory (1967) however, it is directed more towards behavioral aspects of responding to a death. Bowlby (1973) identified four stages: numbness, yearning, disorganization, and reorganization. The present study found participants experienced all four stages after a loss of a teammate. Almost all participants felt that the situation was unreal or dreamlike which coincides with the feeling of numbness. The idea that the teammate would walk in the door again relates to yearning. Several participants felt that his or her daily routines were irregular (disorganization), however after accepting the death of the teammate, they were able to go back to their normal routines (organization).

The study also supported a key element in a study done by Folkman et al (1986) in regards to isolation, which is a component of avoidant coping. Half of the participants revealed that they initially felt that they could cope by themselves; therefore they shut out all teammates, coaches, and friends that would normally act as social support during a difficult time like this. However, after several weeks of doing this, isolation was no longer effective, which slightly differs from Folkman's research. Another factor found throughout the present study that is an extension of Folkman et al.'s (1986) avoidant

coping is that many participants used avoidant coping in order to escape their own emotions. For example, some would cook, or take care of their team, or focus on homework so they would not have to deal with their emotions.

The results of this study appear to be consistent with Kwilecki's (2011) research regarding after death communications (ADC's). Kwilecki's research explained that during the grieving stages many people become spiritual in order to accept the loss of a loved one, or for the present study, a teammate. ADCs include experiences such as images, voices, odors, dreams, unusual activity in electrical appliances, meaningful timed appearances of animals and people, and symbolic phenomena. These experiences are thought to be the presence of the person who has passed communicating with those who are still alive. These ghost-like experiences are found throughout both religious and non-religious individuals. The present study correlates with Kwilecki's research very strongly, as all participants explained different scenarios of feeling the presence of their lost teammate in and out of their respective sport.

Cole et al. (1994) explained that when an individual is grieving and has depressive symptoms social bonds are often broken and sometimes rejected. The present study both supported and contradicted this idea, as there was a mix of positive and negative social support. In correlation with Cole et al (1994), several participants explained that they did not feel they could talk to or open up to friends or faculty that had not gone through the experience. They felt that they would not fully understand the situation; therefore, they became frustrated with those individuals. However, some participants did feel family members could comfort them even though they had not experienced the death of a teammate.

Horn (2012) discussed the key concepts of task and social cohesion, and the present study found that when a team was able to increase social cohesion, task cohesion was likely to increase as well. Both types of cohesion were found within this study; however, task cohesion was increased by the team wanting to come together in order to honor the lost teammate. The present study revealed similar findings to Gersick (1988) who found that if teams were able to manage and overcome challenging situations the team would be able to see a much stronger bond throughout. The present study added to those of Gersick's, in that several individuals considered this to be challenging, but by coming together as a team, they were able to bond and understand each other on a different level.

The present study also supported the findings of Lewis (2014) in regards to feelings of inspiration and motivation to better oneself after experiencing a death. Several of the participants were motivated to better themselves and to better the team. They found motivation because they felt that they needed to fulfill the dream of the past teammate. Many of them explained that you never know when you will go or what will happen, so you should cherish the lives of your teammates. Thus, this new, reflective perspective is an extension of the study done by Lewis (2014).

Applied Implications

The present study revealed important information for practical applications for several parties that are involved with an individual when experiencing the death of a teammate.

Sport Psychology Consultants and Licensed Mental Health Practitioners.

There are many aspects that need to be considered regarding how professionals approach and handle unexpected deaths.

- Treat each athlete as an individual and not as a team.
- Understand that they are going through a normal grieving process, but have additional stressors such as sport and academics that need to be balanced as well as possible media exposure and concern from the campus community.
- Be sensitive, and understand that student-athletes may show signs of depression. Nothing should be overlooked.
- Some student-athletes may grieve longer than others, do not to rush them or else they may create a negative experience.
- Student- athletes feel that they need to isolate themselves, and that they don't need any help from consultants or practitioners. However, many individuals explained that when reflecting back on the situation, they wish that they had taken the time and opportunity to attend counseling sessions to help them through the process.
- Implement mandatory intake sessions. Individuals explained that they wished that they had mandatory counseling sessions during this experience, because they didn't feel that it was a necessity at the time.
- Be mindful of the use of social media/ technology. This may provide additional assistance in understanding the mentality and state the student-athlete is experiencing.

