

Finding Light in the Darkness: A Narrative Inquiry Exploring Male Athletes' Emotional Abuse
Experiences

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Lindsey A. Miossi

August 2021

Dedication

This project is dedicated to the most wonderful participants I couldn't even imagine. Thank you, Bruce Wayne, Chris, and Xavier Grey for your time, energy, and inviting me into your life story. Your vulnerability and openness were unmatched. You and your stories sustained me throughout this project. When I had my toughest moments and my largest doubts throughout this process, you renewed my energy and excitement. I feel honored to be able to share your stories. I look forward to our continued work together and to witness the ways in which you transform the individuals around you, like you already have me, and the larger sport spaces. Thank you.

Acknowledgements

Throughout my journey, it is almost unimaginable the amount of growth—personal, intellectual, spiritual, and professional—I have experienced, especially during the last three years at the University of Tennessee. The Lord has lead me to this point and equipped me the entire way. I am not sure what He has planned in the future for me, but I feel grateful and honored to be where I am now. He has also blessed me with the most amazing community here on earth. I would not have achieved the PhD or grown in the ways that I have, without them. To start, I must thank my committee.

Dr. Fisher, thank you for everything over the last three years. I may not have been the best researcher or writer when I started, but you took a chance on me and brought me on anyways. I can still remember our first meeting at Pete’s in Knoxville. I immediately felt welcomed and at home by you. You have always seen me as a human before “student” or “academic” and that means everything. Throughout my time here, you have pushed me when I needed it, encouraged me, and helped me to follow my curiosities and passions. Thank you!

Lars, I feel incredibly honored to know and work with you. Our conversations on and beyond this dissertation and our book chapter have left a lasting impact. I appreciate your openness, honesty, and vulnerability. Thank you especially for always reminding me to take care of myself and for your joy and excitement for life. I always leave our conversations with a renewed sense of energy.

Dr. Waller, the amount of peace you brought me throughout this process is unrivaled. I have never felt a greater presence from someone, and it always provided the calmness I needed. Thank you for the reminder to do this work with integrity—a note that has been taped to my monitor ever since. The Lord certainly knew I needed you on my committee and provided.

Allison, I cannot thank you enough for always responding to my frantic emails with such compassion and thoroughness. Whenever I got too caught up in the technicalities, you encouraged me to stay on track and focus on my participants and their narratives. Thank you for seeing my vision and my passion. And most certainly, I appreciate you always making time for me.

To my family... Mom, Dad, and Michelle. I owe this degree and my sanity to you as it was you and our conversations that always helped me to find the light in the darkness. I cannot thank you enough for helping me to maintain my values throughout this process, especially to always prioritize family over work. When I claimed to be “too busy,” you helped me make time, accommodated my schedule so I could come visit and vice-versa, and you always challenged yet respected my boundaries. Thank you for all the reminders to sleep, the care packages, and for always answering my distraught calls. You guys are my rocks. I love you!

To all my family and friends, new and old, thank you. Thank you for being so understanding and forgiving whenever I put our relationship on the backburner. Thank you for the encouraging texts and voice messages, your endless belief in me, and for never leaving a thought of mine go unchallenged. I am a better person because of you, and you all make me feel so loved.

Lauren and Sharon, I have been so blessed to have you two as confidants and role models throughout this process. To be able to go through this together, both the suffering and the celebrations... I am so grateful. Thank you for letting me lean on you. And congratulations to you!

Abstract

Emotional abuse is defined as “a pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviours by a person within a critical relationship role that has the potential to be harmful” (Stirling & Kerr, 2008, p. 178). Despite the potential for sport success, athletes who are targets of coaches’ emotional abuse can experience an array of psychological (e.g., decreased self-esteem, increased anxiety, isolation, mental health disorders), training (e.g., less enjoyment, impaired focus), and performance (e.g., Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Gervis & Godfrey, 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2013) consequences. The purpose of the current study was to explore the reflective experiences of previous youth non-elite high school male athletes who were emotionally abused by their coach between the ages of 14-18 years. Utilizing narrative inquiry as the methodology—meaning narrative was both the phenomenon being studied and the method (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)—three men (Bruce Wayne, Chris, and Xavier Grey) participated and shared their experiences of emotional abuse. Each participant engaged in a series of in-depth conversations. Bruce Wayne’s story is one of psychological and physical harm and also of “resilience, work ethic” and taking personal responsibility to control his future and change others. Chris’ story reflected pain from being consistently let down despite giving his all while also finding purpose and meaning in those moments; his story is about “perseverance.” Xavier’s story is one of making intentional decisions and choosing to find the light and peace in the dark moments and to not let them define him; it is about “relaxing in the midst of chaos.”

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The sport environment is ripe with highly visible and normalized emotionally abusive coaching practices that often go unrecognized and uncontested (Anderson & White, 2018; Kerr et al., 2019; Stirling & Kerr, 2013). Athletes can be victims of such abuse, even if they achieve athletic success (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Gervis & Godfrey, 2013; Gervis et al., 2016; Kennedy & Grainger, 2006; Stirling & Kerr, 2013). Emotional abuse is defined as “a pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviours by a person within a critical relationship role that has the potential to be harmful” (Stirling & Kerr, 2008, p. 178). Unfortunately, whether directly or indirectly targeted (Raakman et al., 2010), athletes suffering emotional abuse can experience an array of psychological (e.g., decreased self-esteem, increased anxiety, isolation, mental health disorders), training (e.g., less enjoyment, impaired focus), and performance (e.g., Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Gervis & Godfrey, 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2013) consequences. Such abusive practices continue to be pervasive in sport—including for male athletes—where the expectation may be to adhere to traditional and potentially unhealthy and unnatural masculine norms.

Sport often serves as a space for the social construction of gender and reifies traditional gender norms (Messner, 1990a; Sappington, 2020). As Hartill (2005) discussed, sport becomes a primary space for boys to build orthodox masculinity (defined as hypermasculine and heterosexual) where they are typically expected to be strong, tough, and heterosexual to succeed. Male athletes may experience these expectations through the coaches’ use of gendered and sexist discourse (Adams et al., 2010; Anderson & White, 2018; Crocket, 2012) which can create harmful, non-inclusive (Barber & Krane, 2007) homophobic environments (Adams et al., 2010; Anderson & White, 2018; Barber & Krane, 2003; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003) as well as an expectation that they must embody an unattainable hegemonic masculinity (Anderson, 2005;

Anderson & White, 2018; Coakley, 2017; Messner, 1990b). Such environments likely involve abusive coach practices; however, these techniques are also engrained in the wider sport culture and adopted by other sport personnel (Fisher & Anders, 2019; Jacobs et al., 2017; Kerr et al., 2019; Smits et al., 2017).

Moreover, a strong adherence to an orthodox masculinity may influence one's ability to recognize and speak out against emotional abuse (Mendel, 1995; Parent & Bannon, 2012). If male athletes are abused (particularly in the case of sexual abuse), it may be a threat to their masculinity as they may feel as though they are effeminate or gay. Additionally, males are typically not included in sexual and emotional abuse survivor research, thus perpetuating the ideology that males are only perpetrators (and not victims), and females are only victims (and not perpetrators; Hartill, 2005; Parent & Bannon, 2012). However, males are certainly targets and survivors of violence and emotional abuse, especially in the sport setting. This could be all the more prevalent for athletes of color who endure colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2018), microaggressions (e.g., Burdsey, 2011; Jordan, 2010; Lee et al., 2018), and forced assimilation (e.g., Bloom, 2000; Leonard, 2006; Melendez, 2008) both in and outside of sport.

Subsequently, the emotional abuse experiences of racially diverse male athletes warrant further attention. However, the topic of violence and abuse are sensitive. Therefore, a feminist theoretical frame was used in the current study. Simply put, feminism is ending sexist oppression through the eradication of patriarchal violence which everyone is impacted by (hooks, 2015). Feminist theory is a way of being and living for me (Ahmed, 2017) and that cannot be untethered from this dissertation. Specifically, incorporating feminist sport psychology (FSP) means challenging sport environments and creating healthy spaces for all those in sport (Carter et al., 2020). FSP is important for providing a frame from which to critically examine the institutional

structures and conditions of sport and how they may or may not influence athletes' abusive experiences.

Further, utilizing feminist theory within research allowed me to center the experience of the participants while also making important the critical examination of context that both the participants and I were operating within. This also aligned well with the methodology for this study: narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

Emotionally abusive coaching practices in sport are pervasive, highly visible, and normalized with little to no critique from sport participants, coaches, parents, or officials (Stirling & Kerr, 2014). While there is only minimal research on emotional abuse in the coach-athlete relationship, researchers have demonstrated that these practices are harmful to athletes even if athletes are successful in their sport (Stirling & Kerr, 2013). More specifically, no researchers to date have explored male athletes' experiences of emotional abuse within the context of youth sport or the influence of racial identity on these experiences. The particularities of men's gendered, and racialized sport experiences have consistently been left out of emotional abuse research; therefore, they deserve further exploration. Finally, much of our understanding of the experience of sport emotional abuse comes from elite female athletes' experiences (e.g., Jacobs et al., 2017; Smits et al., 2017; Stirling & Kerr, 2007, 2008, 2009); however, athletes' assimilation into emotionally abusive sport environments happens well before they obtain elite status.

Research Puzzle

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Clandinin (2013) coined the term *research puzzle* instead of *research problem or question* because they believe such phrasing misrepresents what

narrative inquirers do. Coming to the inquiry with a “problem” or “question” assumes there is a definition, answer, or solution that will be made clear through the research. A research puzzle, on the other hand, “carries more of a sense of a search, a ‘re-search,’ a searching again... a continual reformulation of an inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). Consequently, I have chosen to use the words *research puzzle* instead of *research question*.

Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to explore the reflective experiences of non-elite youth male athletes who were emotionally abused by their coach when they were between 14-18 years of age (e.g., high school sport or community recreational league). Specifically, I focused on participants’ sport stories, including their emotional abuse experiences, the particularities of their gender and racial identities, and the impact of the emotional abuse experience in and out of sport.

Justifications for Research Puzzle

Personal

My personal justifications for this research stemmed from a variety of experiences. For one, I had previously only studied female athletes’ experiences, and I recognized that their experiences cannot “stand in” for male athletes’ experiences. Moreover, within the previous research I conducted, many of the participants shared that they did not think they would have had that same experience if they were a male. This led me to consider how frequently members of US society, including myself, tend to see males as only the perpetrator and rarely the victim of emotional abuse. Additionally, my own personal life experiences of being emotionally abused by coaches and bullied by peers and teammates have been the largest contributors leading me to focus on emotional abuse in sport. My relation/positionality to the topics in this research have

been explored throughout my comprehensive exams as well as my autobiographic account (see Appendices A-E).

Practical

Coach abuse is harmful and needs to be eradicated. Yet, it is extremely engrained within sport. Currently, there is little empirical research and knowledge on emotional abuse in sport, especially with male athletes. If we are to work towards ending violence in the coach-athlete relationship and in sport spaces, we must further understand the experiences of male athletes who are emotionally abused. Through an exploration of their experiences within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I hoped to gain a deeper contextual and analytic understanding so that I can change sport spaces in the future.

Social

The theoretical justification for studying emotional abuse experiences of male athletes was simply that we do not have much knowledge or insight into the larger phenomena of emotional abuse, especially specific male athlete experiences. Although sexual abuse in sport has been brought to light in recent years (e.g., Brackenridge, 2001; Dzikus, 2012; Fisher & Anders, 2019; Kerr et al., 2019), there remains little discussion on emotional abuse and how emotionally abusive coaching practices are often justified as a means to achieving success and winning. The social justification was to explore and make visible the experiences of emotional abuse which could hopefully lead to future studies that help reform sport coaching practices and administrative policies at the youth sport level. Emotional abuse is violent and harmful—psychologically, emotionally, and physically—yet is a seemingly invisible topic in the sport world. We must bring these experiences to light.

Most Relevant Definitions

Antiracist – “one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea” (Kendi, 2019, p. 14).

Colorblind racism – the belief that there is no longer racial privilege or oppression in society, and the claim one “does not see color” (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Emotional abuse – “a pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviours by a person within a critical relationship role that has the potential to be harmful” including physical and verbal behaviors as well as denial of attention and support (Stirling & Kerr, 2008, p. 178).

Feminism – a movement to end sexist oppression (hooks, 2015).

Feminist sport psychology – “challenges the status quo and recognizes that applied sport psychology professionals must force their practice to be socially just, intersectional, and multicultural whilst elevating the needs and experiences of women” (Carter, 2020, p. 1).

Gender – social construct and identity related to “attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex” (APA, 2012, p. 11).

Gender identity – one’s psychological sense of gender (APA, 2020).

Hegemonic masculinity – social and institutional dominance beyond physical, brute power that is woven into the culture and is constructed in relation to subordinated masculinities and women. It is a “fantasy” that is unrealistic yet very public which helps to maintain patriarchal power. This masculinity is also related to heterosexuality (Connell, 1987).

Heterosexism – belief that heterosexuality is natural and normal, and thus it is privileged (Rainbow Resource Center, 2012).

Maltreatment – when a person in a position of power (e.g., caregiver, coach, etc.) willingly mistreats or neglects another person resulting in physical or psychological harm (Crooks

& Wolfe, 2007). Maltreatment includes neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse.

Masculinity – a social construct based on hierarchies where men are expected to perform their gender in accordance with their biological sex (Anderson, 2014).

Microaggressions – brief, intentional and unintentional, everyday insults directed at a person which communicate hostile, degrading, and harmful racial beliefs (Sue et al., 2007).

Narrative – the telling, living, retelling, and reliving of lived stories which is a central source of knowledge and understanding (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Orthodox masculinity – embodying hegemonic masculine in accordance with homophobia, misogyny, taking risks, demonstrating strength, etc. regardless of race, religion, and socioeconomic status (Anderson, 2005, 2009).

Patriarchy – belief, and, in turn, lived reality, that the male sex is more powerful and dominant and the female sex (and subsequently all genders besides cisgender males) are less dominant (hooks, 2015).

Power – based on a Foucauldian theoretical framework, power is discursive. While there are multiple discourses, some are more dominant and pervasive throughout society, and, thus, become legitimate. Dominant discourses become a way of knowing (i.e., the truth) and living, and these discourses operate in subtle and productive ways (Foucault, 1995).

Race – “an evolving social idea that was created to legitimize racial inequality and protect white advantage” (Diangelo, 2018, p. 17).

Racism – when a racial group’s prejudice against an individual or group of individuals based on their race is reinforced by legal authority, institutional control, and systems of power (Diangelo, 2018; Oluo, 2018).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this brief literature review, I first discuss the beginnings of organized sport and abuse in sport and the potential role of patriarchy and masculinity. Second, I explore the influence of race and racism in sport and its influence on sport experiences. Lastly, I discuss my theoretical framework of feminism.

The Development of Organized Sport, Masculinity, and Abuse

Authoritative coaching and abuse in the coach-athlete relationship has been foundational to sport since the rise of organized sport. Although organized sport likely emerged for various reasons, Anderson and White (2018) discussed one avenue being the need to socialize young boys for factory work so they could contribute to the increasingly competitive economy (typically geared towards ages 8-14 years; Coakley, 2017). Sport organizers hoped team sports would teach working-class boys to “obey rules and work together productively... (and) toughen middle- and upper-class boys and turn them into competitive men” (Coakley, 2017, p 80). Additionally, organized sport was used to colonize and force assimilation of minoritized cultures and individuals into the Anglo-American culture as evidenced by the sport history of Native Americans (Bloom, 2000), Latinos (Iber et al., 2000), and Blacks (Hawkins, 2010). For example, according to Hawkins (2010), organized sport was a means to develop “proper” masculinity and turn boys into men based on White supremacist and patriarchal ideologies.