In addition to these factors, knowing that for many participants, this was the first death they had ever had to experience, many emotions and behaviors were unfamiliar to them and difficult to understand and process. Several participants explained that during

the experience, they had feelings of depression. From a clinical standpoint, this is something that needs to be addressed immediately. If the student-athlete is referred for an initial session with a licensed psychologist on campus, this practitioner has to be prepared to work with a student-athlete, meaning they must understand specific stressors that the student- athlete may be battling. If the psychologist has never worked with a student- athlete, or does not understand the role of a student-athlete, it may be crucial that this individual seeks additional or alternative help that is more appropriate for the student- athlete.

Student-Athletes. The study also presents valuable information for other athletes that may go through or have gone through the death of a teammate. Knowing that there are similarities, and new and uncomfortable emotions are not abnormal or out of the ordinary. These emotions are typical for the grieving process. As student-athletes are young, this experience may be the first time they have had to experience any type of death, but knowing that you are not alone and that isolation is not necessarily the most beneficial option is an essential factor to keep in mind. For athletes, it is important to:

- Recognize any clinical symptoms and assure that the student- athletes are reaching out for help. All campuses have services that can be utilized. If services are unavailable, hotlines are available at all times.
- Reach out to teammates, as it can be helpful and comforting to be around each other. Although student-athletes may need to grieve individually, all teammates are going through a similar situation; therefore they may find relief within one another.

- Use tributes to honor the lost teammates, but also as a way to help individual student-athletes and the team cope with the situation. Objects that can be seen are a powerful reminder of the life of the individual and motivator to continue living the life that is provided.
- Do not be ashamed to turn to religion to assist in coping.
- Do not be afraid to express emotions. Often times keeping emotions locked inside leads to anger and frustration.
- As a captain, be sure to address individual emotions and challenges before taking care of the team. Be aware of how each teammate is reacting and see how the team is responding as a unit. Assure that there are no harmful or abnormal behaviors within any individuals throughout the team.
- Be aware of what student-athletes are posting on social media in regards to reactions to the death. Anything that does not want to be seen should not be posted. During emotional times, things may be posted that may seem inappropriate at a later date.
- Understand that this is a difficult time for all parties involved. Although it is frustrating, be patient and let other people around grieve as needed.

Coaches. Coaches have a dramatic impact on athlete's lives, and are also often seen as parental figures during an individual's collegiate career. The coaches need to:

- Understand how difficult this kind of situation is for the student-athletes. Take time to grieve individually, but understand that the team is in need of assistance as well.

- Set aside personal beliefs or influences that may discourage, harm or upset any individuals. Be sensitive to all religious and cultural views.
- Find a balance of comfort, support, motivation and strength at the same time.
- Be attentive to detail to see that each individual eventually returns to his or her normal routine in participation to sport. If any individual shows unusual behaviors, it is the job of the coach to know whom the athlete needs to be referred to for further assistance.
- Encourage student-athletes to seek additional help with the counseling center on campus.
- If a coach is not insightful towards each individual, it can create a negative and detrimental experience to the individuals' participation in sport, academics, and life perspective in general.

Academic Faculty. Academic professors and other faculty play a large role in this experience as well. Being a student-athlete is a challenge in itself, however when going through the death of a teammate, academic performance has a chance of decreasing; attendance, participation and grades can be dramatically impacted in a negative way. Professor's need to:

- Understand the situation of the student. Be open to working with the student to assure that they are maintaining acceptable grades as well as a positive state of mental health.

- Reach out to student-athletes if and recognize if the student is struggling, or create an open line of communication if the student-athlete feels the need to reach out for additional assistance.
- Reinforce office hours and tutoring services to the individual.
- Do not oversee an athlete that is experiencing grief or high levels of stress, the student may become discouraged and quit before thinking twice about their position as a student.

Athletic and Academic Administration. In addition to academic faculty, administration throughout the school and the athletic department play a role when a team may experience the death of a teammate.