To be sure, sport is a gendered and racialized space (Messner, 1990a; Sappington, 2020). The role of sport as a site for the social construction and reproduction of masculinity has been extensively studied (e.g., Anderson & White, 2018; Connell, 1987; Crocket, 2012; Messner, 1990b; Pringle, 2001). Just like the laborious workforce in which men were expected to be strong and tough, when organized sport arose, the purpose was to teach boys similar notions,

preparing them to be tough and unemotional (Anderson & White, 2018). The values of organized sport became strength, aggression, intimidation, competition, and masculine hierarchy (Coakley, 2017). Sport “created a social space in which boys are still taught to value and perform a violent, stoic, and risky form of masculinity; one based in antifemininity, patriarchy, misogyny, and homophobia” (Anderson & White, 2018, p. 30). While that is certainly not the experience of all men and boys participating in sport, those values are woven into the fabric of the larger sport system.

Ultimately, the historical patriarchal foundations of sport—which require that men and boys uphold orthodox masculinity—is important to examine as it gives context for the current conditions in male sport. Being expected to strive for an unrealistic and unachievable hegemonic masculinity places potential limits on players’ humanity and performance (Sappington, 2020), can lead to exclusion and “othering” within a team (Coakley, 2017), and can involve criticism from coaches towards athletes who do not adhere to traditional masculine notions (Anderson & White, 2018; Coakley, 2017; Messner, 1990b). Although some studies have indicated that not all athletes are expected to strive for hegemonic masculine ideals (Beal, 1996; Crocket, 2012; Thorpe, 2010), athletes from these studies participated in sports either outside of the US (Crocket, 2012; Pringle, 2001; Pringle & Markula, 2005) or in the alternative sport subcultures of skateboarding (Beal, 1996) and snowboarding (Thorpe, 2010). Thus, there is little knowledge with regard to how notions about US masculinity directly contribute to US emotional abuse experiences, if at all, especially in the most popular “big four” sports (i.e., basketball, football, hockey, and baseball). In addition, it is assumed that since the coach has a role in athletes’ sport experiences and their subsequent adoption of sport masculinity, the coach-athlete relationship is also important to explore.

Moreover, it is important to note that various scholars have found that male athletes' masculine identities typically evolve from orthodox masculinity to moderated masculinity as they mature (i.e., performed masculinity with decreased violent domination; Crocket, 2012; Pringle, 2001; Pringle & Markula, 2005; Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2012; Thorpe, 2010). Thus, it makes sense that a positive influence by the coach—such as creating more moderate conceptions of masculinity—is even more critical for vulnerable youth athletes who are being raised in sport, spending more time with their coaches than their parents, and may not see a life outside of sport as important. In addition, the many identified negative consequences for men and boys who do not adhere to or are not perceived as heterosexual and hypermasculine should be further explored in the sport environment and in the coach-athlete relationship; this is especially important because of the inherent power dynamics and ability for coaches to misuse their power.

Coaches are in one of the few positions in society that possess all five of the basic types of power which include: (a) legitimate power because they were appointed the position; (b) coercive power because they can take something away from athletes; (c) reward power because they can give a desired something; (d) expert power because they have gone through the system and necessary training; and (e) referent power because of the social respect they have (Anderson & White, 2018). Although not all power is negative - and athletes certainly have a degree of power, too - those who sacrifice their agency and adhere to traditional sport practices (e.g., strive for hypermasculinity) are more likely to play at the next level. In addition, those coaches who make it to higher levels of play based on these beliefs are perceived as better and more competent coaches. Typically, however, these types of athletes and coaches have a traditional, rigid view of sport coaching engrained. Thus, they may embrace the ways they were coached in

their own coaching philosophy using the logic that it led them to success, and, therefore, will lead other athletes to success.

In reality, then, coach training is largely comprised of previous playing experiences. Further, coaches are “relatively free of supervision and evaluation by other professionals” (Anderson & White, 2018, p. 44). Thus, through this coaching recruitment model (Anderson & White, 2018), a lack of training beyond playing experience, and a focus on winning and sacrifice, the sport ethic and abuse are often perpetuated and maintained (Coakley, 2017).

These types of authoritative coaching practices are typically a result of a need to be in control and a fear of losing respect from athletes, losing the game and then being fired, losing control, etc. (Potrac & Jones, 2011; Potrac et al., 2002). Subsequently, athlete obedience is expected and enforced by not allowing athletes to participate in decision-making, degrading them when they ask questions, etc. Sometimes (and particularly with male athletes), degradation comes in the form misogynistic and homophobic comments (e.g., Adams et al., 2010). Thus, some boys learn that if they question their coach, they are likely to get reprimanded and perhaps even emasculated. Further, coaches have power over and are gatekeepers to athletes’ current playing time as well as future, higher-level sport opportunities. Therefore, it is unsurprising that athletes’ sense of agency may wither away under these conditions (Potrac & Jones, 2011) and their bodies become vessels to carry out the coaches’ wishes (Anderson & White, 2018). Simply, athletes are expected to take direction without question and endure consequences when they do not.

In sum, athletes often do not have the capital or resources to support themselves in challenging the “traditional” coaching system (Potrac & Jones, 2011). Moreover, while not all coaches abuse their power and some athletes have great coach experiences (e.g., Becker, 2009),

the imbalance of power and the potential for coaches to abuse their power to harm athletes warrants further attention.

In addition, we do not openly allow this same emotional abuse to occur in most other social contexts, so why do we allow it in sport? Sport is one of the few institutions in which there is still a significant amount of “self-organization and self-regulation with no oversight body or regulatory system” (Kerr et al., 2019, p. 240). This is unlike any other domain with large amounts of children; those in the sport system also perpetuate the belief that sport is inherently good, and, thus, no oversight is needed. However, this has led to non-child-centered sport practices such as relying on authority, punishment, and power all in the name of winning (Fisher & Anders, 2019; Kerr et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, then, abuse from coaches toward athletes is often expected, accepted, and goes uncontested (Anderson & White, 2018; Kerr et al., 2019; Stirling & Kerr, 2013). However, in terms of scholarship, sexual abuse in the coach-athlete relationship has recently gained attention while the more highly visible and public form of emotional abuse still has received little scholarly and media attention (Anderson & White, 2018; Kerr et al., 2019; Stirling & Kerr, 2013). Both are briefly explored next and are specifically related to male athletes.

Sexual Abuse in Sport

Brackenridge (1997) defined sexual abuse as “a wide range of intrusive behaviors, which violate the person on a sexual basis” (p. 118). Brackenridge (e.g., 1997, 2001) was a pioneer of sexual abuse research in sport, although she focused almost entirely on the male perpetrator/female victim dyad. While that work is important and certainly makes sense given the fact that females suffer from and report abuse more than males (Brackenridge, 2001), it does not provide a holistic account of the issue; male athlete experiences of sexual abuse have largely

been overlooked (Parent & Bannon, 2012). As Etherington (2000) stated, “male survivors are therefore imprisoned by patriarchy, which ignores the reality of their sexual abuse” (p. 202).

Male survivors of sexual abuse and their experiences warrant further attention especially as Hartill (2009) argued, “everyday practice and discourse of male sports (its cultural norms) provide an environment conducive to the sexual abuse of male children” (p. 232). Hartill (2009) discussed how in youth sport, the context is constructed so that boys are expected to act like men. Often, the discourse used is related to acting manly, aggressive, powerful, etc., which are all qualities that are more man-like than child-like (Hartill, 2009). Such discourses can be confusing to boys in sport; however, they may strive to embody hegemonic masculinity for fear that their coach will belittle or degrade them for acting otherwise (Hartill, 2005). In addition, male athletes abused in this context may not be able to recognize it as such; instead, they may internalize it or use self-blame and think that they are simply not strong enough to protect themselves (Hartill, 2005). When this is the case, disclosing the abuse perhaps becomes equated with being effeminate or gay; this is in direct contrast to orthodox masculinity (Mendel, 1995; Parent & Bannon, 2012). And such disclosure could lead to exclusion, ridicule, and further victimization by peers, coaches, and other sport stakeholders (Parent & Bannon, 2012).

Ultimately, therefore, for boys, sport is a space to be socialized into orthodox masculinity and where they are continually told and expected to act like a “man,” a man who is strong, powerful, aggressive, and heterosexual and certainly not capable of being emotionally abused (Anderson, 2005; Sappington, 2020). Thus, when sexual abuse and exploitation occur, male athletes may blame themselves instead of seeking help due to the negative consequences that can occur by admitting they have been harmed in this environment. However, similar to sexual

abuse, to date, there has been very little research conducted on the emotional abuse experiences of male athletes. What has been done is reviewed briefly next.

Emotional Abuse in Sport

Unlike sexual abuse, emotional abuse in sport is often highly visible and publicized, yet it is rarely recognized and vastly understudied. Gervis and Dunn (2004) conducted one of the first studies to explore emotional abuse in the coach-athlete relationship in the UK with 12 male and female elite youth athletes from a variety of sports. Through semi-structured interviews, they found that all of the participants experienced emotionally abusive behaviors from the coach including belittling, threatening, yelling, humiliation, scapegoating, ignoring, rejection, and intimidation. Although the athletes discussed a desire to stop training with the coach, they were striving to become international athletes and felt that in order to achieve this goal, they could not leave the coach or training center. The coaches' behaviors, however, caused the athletes to feel "stupid," "worthless," "depressed," and "non-confident" (Gervis & Dunn, 2004, p. 221). Thus, Gervis and Dunn made a call for more research to be conducted in this area.

Stirling and Kerr (2007) started their work on sport abuse by exploring the emotional abuse experiences of 14 retired elite Canadian female swimmers. Similar to Gervis and Dunn (2004), they found that the abuse intensified as athletes progressed in their careers. In fact, abusive behaviors were normalized prior to entering the elite level. Additionally, from the same participant experiences, Stirling and Kerr (2008) defined and categorized emotional abuse in sport. They found that although physical abuse, verbal abuse, and denial of attention and support were all present, the denial of attention and support affected athletes the most. Stirling and Kerr (2008) suggested that this may be due to denial of the abuse which caused a greater decrease in

the athletes' self-esteem and sense of identity as well as the experience of a deteriorated coach-athlete relationship.

Deepening their understanding of emotional abuse, Stirling and Kerr (2013) interviewed 14 elite female *and* male athletes about their perceptions of the effects of emotional abuse. They discussed a range of perceived negative effects including those related to psychological (e.g., low mood, anger, dwindled self-esteem, increased anxiety), training (e.g., decreased motivation, less enjoyment, impaired focus), and performance (e.g., performance decrements). Although they also described a few positive effects (e.g., increased motivation, enhanced motivation), these were less prevalent (Stirling & Kerr, 2013). Additionally, these minimal positive effects did not override the harm the negative effects had on the athletes' well-being.

Furthering the empirical research on the effects of emotional abuse, Gervis and Godfrey (2013) utilized a case study approach to explore the experience of an elite 12-year-old female gymnast. Due to her experiences of emotional abuse, she suffered mental health challenges and was diagnosed with an impulse control disorder, trichotillomania (i.e., hair-pulling disorder; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Specifically, the high intensity of training, living away from parents, and being separated from a world outside of gymnastics were all confounding factors in her harmful experience which eventually led her to quit. Gervis and Godfrey (2013) likened this elite sport environment to a cult; they illuminated how both cults and sport include isolation, sacrifice, fear, shared obsession, and a charismatic leader (Gervis & Godfrey, 2013). Although suggesting that elite sport is like a cult may appear to be an extreme conclusion, the symptoms the female athlete suffered from the emotional abuse were also extreme.

Stirling and Kerr (2014) then studied through interviews the process of emotional abuse including how it began and was sustained with 18 former elite female and male athletes. Upon

commitment to a more competitive sport route, participants described experiencing emotional abuse which typically followed poor performances and happened in public. A critical finding from this study was the complete lack of intervention from witnesses (e.g., other athletes, sport stakeholders, parents) demonstrating tolerance, acceptance, and even expectations for abuse in sport. In fact, even participants in Stirling and Kerr's study suggested that violence and harmful discourse from coaches is acceptable and expected. They reported that these harmful behaviors escalated over time; however, they believed that they were necessary coaching practices due to the coach's successful reputation (Stirling & Kerr, 2014). Again, this overwhelming acceptance of abuse in the coach-athlete relationship is often justified by an "understanding" that it will get athletes to perform their best (Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2014; Stirling & Kerr, 2013). Although these behaviors are easily recognizable as emotional abuse when occurring in a parent-child, caregiver-child, or teacher-child relationship, for example, there is an exception in sport where winning takes precedence and emotional abuse is seen as "character-building".

Thus, to move beyond simply recognizing and describing emotionally abusive behavior, Gervis et al. (2016) wanted to understand how people perceived emotional abuse given certain situational factors, specifically, the level of sport and the performance outcome. They distributed multiple vignettes of hypothetical emotional abuse experiences to 208 current coaches and athletes and asked them to answer a series of related questions regarding their perception and acceptability of the abuse. They found that coaches and athletes justified the emotional abuse if the athlete in the vignette was successful; however, if the athlete was unsuccessful, the behavior was viewed more negatively. Gervis et al. (2016) labeled this rationalization as "legalizing" emotional abuse in sport (p. 777).

Furthering the literature on emotionally abusive coaching practices, Smits et al. (2017) explored perceptions of emotional abuse from elite female gymnasts and their parents living in the Netherlands and Jacobs et al. (2017) explored these same perceptions from coaches and directors in the same gyms. Results suggested that parents and athletes made sense of and normalized the abuse they experienced through their interactions with others which were limited to the elite gymnastics world (e.g., other parents, athletes, and coaches). For example, early on, through fear and intimidation, athletes adopted a *code of silence* in which they eventually stopped telling their parents what occurred at practice (i.e., *maintained distance from their parents*). Meanwhile, parents made sense of the coaches' behaviors because of their own person experiences in elite sport as athletes. This finding demonstrates that not only do coaches coach the way they were coached as was the case in the Steinfeldt et al. (2011) study, but parents made sense of and accepted this coaching because it mirrored their own experience in sport. The other parents who were not involved in elite sport, then, deferred to those parents and the coaches who had been involved to make sense of and normalize the environment. Additionally, both athletes and parents had complete trust in the coaches' knowledge; therefore, they no longer engaged in critical thinking and simply accepted the emotionally abusive behaviors (Smits et al., 2017).

Maintaining distance from parents and enacting the code of silence in Smits et al.'s (2017) study is similar to what athletes reported in Gervis and Godfrey's (2013) study as well as what Dzikus (2012) and Kennedy and Grainger (2006) stated in their accounts of sexual misconduct (see pp. 179-180 for a more thorough account of Dzikus, 2012, and Kennedy and Grainger, 2006). A converging finding appears to be, therefore, that a key strategy that coaches use to gain access to and control athletes is by keeping parents at a distance and maintaining a code of silence while at the same time producing fear in athletes; in addition, the mantras "the

coach knows best” and “the coach is the only way to success” keeps athletes from reporting what is actually happening to them and keeps parents from critically reflecting on the environment that their child is training in (Fisher & Anders, 2019).

Further, Jacobs et al. (2017) found that the gymnastic club directors in their study also had a great sense of trust for the coaches, viewing them as experts in the knowledge of gymnastics and coaching methods. The trust was further elevated if a coach produced a winning elite athlete; then, the coach and their behaviors went unquestioned by directors as well as parents and athletes. Thus, the directors placed the responsibility of a child’s protection and wellness on the coach. By passing on the responsibility of child protection solely to the coaches, the directors took responsibility only for winning (Jacobs et al., 2017). In contrast, parents deferred to the coaches for both performance and health-related issues (Smits et al., 2017). In sum, directors relied on parents to assume that coaches were protecting their children (Jacobs et al., 2017), parents deferred to coaches (Smits et al., 2017), and subsequently, coaches were seen as—and became—solely responsible for athlete well-being. The coaches, however, stated that the responsibility for athlete welfare was dependent upon athletes themselves, claiming athletes were never forced to do anything (Jacobs et al., 2017); in fact, the coaches even stated they were athlete-centered because they were focused on winning for the athlete and through winning, the athletes would experience pleasure. However, the coaches’ definition of well-being was an end product and not the actual process of learning through good and non-harmful coaching techniques (Jacobs et al., 2017).