- The athletic department needs to implement a specific plan that each member of the faculty participates in. For example, there needs to be one individual that is contacted to make referrals for the student-athletes.
- One individual should be assigned to maintain contact with student-athletes. This person should check up on the student-athletes, or assures that the coaches are checking in with all of his or her athletes.
- The athletic director should be in communication with psychologists on campus as well as sport psychologists to assure that the student-athletes are utilizing the services that are provided for them.
- The athletic director should create and implement crisis management workshops for faculty, coaches as well as student-athletes.
- The athletic director can invite professional athletes and/ or collegiate athletes for seminars that the student-athletes can attend. This will allow

the student-athletes to be aware of the situation, and here how this can be experienced first handedly.

- Have information that is easily accessible for all parties involved in the situation in regards to mental health support and counseling services if needed?

If every person within the athletic facility has a specific role, this assures that the situation can be handled affectively and appropriately without leaving out crucial information or steps throughout the process.

Families. In regards to families with student-athlete children that are trying to accept and go through this challenging situation, many families are faced with a great distance between themselves and the college. Obviously international students-athletes are often are not able to spend time with their families so may need additional social support. It is crucial that families reach out to their child as much as possible to assure that they are okay. Student-athletes may put up a wall or tell coaches and friends that they are okay when in reality they are not. Collegiate student- athletes are still young, and can still feel uncomfortable with being vulnerable around their own family members. Parents need to carefully listen to their son or daughter, knowing that they can be in contact with the school if they feel that there is a serious problem in regards to the mental state of their son or daughter.

Future Research

The current findings have strong implications for future research. Given that this is the only phenomenological study regarding the experience of the death of a teammate, more research appears warranted on this topic area. Studies such as the death of a

teammate due to suicide, or the expected death (i.e., to illness) of a teammate could be valuable research to this field. Also, it may be interesting to compare research between high school, collegiate, and professional athletes in regards to this subject matter as well. Furthermore, additional research may be beneficial to look at psychological abnormalities or clinical conditions that student-athletes may have experienced during the aftermath of losing a teammate unexpectedly. Future research on perspectives of coaches, administration and additional athletic faculty would be beneficial as well. This can further assist in developing test protocol for crisis management interventions. If different situations of a teammate's death are studied and understood, this can not only assist in further research, but can also assist the student-athletes and athletic faculty if this happens to them.

Limitations

There are at least four limitations found within the present study. First, the sample did not account for the experience of all collegiate athletes who have lost a teammate. Knowing that each experience is unique, some student-athletes that did not participate in the study may have disagreed or experienced different aspects of reactions to their loss. The next limitation is that some participants may not have shared all details that they experienced when losing a teammate due to the nature of the topic. Next, because the majority of the participants were team captains, this may have created a skew in the results in regards to how a leader should act in these kinds of situations. Lastly, because the researcher has experienced the death of a teammate, there may have been a bias even though a bracketing interview had been conducted prior to the data collection.

Conclusion

The death of a teammate is a tragic and challenging event for student-athletes to experience. There are several factors that play a part into this experience. The collegiate athlete participants throughout this study all had a unique experience, but there were several commonalities found throughout all of the participants. All participants shared different memories and experiences, but the experience can be captured in six major themes; *Emotional responses, behavioral responses, faith, social support, team cohesion and a change in life perspective*. The present research contributes to the literature by providing a detailed investigation on an experience that can be a sensitive and avoided topic throughout the field of sports.

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Appendix A

Barry University Informed Consent Form For use with Skype

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is A Phenomenological study: Experiencing the death of a teammate. The research is being conducted by Lauren Elberty, a student in the Sport and Exercise Sciences Department at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology. The aims of the research are to understand the experience of losing a teammate due to unexpected death.