More research is warranted, however, because even if athletes are successful while experiencing emotional abuse in sport, they are still likely to suffer from grave and lasting psychological and emotional consequences. For example, abusive environments in sport have led

to a loss of sense of self (Kennedy & Grainger, 2006; Stirling & Kerr, 2008), feelings of isolation (Dzikus, 2012; Kennedy & Grainger, 2006), decreased self-esteem (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2009, 2013), mental health disorders (Gervis & Godfrey, 2013), and, ultimately, a further normalization and expectation of abuse in order to win (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2009, 2014). Moreover, Raakman et al. (2010) found that the effects of abuse are not just damaging for the athlete directly targeted, but also for youth athletes who witness the behavior.

While all of the aforementioned research on emotional abuse in sport is important and informative, our current understanding of the issue has come solely from the experiences of elite athletes. Although research has found elite athletes' experiences to be more frequent and intense, researchers have found that abuse in sport can and does occur earlier (Gervis et al., 2016; Kennedy & Grainger, 2006; Stirling & Kerr, 2014). Additionally, much of the literature has been undertaken in Canada (e.g., Stirling & Kerr, 2007, 2009, 2013), the United Kingdom (e.g., Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Gervis & Godfrey, 2013; Gervis et al., 2016), and the Netherlands (Jacobs et al., 2017; Smits et al., 2017) and not in the US. This means that US sport norms, standards, and abusive sport systems have only recently begun to be explored (Fisher & Anders, 2019). In addition, as stated previously, no researchers have focused on male athletes or gender differences in experiences of emotional abuse (e.g., Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2013). Lastly, none of the aforementioned researchers who have studied emotional abuse in sport have discussed the racial demographics of the participants or the impact a minoritized racial identity may have on experiences of emotional abuse in sport.

Men of Color and Emotional Abuse in Sport

Male athletes and athletes of color are likely to experience emotional abuse differently than females and White-passing individuals given the gendered, sexist, and racist ideologies and expectations engrained within sport cultures. Compared to other gender identities, men and boys are socialized and expected to participate in organized sport to a higher degree; this is evident in how sport is still male-dominated, -identified, and -centered (Coakley, 2017). Therefore, many male athletes face a double-bind: If they do not participate in sport, they could endure social exclusion while if they do participate, they are still likely to be ridiculed by the coaching staff or othered by teammates if they are not masculine enough (Anderson & White, 2018). This is all the more pertinent for Black athletes considering the ways the Black male body is fetishized as athletically dominant starting at a young age (see, for example, Ferber, 2007; Hawkins, 2010; Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009).

In fact, race is inextricably tied to all that we do and all of our experiences, both in and outside of sport. Despite some people believing in color-blindness and non-racist attitudes (Bonilla-Silva, 2018), racial hierarchies still exist today where Whiteness is privileged and everyone else is minoritized including in the confines of sport. Although sport participation has become increasingly diverse, it remains a space where racist ideologies are perpetuated, and harm can be done. Sport is a microcosm of society (e.g., Coakley, 2017; Cooper, 2012); thus, unsurprisingly, sport is also a place where colorblind ideologies and microaggressions abound.

In other words, although many (White) Americans believe racial barriers have been eliminated and equality has been achieved in sport (Harrison & Valdez, 2006), this is likely not true. Looking beyond athletes, it is easy to notice the lack of racially diverse sport coaches, administrators, owners, etc., thus creating a historical plateau for success (Harrison & Valdez,

2006). Ultimately, colorblind racism and microaggressions are omnipresent in sport, and athletes of color are more likely to incur the negative consequences.

Black Athletes

Although there are a large number of Black athletes in high-profile and popular spectator sports (e.g., basketball and football), such high prevalence rates give a false narrative and do not shed light on the complexities of being a Black male athlete (Smith, 2009). The noticeably large number of Black athletes in spectator sports provides a façade of the American dream for Black boys; this facade enacts and perpetuates the belief that sport transcends race. Black athletes continue to endure racial oppression such as the emphasis on physical and sport development over intellectual and academic development; this is reinforced by White and Black academic and non-academic communities alike (Hawkins, 2010; Smith, 2009).

In addition, although Black athletes have access to some sports, this does not mean they are fully accepted once they get there, especially at predominantly White institutions (PWI; Smith, 2009). Structural inequalities and racist beliefs “produce an athletic labor force in Black communities that supply these [PWI] institutions with a consistent flow of athletic labor” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 13). Black males are often viewed as physically dominate, a commodity for sport and entertainment (Ferber, 2007), and some have been exploited for their athletic abilities beginning at the youth level (Hawkins, 2010; Springer, 2009). In the process of this exploitation, they are viewed and treated as if they are academically unmotivated and incapable of success; then, they are not provided the necessary resources or opportunities to succeed (Bimper, 2015). This can result in a lack of social and economic mobility whether they achieve their anticipated sport success or not. Hawkins (2010) referred to this as the “plantation model,” stating:

To examine how the structures of these institutions and athletic departments work economically, politically, socially, and culturally, to shape the experiences of Black athletes... these institutions continue a heritage of White supremacy, which is inherent in the American culture, where racist practices are embedded in these institutions' relationship with Black male athletes. (p. 13)

Going beyond college athletics, if a Black athlete ascends to the highest level of sport (i.e., the NFL or NBA), race is still an issue despite the associated success and fame (Cunningham, 2009; Leonard, 2006). These elite athletes are still likely to face an abundance of racism, discrimination, and colonization. This is especially evident in the lack of appreciation for Black culture in these environments. Similar to Melendez's (2008; see pp. 219-220 for a more thorough review) and Jordan's (2010; see pp. 210-211 for a more thorough review) findings that in collegiate sport Black culture is devalued, Black athletes at the professional sport level must also continue to negotiate their Black cultural values within the dominant White discourse (Cunningham, 2009; Ferber, 2007; Leonard, 2006).

Asian Americans and Sport

While Black athletes are subjected to racist ideologies and exploitation, it can be assumed that Asian American athletes also experience racism in sport. However, there is very limited research to support this assumption (e.g., Burdsey, 2011; King, 2006; Lee et al., 2018). For example, Burdsey (2011) found that microaggressions against British Asian (mostly Pakistani) male cricketers frequently came in the form of negative cultural references (e.g., being called a "bomber"). British Asian male cricketers, like their perpetrators, often played off the comments as harmless jokes. This finding was similar to the examples and discussion King (2006) provided

highlighting anti-Asian American racism. King noted that racism was often conveyed in the form of jokes perpetuating negative stereotypes of Asian American masculinity and culture.

For example, King provided a narrative of an Asian American NFL athlete to a group of students, and they thought being an Asian American NFL player was unfathomable and just plain nonsense. Revealed in their comments was hegemonic White cultural knowledge, that Asian American men are not suited for football. Lastly, Lee et al. (2018) interviewed Asian/Asian-American collegiate student-athletes about their experiences of racism; among other things, they discussed microaggressions regarding their intelligence, perceived physical weakness, and frequently being asked, “Where are you *really* from?” (p. 1029).