In accordance with these aims, the following procedures will be used: a detailed description of the issue will be sought through a one-time interview, which will later be analyzed to draw meaning from your experiences. We anticipate the number of participants to be approximately 30 people. If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following: Participate in either a face to face or Skype interview lasting between 30 to 90 minutes, or until you have expressed your experience to your satisfaction. Prior to the conduction of the interview, you will chose a pseudonym (fake name) in order to keep your identity anonymous. You will initially be asked one open ended question in which you will respond with as much detail as you can. Additional follow up questions may be asked if needed in order to direct the interview or add more detail. The interview will be digitally recorded and then transcribed (i.e., type it out on paper) by the primary researcher for further analysis.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate or should you choose to not answer any question or drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects to you. Although there are no direct benefits to you, your participation in this study may help our understanding of the experience of dealing with the death of a teammate. There are no known risks. However, the interviewing process may bring up unpleasant memories or emotional distress. If this does occur, the researcher will provide you with a referral sheet for numerous counseling services. The phone number for the crisis hotline is 1-800-784-2433.

As a research participant, information you provide will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. As this project may involve the use of Skype: to prevent others from eavesdropping on communications and to prevent impersonation or loss of personal information, Skype issues everyone a "digital certificate" which is an electronic credential that can be used to establish the identity of a Skype user, wherever that user may be located. Further, Skype uses well-known standards-based encryption algorithms to protect Skype users' communications from falling into the hands of hackers and criminals. In so doing, Skype helps ensure user's privacy as well as the integrity of the data being sent from one user to another. If you have further concerns regarding Skype privacy, please consult the Skype privacy policy. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher will establish a separate Skype account for this research project only. After each communication, the researcher will delete the conversation history. Once this is done, the conversation cannot be recovered.

Any published results of the research will refer to group averages only and no names will be used in the study. After receiving written informed consent and conducting the interview the lead researcher will upload the audio files onto her password-protected computer and will delete the files from the recorder. The researcher will then transcribe the audiotapes verbatim and remove any information, which may identify you, or others named in the interview in order to maintain confidentiality. The transcript will be emailed back to you to assure accuracy. If you feel that you have been misinterpreted, the transcript will be collected, corrected and returned. This process will continue until you are satisfied with the transcript. Hard copies of transcriptions will be stored in the investigator's office at home in a locked filing cabinet. This signed consent form will be filed separately from the transcripts in a different locked draw of the filing cabinet. All word files of the transcriptions and audio files will be kept on the researchers' password-protected computer. All data transcripts and additional data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years upon completion of the study and will be kept indefinitely. All audio files will be deleted immediately after they have been transcribed.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Lauren Elberty, at (908) 752-0919 or Lauren.elberty@mymail.barry.edu, my supervisor, Dr. Duncan Simpson, at (305) 899-4890 or Dsimpson@barry.edu, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020.

If you are satisfied with the information provided and are willing to participate in this research, please signify your consent by signing this consent form.

Voluntary Consent

I acknowledge that I have been informed of the nature and purposes of this experiment by Lauren Elberty and that I have read and understand the information presented above, and that I have received a copy of this form for my records. I give my voluntary consent to participate in this experiment.

Signature of Participant

Date

Researcher

Date

Witness

Date

(Witness signature is required only if research involves pregnant women, children, other vulnerable populations, or if more than minimal risk is present.)

Appendix B

Barry University
Cover Letter

Dear Research Participant:

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is “A Phenomenological study: Experiencing the death of a teammate.” The research is being conducted by Lauren Elberty, a student in the Sport and Exercise Sciences Department at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology. The aims of the research are to understand the experience of losing a teammate due to unexpected death.

In accordance with these aims, the following procedures will be used: a detailed description of the issue will be sought through an interview, which will later be analyzed to draw meaning from your experiences. I anticipate the number of participants to be approximately 30 people. If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following: Participate in either a face to face or Skype interview lasting between 30 and 90 minutes, or until you have expressed your experience to your satisfaction. You will initially be asked one open ended question in which you will respond with as much detail as you can. Additional follow up questions may be asked if needed in order to direct the interview or add more detail. The interview will be digitally recorded and then transcribed (i.e., type it out on paper) by the primary researcher for further analysis. Once your interview has been transcribed, it will be returned to you via email. This will allow you to look at your transcript to be sure it accurately portrays what you were trying to say in your interview. You may choose to omit, add, or modify any part of the interview in order to provide a more accurate description of your experience.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects to you. Also, there are no known risks to you presented through involvement in the study. However, the interviewing process may bring up unpleasant memories or emotional distress. If this does occur, the researcher will provide you with a referral sheet for numerous counseling services. If needed, the phone number for the crisis hotline is 1-800-784-2433. Although, there are no direct benefits to you, your participation in this study may help our understanding of the experience of dealing with the death of a teammate.

The risks of involvement in this study are minimal and may include emotional distress or discomfort. The following procedures will be used to minimize these risks: The researcher will provide a referral sheet to counseling and psychology centers that can be accessed in the participant’s residency. Although there are no direct benefits to you, your participation in this study may help our understanding of the experience of the death of a teammate.

As a research participant, information you provide will be kept anonymous, that is, no names or other identifiers will be collected on any of the instruments used. You will choose a pseudonym (fake name) prior to the start of the interview. Data will be kept in a locked file in the researcher’s office. This study will include in-person, phone and Skype

interviews. As this project may involve the use of Skype: to prevent others from eavesdropping on communications and to prevent impersonation or loss of personal information, Skype issues everyone a "digital certificate" which is an electronic credential that can be used to establish the identity of a Skype user, wherever that user may be located. Further, Skype uses well-known standards-based encryption algorithms to protect Skype users' communications from falling into the hands of hackers and criminals. In so doing, Skype helps ensure user's privacy as well as the integrity of the data being sent from one user to another. If you have further concerns regarding Skype privacy, please consult the Skype privacy policy. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher will establish a separate Skype account for this research project only. After each communication, the researcher will delete the conversation history. Once this is done, the conversation cannot be recovered.

Any published results of the research will refer to group averages only and no names will be used in the study. After receiving written informed consent and conducting the interview the lead researcher will upload the audio files onto her password-protected computer and will delete the files from the recorder. The researcher will then transcribe the audiotapes verbatim and remove any information, which may identify you, or others named in the interview in order to maintain confidentiality. The transcript will be emailed back to you to assure accuracy. If you feel that you have been misinterpreted, the transcript will be collected, corrected and returned. This process will continue until you are satisfied with the transcript. Hard copies of transcriptions will be stored in the investigator's office at home in a locked filing cabinet. This signed consent form will be filed separately from the transcripts in a different locked draw of the filing cabinet. All word files of the transcriptions and audio files will be kept on the researchers' password-protected computer. All transcripts and additional data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years upon completion of the study and will be kept indefinitely. All audio files will be deleted immediately after they have been transcribed.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Lauren Elberty, at (908) 752-0919 or Lauren.elberty@mymail.barry.edu, my supervisor, Dr. Duncan Simpson, at (305) 899-4890 or Dsimpson@barry.edu, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Lauren P. Elberty

Appendix C

Referral for counseling/ psychology services

If you wish to seek additional help after participating in this research study, please follow the provided guidelines:

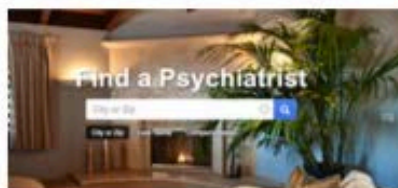
1. Visit www.psychologytoday.com



2. Navigate to the "find a therapist tab" and select appropriate option



3. Insert zip code



4. If zip code is unknown, chose from the provided list of states/ locations



5. After selecting your desired location, you will be provided with a list of professionals to chose from and contact if needed.

You may also call the National Suicide and Emotional Distress Hotline at 1.800.273.TALK/8255

Appendix D

Barry University
Research with Human Participants
Protocol Form

PROJECT INFORMATION

1. Title of Project

A Phenomenological study: Experiencing The Unexpected Death of a Teammate

2. Principal Investigator

Student Number or Faculty Number: 2892153

Name: Lauren Elberty

School – Department: HPLS- SES- SEPP

Mailing Address: 244 Three Islands Blvd #305. Hallandale Beach FL, 33009

Telephone Number: (908) 752- 0919

E-Mail Address: lauren.elberty@mymail.barry.edu

*NOTE: You **WILL NOT** receive any notification regarding the status of your proposal unless accurate and complete contact information is provided at the time the proposal is submitted.*