Latinos and Sport

Turning our attention toward Latinos in sport, their rise was largely due to the colonization and demand of assimilation by Anglo-Americans (Iber et al., 2011). The notion that Latinos could be paid less for the same amount of talent and labor compared to Whites was a clear demonstration of racism (Iber et al., 2011). However, by the 1960s and 1970s, Latino athletes began to challenge racist stereotypes as well as the discriminatory treatment they endured. Since the 1980s, not only has the Latino population in the US grown significantly, so, too, has their participation in sport (Iber et al., 2011). Despite breaking barriers within sport, there are still many challenges Latinos in the US experience. However, as Coakley (2017) identified, there is little research on the Latino population in sport; more is needed, especially considering they are the “fastest-growing ethnic population in the United States” (p. 240).

Native Americans and Sport

Unfortunately, similar to Asian American and Latinx athletes, there is little scholarly attention on Native American athletes’ experiences of race and racism in organized sport (Welch,

2019). Although Native Americans likely had culture-specific forms of organized sport, their beginnings in modern organized sport experiences were rooted in racism and are extremely contentious. For example, modern organized sport was introduced to Native American communities in the late 19th century in US boarding schools (Bloom, 2000). Boarding schools were created to remove Native American children from their communities and culture as a means of assimilation and conversion through education into Anglo-American culture (Bloom, 2000; Sewell, 2013). The athletic programs developed within these boarding schools were created to provide “‘proof’ that Native American children could be assimilated and taught to compete with grace and sportsmanship” (Bloom, 2000, p. XVII).

Although the research is limited, one Native American scholar and athlete (Ali-Christie, 2013) found that Native American athletes’ experiences were unique as they faced a culture shock and isolation once they reached the collegiate sport level and chose to move away from their close-knit community. While some of the participants in Ali-Christie’s study had very positive coaching experiences, others faced challenges which were laden with racist and stereotypical beliefs.

A Feminist Theoretical Framework

Since many sport spaces have been filled with oppression in the form of patriarchy and racism, until all sport spaces are safe, we must continue to work toward abolishing these ideologies. Simply put, my understanding of feminism aligns with hooks’ (2015) definition as the movement to end sexist oppression. Sexist oppression is pressing individuals onto narrow paths based on who they are perceived to be according to the socially constructed category of gender (Ahmed, 2017; Frye, 1983). Feminist sport psychology (FSP) as a framework can provide a critical path to achieve this freedom from patriarchy; those who engage in FSP challenge the

status quo and recognize that “...applied sport psychology professionals must force their practice to be socially just, intersectional, and multicultural” (Carter, 2020, p. 1).

Unfortunately, applied sport psychology as a whole has not thoroughly developed a concrete FSP framework for applied work (Carter, 2020), particularly one that foregrounds racism in addition to sexism. Although there have been many renowned feminists in our field since its beginnings (e.g., Dorothy Harris, Carole Ogelsby, Brenda Bredemeier, Ruth Hall, Leslee Fisher, Diane Gill, Vikki Krane), all but one of the aforementioned women are White and most conducted research with predominantly White individuals. To progress forward, applied sport psychology professionals must work towards ameliorating all social injustices and become more intersectional in their analyses (Gill, 2020). Through FSP with a focus on social justice, we can ensure that we are not only theorizing about gender and sport, but also actively working towards dismantling the outright patriarchal and White supremacist violence and abuse in sport. The FSP framework as well the cultural sport psychology framework (CSP; e.g., Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009) have foundations in intersectional analysis (Crenshaw, 1989; Hall, 2001; Krane, 2001; Norwood, 2020; Smith et al., 2020). The direct call for more intersectional work means that while exploring sport emotional abuse experiences, it is critical that I examine the ways athletes’ experiences are shaped based on their multiple and intersecting identities. FSP is a framework that I can use to explore all forms of oppression, privilege, and the power relations embedded within athletes’ experiences. This includes understanding how sport stakeholders’ social identities—and the structure of sport itself—affect athletes’ experience of emotional abuse. Moreover, Gill (2020) called for professionals operating with FSP to move beyond an elite sport focus in their research and move toward a wider range of athletes (e.g., youth) and their holistic development.

Finally, Carter et al. (2020) stated, “doing FSP is to challenge how sporting environments are creating and maintaining safe, compassionate, and healthy spaces for athletes, professionals, fans, and all” (p. 209). An environment filled with patriarchal violence and emotional abuse is not safe and certainly does not allow for optimal performance. FSP is unique because although performance remains an important focus, FSP scholars also call for critical examination of oppressive, power-filled experiences (Smith, 2020); I want to work to ameliorate the patriarchal, violent, and oppressive underpinnings in the sport system.

Literature Review Conclusion

In conclusion, to date, no research has been found solely focusing on male athletes’ emotional abuse experiences. Emotionally abusive practices and their impact on athletes need to be explored and critiqued by researchers, practitioners, and laypersons as the effects can be harmful. Sport has been and continues to be one of the most prominent institutions for boys to be socially constructed into men (e.g., Connell, 1987; Messner 1990b; Sappington, 2020), minoritized, and assimilated into Anglo-American culture (Bloom, 2000; Hawkins, 2010; Iber et al., 2011). White cisgender orthodox masculinity is highly valued in this context and showing anything less means being scrutinized at best and abused at worst. Male athletes who are emotionally abused are expected to accept the treatment, obey authority, and remain docile without question (Anderson & White, 2018). Any other response to the abuse (i.e., telling someone about the abuse) may be seen as emasculating, leading to most experiences going unvoiced, unnoticed, unchallenged (Hartill, 2005, 2009), and thus continuing.

Coaches play a large role in creating safe inclusive environments and when they do not, athletes suffer (Barber & Krane, 2007). Forms of emotional abuse that coaches have engaged in include physical, psychological, and verbal abuse (Stirling & Kerr, 2008). Lastly, feminist sport

psychology (Carter, 2020) provides an optimal theoretical framework to study male athletes' experiences of emotional abuse in sport.

Chapter 3: Methods

For this study, I utilized the methodology and method of narrative inquiry. I start this section by discussing the turn towards narrative analysis in the social sciences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Daiute, 2014; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Riessman, 2008). I then outline the methodological narrative approach and its ontological and epistemological underpinnings I used in this dissertation. These frameworks were part of my broader worldview, both in and outside of sport, and drove my research interests (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). I conclude this section with a discussion of my method, including data collection and analysis, which are influenced by the research paradigm and narrative inquiry methodology.

Narrative Research

In its most basic sense, narrative research is the study of human stories. Overall, narrative researchers “embrace the assumption that the story is one if not the fundamental unit that accounts for human experience” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 4). I concur with Clandinin (2013) who defined narrative inquiry “as an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (p. 17). Further, it is a collaboration between the researcher and researched within multiple contexts, time, and space as the narrator lives, tells, relives, and retells their narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). People live by and in stories (Clandinin, 2013) and as such, narrative inquiry was an incredibly powerful tool which helped me gain a deeper insight into male athletes’ experiences of emotional abuse well beyond the actual physical events. However, not all narrative researchers agree with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in terms of what narrative methodology, ontology, and epistemology should be adopted; there are a few key commonalities that have led researchers to make the turn to narrative.

The Narrative Turn

Historically, there have been four major turns or themes that have led researchers to the narrative turn. The first major turn was a shift in the understanding of *the relationship between the researcher and researched* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Daiute, 2014; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). This turn included moving away from positivism and a belief in objectivity both in the research and in the relationship between researcher and researched (Daiute, 2014; Riessman, 2008). Instead of pursuing claims of objectivity, narrative researchers turned toward interpretation, relation, and interdependency of learning. In this turn, there was a clear understanding that there was a relationship between the researcher and participant, and that the researcher also comes with a subjective, lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The second turn was moving away from data as numbers and instead *turning toward data as words* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). This is because numbers cannot answer “Why?” or “How?” questions; using words allows researchers to explore participants’ understanding and sensemaking of events (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

The third turn was moving away from generalizing and *toward the particular* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Daiute, 2014; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Riessman, 2008). Although there is certainly value in prediction and generalization, narrative researchers strive to understand experience within context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Daiute, 2014; Riessman, 2008). It is the personal stories and their particularities that add richness and depth to understanding phenomena (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

The fourth and final turn was moving away from the belief that there is a single truth, reality or way of knowing and instead moving toward an understanding that *there are multiple ways of knowing and many worldviews* (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Through a focus on the

relational aspects and particulars of experience, narrative inquirers co-compose findings that are relational, tentative, and variable which make the data more trustworthy (Clandinin, 2013).