3. Faculty Sponsor (If Applicable)

Name: Duncan Simpson, PhD, CC-AASP

School – Department: HPLS-SES

Mailing Address: 11300 NE Second Avenue, Miami Shores, FL, 33161

Telephone Number: 305-899-4890

E-Mail Address: dsimpson@mail.barry.edu

Faculty Sponsor Signature: _____ Date: _____

4. Is an IRB Member on your Dissertation Committee? Yes No: _____

5. Funding Agency or Research Sponsor

Not Applicable

6. Proposed Project Dates

Start February 1, 2015

End February 1, 2016

Note: It is appropriate to begin your research project (i.e., the data collection process) only *after* you have been granted approval by this board. Proposals that list starting dates occurring before the date of submission will be returned without review. Please allow time for approval when determining your start date. It is best if the end date you choose is one year after the start date.

Please Provide the Information Requested Below

A. Project activity STATUS is: (Check one of the following three as appropriate.)

NEW PROJECT

PERIODIC REVIEW ON CONTINUING PROJECT

PROCEDURAL REVISION TO PREVIOUSLY APPROVED PROJECT

(Please indicate in the **PROTOCOL** section the way in which the project has been revised.)

B. This project involves the use of an **INVESTIGATIONAL NEW DRUG (IND) OR AN APPROVED DRUG FOR AN UNAPPROVED USE** in or on human participants.

YES NO

Drug name, IND number and company:

C. This project involves the use of an **INVESTIGATIONAL MEDICAL DEVICE (IMD)** or an **APPROVED MEDICAL DEVICE FOR AN UNAPPROVED USE**.

YES NO

D. This project involves the use of **RADIATION** or **RADIOISOTOPES** in or on human participants.

YES NO

E. This project involves the use of Barry University students as participants. (If any students are minors, please indicate this as well.)

YES Barry Students will be participants (Will minors be included? YES NO)

NO Barry Students will participate

F. **HUMAN PARTICIPANTS** from the following population(s) would be involved in this study:

Minors (under age 18)

Fetuses

Abortuses

Pregnant Women

Prisoners

Mentally Retarded

Mentally Disabled

Other institutionalized persons (specify)

Other (specify) College athletes who have experienced the death of a teammate

G. Total Number of Participants to be Studied:

Description of Project

1. Abstract

There has been a lack of research that has examined the experience of the death of a teammate. The present study will involve phenomenological interviews with about 30 male and female college athletes who have lost a teammate to an unexpected death in order to understand the meaning of this particular experience. This study will focus on meanings and themes specified from the athletes in order to gain a deeper understanding of this experience. All participants will initially be asked an open-ended question in order to acquire responses. The researcher expects that the findings from this study will allow future research in this field as well as provide athletic faculty with information that will help in preparing for such situations.

2. Recruitment Procedures

Describe the selection of participants and methods of recruitment, including recruitment letter if applicable. (**NOTE:** If the investigator has access to participants by virtue of his or her position within the study setting, please provide a brief description of such access.)

Pending approval of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB), the researcher will send email out to a sport psychology listserv based out of Temple University. This listserv is made up of faculty, professionals, athletes, coaches, and students who are interested in the field of sport psychology. The email will briefly explain the purpose of the study, all procedures, criteria, confidentiality, a disclaimer, as well as contact information for those interested in participating (Appendix A). The same posting will also be posted on a Facebook page created by the researcher. This newly created page will explain the purpose of the study as well as the criteria one needs to meet in order to participate. Those who are qualified and interested to participate in the study will contact the lead researcher and will be considered for the study. Once the interested participants contact the lead researcher and it has been established that they meet the inclusion criteria, a consent form (Appendix B) will be sent via email for them to fill out and return. The inclusion criteria that will need to be met are that the participant is a collegiate athlete of any level and has experienced an unexpected death of a teammate. Once the participant agrees to be interviewed and has returned their consent form, face-to-face or Skype interviews will be arranged at a time and date convenient to the participant. At this time, basic demographics such as age, gender and the type of sport played will also be collected.