Clandinin (2013) is not claiming here that this data is truthful, however; she is claiming that the data are truthful for the particular moment it was experienced (past), shared (present), and imagined (future), and even then, the story can never be fully understood (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In sum, while there are some commonalities across narrative research, including the turns toward using narrative, this movement has been fraught with much debate across disciplines and different schools of thought on how narrative should be used (Clandinin, 2013; Daiute, 2014; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Scholars disagree on narrative's beginnings, definitions, and if it is used as a methodology, method, both, or more. As Clandinin (2013) explained, "*Narrative* has, for example, come to refer to almost anything that uses, for example, stories as data, narrative or story as representational form, narrative as content analysis, narrative as structure, and so forth" (p. 11).

Methodology: Narrative Inquiry

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is simply defined as "stories lived and told" (p. 20). Clandinin (2013) furthered this definition stating narrative inquiry is "an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (p. 17). In other words, for these scholars, narrative is both the phenomenon being studied as well as the method of study. Although some researchers such as Riessman (2008) use narrative only for analysis—and others use narrative simply as data within different methodologies (e.g., phenomenology and case study)—narrative inquirers embrace narrative and experience as all of the above. As Clandinin

(2013) explicitly stated, “narrative is not, as some would have it, merely an analytic or representational device. Thinking narratively about a phenomenon—that is, about people’s experience—is key to undertaking narrative inquiries” (p. 38). In fact, for both Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is grounded in Dewey’s theory of experience.

Dewey’s Theory of Experience. Dewey’s theory of experience is based on a pragmatic philosophy that lays out the ontological and epistemological foundation for narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Dewey’s theory of experience has two primary characteristics that are key to narrative inquiry: Experience is both interactional and continuous. Experience, although believed to be inexpressible, becomes a lived reality through an interaction of the personal and social contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Experience “does not refer to some precognitive, precultural ground on which our conceptions of the world rest. Instead, it is a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39); in other words, experience is relational. Further, experience is continuous. Continuity means experiences develop from previous experiences while also leading to future experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Approaching narrative inquiry with this ontological and epistemological standpoint, lived experience is foundational as both the starting and ending point of the interpretation process. Therefore, narrative inquirers must focus on the individual’s lived experience *and* the sociocultural and institutional narratives that shape their experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Narrative Inquiry Foundations. From the theoretical framework of Dewey’s theory of experience, three main dimensions are drawn from which narrative inquiry operates within. Narrative inquirers conceptualize experience according to *sociality* (personal and social), *continuity* (temporality; past, present, future), and *place* (situation; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

First, on a personal level, inquirers must attend to emotions, hopes, reactions, etc., and on the social level attend to the influence of the cultural, familial, and institutional narratives. Also, on the social level, the relationship between the researcher and researched must be considered (Clandinin, 2013). Second, continuity (i.e., temporality) leads inquirers to understand that narratives (i.e., experiences) are never stable other than in the very moment they are shared. Even at the point in which they are shared, there is always more than can actually be expressed (Clandinin, 2013). Moreover, narratives live in the past, present and future. Third, narratives occur and are told with specific situations and places. For example, the specific context in which the experience occurred, the context in which the sharing takes place, the perceived audience, etc., all must be considered to provide a type of landscape to the story (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In other words, there is a relationship between the researcher and researched, the narrator and their personal world, the narrator and space, and the events and feelings among many other potential relations.

In sum, narrative inquiry allows for a deep exploration of the human lived experience. The most important aspects of narrative inquiry are the ontological underpinnings of Dewey's theory of experience, understanding that narrative is both the method and phenomena, and that people operate from the three-dimensional space of temporality, sociality, and place. Moreover, the relation between the researcher and researched is continuous; narrative is a collaboration between the researcher and researched over time, place, and the sociocultural environment. The inquirer enters into the midst of the living and telling and moves along with the participant. Therefore, before the study even began, I was reflexively thinking of my own place within and beyond the study as I am still developing my autobiographical accounts (see Appendix A for an

extended autobiographical account). I continued this reflexivity specific to the three-dimensional space throughout data collection and analysis (see Chapter 7).

Ontology: A Relational Perspective

Ontology refers to the conceptualization of the nature of reality and existence. Essentially, ontology addresses “what we can know about the ‘real’ world” and stems from the question of whether reality exists without human interpretation (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015, p. 5). In line with narrative inquiry and Dewey’s theory of experience, I am approaching this study with a relational ontological standpoint. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) illustrated, “experience is the fundamental ontological category from which all inquiry – narrative or otherwise – proceeds” (p. 39). Experiences are a continuous and relational stream of “human thought with our personal, social, and material environment... Dewey’s ontology is not transcendental, it is transactional” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). By transactional, Dewey is referring to the point that in order to know the world, we must interact with it, thus making it transactional, or in other words, relational.

Epistemology: Reconciling Pragmatism and Feminism

Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and “how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). It is the relationship between the knower and knowledge production (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). For this study, the epistemological underpinnings were Dewey’s theory of experience (i.e., pragmatism) and feminism (Carter, 2020). That is, my life experience is feminist, and I cannot separate myself from it, nor do I wish to. In operating from pragmatism, however, I started and ended the research with the participant’s experience and analyzed it from within the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Pragmatism means I stayed focused on the lived experience and attempted to not approach the

participants with an already deficit view (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). My feminism, therefore, allowed me to prioritize their experience.

Interestingly, Duran (1993) explained some of the intersections of feminism and pragmatism. First, individuals who utilize these frameworks believe that there is no one universal or normal experience. Second, pragmatists and feminists are concerned with the androcentricity of the world. Third, it is essential to understand and prioritize the multiple relations within the participants' lived experience over conceptualizing or theorizing distant particulars. Similarly, "what both accounts have to offer is not so much an overview and its constructs but a set of practices that may or may not be articulated, set out, and hence seen as a stated viewpoint" (Duran, 1993, p. 166). In other words, practice precedes theory or articulation. Other conceptual links include that both pragmatists and feminists have goals rooted in social justice and empowering all people to govern the society in which we live (see the practical implications in Chapter 7). Additionally, analyses always include the influence of social and political contexts/narratives in participants' lived experiences (Siegfried, 1993). Ultimately, the core and foundational ideologies of both feminism and pragmatism are very similar.

Methods

Methods are techniques used to gather and interpret data related to the research puzzle (Crotty, 1998). The main research method for the current study was interviews, or more fittingly for narrative inquiry, conversations. In this section, I first explain the participant selection process and the sampling method. Then, I transition into the data collection and end with a discussion on the analytic processes.

Participant Selection and Recruitment Process

After I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in late November 2020, I began participant selection and recruitment. The selection of the participants was purposeful and criterion-based (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003; Patton, 2002). It was purposeful in that I sought a small number of participants who had experienced the phenomena of interest: Emotional abuse in the coach-male athlete relationship at the non-elite sport level between the ages of 14-18. That allowed me to give each participant more time in the data collection and analysis so I could gain in-depth knowledge (Patton, 2002). LeCompte and Preissle (2003) described criterion-based selection as a method in which the researcher has pre-selected a set of attributes that the participant must have. My participants for this study had to meet the following criteria: Identify as male, 18 years of age or over, and have been previously emotionally abused by their coach while participating in non-elite sport between the ages of 14-18 years (e.g., high school sport or community recreation league).

Lastly, due to the sensitivity of the topic and methodology, I chose to use network sampling. Network sampling consists of identifying potential participants through referrals of others (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003). Colleagues of mine identified potential participants and asked them to contact me if they were interested in participating. Once a potential participant contacted me, I sent a formal IRB-approved recruitment email (see Appendix B) inviting them to participate in the study which also informed them of the purpose of the study, research process, and asked them to confirm they meet the inclusion criteria. If they agreed to participate, I sent the IRB-approved informed consent (see Appendix C), demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D), and we scheduled our first conversation via Zoom dependent on the most

convenient day and time for them. In total, three men participated in the study. Each participant chose a pseudonym to protect their identity throughout the research process.