3. Methods

Describe procedures to which humans will be subjected. Include a description of deceptive techniques, if used, and debriefing procedures to be used on completion of the study. Use additional pages, if necessary.

1. The participant will contact the researcher if they are interested to participate in the study.

2. The researcher will then determine if the participant meets the inclusion criteria.
3. Once the participant has signed and returned the consent form a convenient time, date and location (if face-to-face interviewing) will be agreed upon to conduct the interview and collect appropriate data. If a Skype interview will be conducted, a convenient time will be determined.
4. Each interviewee will choose a pseudonym prior to conducting the interview.
5. The investigator will meet with each participant for an open-ended interview
 - a. “When you think about your experience of losing a teammate unexpectedly, what stands out for you?”
 - b. Additional open-ended questions will be asked in order for the participant to provide more detail or focus.
6. The interview will last between 30 and 90 minutes
7. The interview will be digitally audio recorded.
8. The lead researcher will upload the audio files onto her password-protected computer and will delete the files from the recorder. The researcher will then transcribe the audiotapes verbatim and remove any information, which may identify the participant, or others named in the interview in order to maintain confidentiality.
9. The transcript will be emailed back to the participant to assure accuracy. If the participant feels that they have been misinterpreted, the transcript will be collected, corrected and returned. The participant will be given one week to return the transcript. This process will continue until the participant is satisfied with the transcript.
10. Hard copies of transcriptions will be stored in the investigator’s office at home in a locked filing cabinet and maintained for a minimum of 5 years upon completion of the study and will be kept indefinitely. The signed consent form will be filed separately from the transcripts in a different locked draw of the filing cabinet. All word files of the transcriptions and audio files will be kept on the researchers’ password-protected computer.

4. Alternative Procedures

Describe alternatives available to participants. One alternative may be for the individual to withhold participation.

The alternative is to choose not to participate. Participants may choose to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without adverse consequences.

5. Benefits

Describe benefits to the individual and/or society.
There are no direct benefits to the participant.

6. Risks

Describe risks to the participant and precautions that will be taken to minimize them.

Include physical, psychological, and social risks.

There are no known risks. However, the interviewing process may bring up unpleasant memories or emotional distress. If this does occur, the researcher will provide you with a referral sheet for numerous counseling services. (see Appendix C).

7. **Anonymity/Confidentiality**

Describe methods to be used to ensure the confidentiality of data obtained.

After receiving written informed consent and conducting the interview the lead researcher will upload the audio files onto her password-protected computer and will delete the files from the recorder. The researcher will then transcribe the audiotapes verbatim and remove any information, which may identify the participant, or others named in the interview in order to maintain confidentiality. Each interviewee will choose a pseudonym. The transcript will be emailed back to the participant to assure accuracy. If the participant feels that they have been misinterpreted, the transcript will be collected, corrected and returned. This process will continue until the participant is satisfied with the transcript. Hard copies of transcriptions will be stored in the investigator's office at home in a locked filing cabinet. The signed consent form will be filed separately from the transcripts in a different locked draw of the filing cabinet. All word files of the transcriptions and audio files will be kept on the researchers' password-protected computer. All data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years upon completion of the study and will be kept indefinitely.

8. **Consent**

Attach a copy of the consent form(s) to be signed by the participant and/or any statements to be read to the participant or informational letter to be directed to the participant. (**A copy of the consent form should be offered to each participant.**) If this is an anonymous study, attach a cover letter in place of a consent form.

9. **Certification**

I certify that the protocol and method of obtaining informed consent as approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) will be followed during the period covered by this research project. Any future changes will be submitted to IRB review and approval prior to implementation. I will prepare a summary of the project results annually, to include identification of adverse effects occurring to human participants in this study. I have consulted with faculty/administrators of any department or program, which is to be the subject of research.

Principal Investigator

Date

Reminder: Be sure to submit sixteen (16) individually collated and bound (i.e. stapled or paper clipped) copies of this form with your application.

*NOTE: Your proposal **WILL NOT** be reviewed until the completed packet is received in its entirety.*