Participants

Bruce Wayne. Bruce was a 25-year-old White male who grew up in the United States Midwest with his mother and older brother after his parents got divorced when he was 5 years old. He played baseball and basketball for a number of years as well as one year of football. He experienced emotional abuse from both baseball and basketball coaches. After high school, he attended a Midwestern undergraduate school relatively far from his hometown. He continued participating in sport through intramurals as well as teaching himself new skills such as golf. After he graduated with his bachelor's degree, he continued at the same university for a master's degree in sport psychology. At the time of the interview, Bruce was working towards his second master's degree which was counseling.

Bruce and I met a number of times through mutual friends prior to this research. However, never in our conversations had we discussed our previous sport experiences and what lead us to our current graduate programs or career aspirations. I was both nervous and relieved that he was my first participant. He was my "test" in some sense, my first trial. So, when Bruce responded to my email, I could not help but feel it was likely a benefit that we had brief interactions in the past. We were one step ahead in the relationship-building phase. Interestingly, when Bruce popped onto my screen for the first time, he had a virtual background set and removed it promptly. I was oddly relieved when he did. We were both in our homes and seemingly welcomed each other into our spaces. Then, we spent the next few minutes just catching up and engaging in small talk like any acquaintances would before diving into the

research conversation. We met virtually three times ranging from 54-95-minutes for a total of four hours. Additionally, we had a 60-minute analysis meeting.

Chris. Chris was a 22-year-old Black, Christian male who grew up in the United States Midwest with his mom and dad until they got divorced during his junior year of high school. He played baseball, soccer, football, and basketball during his primary and secondary education years. After, he attended an out-of-state University for his undergraduate degree. He then returned to his home state and began working towards his master's degree in sport psychology. Currently, he is in his first year of graduate school. We met virtually three times, ranging from 70-104-minutes for a total of over four hours. Additionally, we exchanged several emails and had a 30-minute analysis meeting. Since Chris liked his narrative and did not have any changes he wanted to make, our meeting ended up being relatively short compared to the other two participants.

Xavier Grey. Xavier was a 22-year-old Black male who grew up in the United States Midwest with his mom and three sisters, and his stepdad for a while. He participated in t-ball and football for a short period of time while mostly focusing on the individual sports of wrestling and track and field. He continued his track and field career and pole-vaulted in college while he earned his bachelor's degree. During that time, he also taught himself the sport of ping pong. His sport career abruptly ended due to COVID-19 in March 2020. He then graduated in May 2020 and continued his education. At the time of the interview he was in his first year of earning his master's degree in sport psychology. Xavier and I met virtually three times, with each conversation lasting between 120-137-minutes, for a total of over six hours. We then met again for a two-hour analysis meeting. Unlike Bruce and Chris, who just wanted to talk about the

document and general changes, Xavier wanted to read through the document out loud and make revisions together.

Data Collection

Interviews. To align the methods with the narrative inquiry methodology, I adopted feminist interviewing and a feminist orientation to the analysis which I believe fit best to generate the most fruitful field texts (i.e., data; Hesse-Biber, 2012). In general, feminist projects are typically concerned with social justice, bringing forward disregarded voices, and focusing on experience (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Feminist researchers are aware that the interviewees likely have assumptions about the interviewer and must consider these and their potential impact. Simultaneously, researchers also have assumptions about their participants and must be reflexive about these as well. Thus, feminist interviewers are most concerned about organizing interviews in the best way to produce truly collaborative interactions despite the multiple identities, histories, etc., of both the researcher and participant (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

One method is *sustained immersion* which involves multiple interviews over longer periods of time and invites participants into the interpretation process by revisiting and revising the co-composed narratives (Jones, 2007). I adopted this method by holding three conversations with each participant. Feminist interviewers also believe that self-disclosure—whether about personal information, research interests, or political aims—is characteristic of feminist research and allows for more collaboration and lessens the authority of the researcher (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Throughout the interviews, albeit briefly, I alluded to my own experiences of emotional abuse, sport, life, etc. Personally, I felt that the extent of the self-disclosure contributed to the more “conversational” feeling compared to an interview. Sharing that information felt like a natural process. Although I was aware that I was sharing information about myself and was

cognizant to not dominate the conversation, it seemed to allow the conversation to continue to flow while also serving as a way for us to relate to one another and connect deeper. I vividly remember a few incidents where Chris would say “exactly” in a very excited and loud tone as we related similar experiences and feelings.

Most importantly, feminist researchers maintain that reflexivity is required throughout the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Reflexivity includes understanding that research relations between the participant and researcher are never simple, inherently rooted in power, and always shaped by cultural constructions (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Roper & Fisher, 2020). Thus, I have continually revised my autobiographical account and journaled about my experiences (e.g., thoughts, feelings, and emotions) throughout the research process (see Appendix A for an updated version of my autobiographical account). As an example, after my third conversation with Xavier, I journaled, “I felt myself having to hold back tears. I feel so much honor in being able to hear his journal.” In sum, regarding the process of feminist interviewing and narrative inquiry, Hesse-Biber (2012) stated that researchers need to be aware that “experience recounted is always emergent in the moment, that telling requires a listener and that the listening shapes the account as well as the telling. Furthermore, both telling and listening are shaped by discursive histories” (p. 212).

Moreover, just as narrative inquirers should not approach their work with a deficit view, feminist interview practices also include not taking advantage of the seemingly simple practice of active listening. Feminist interviewing and narrative inquiry converge in that researchers must listen wholeheartedly, be fully present, and be actively engaged while allowing themselves to be affected by the narrative (Hesse-Biber, 2012). This leads to the final point in the commonalities between narrative inquiry and feminist interviewing which is producing relational knowledge.

We all are living within webs of personal, social, and temporal contexts and relations which must be kept at the forefront of every stage in research. Subsequently, writing my own autobiographical accounts and about my relationships within those spaces before, during, and after the research has been imperative. For example, it was after my conversations with Chris that I started to reflect on my process of forgiveness with my coaches. Through Chris' telling of his story, I recognized I had not yet forgiven my coaches. Thus, I wrote the following in my journal, "I need to take time to work on forgiving my coaches. What does that look like for me?" Moreover, my new engagement with Christianity has pushed me to be more forgiving, something Chris reminded me of many times (indirectly) as I listened to him use faith to understand his experiences. Although, I have not yet spent this time and am still unsure of what the process of forgiveness of my coaches looks like for me personally, it is a new addition to my own account. This process allowed for reflexivity, bringing me and my relations closer to the research (Clandinin, 2013).

In sum, the interview methods I used were less methodical on the questions asked and more intentional on creating intimate relationships and conversations through the aforementioned feminist interview techniques (e.g., reflexivity, active listening, self-disclosure). Further, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) proposed establishing intimate relationships with participants so that the interview turns into a conversation. As Clandinin (2013) shared, "conversations create a space for the stories of both participants and researchers to be composed and heard. Conversations are not guided by predetermined questions, or with intentions of being therapeutic, resolving issues, or providing answers to questions" (p. 45). A conversation, then, shifts the attention from the researcher's interests (e.g., information gathering) to the participant, interaction, and process (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Subsequently, I chose to use the term

“conversation” instead of “interview” throughout the study, including in my conversations with the participants.

My goal in these conversations was to co-create a space that allowed for a deeper exploration of participants’ experiences, in and outside of sport. I believe that this space can be created more easily when more time is given and when multiple conversations can be had.

Overall, then, my goals for the interviews aligned with Roulston (2010) and were “ethical, non-exploitative, sincere, and genuinely interested in free and open dialogue” (p. 23).

Conversation Process. I used a three-phase conversation process with each participant for “data collection” over two months’ time. Due to COVID-19, I met with the participants virtually via Zoom. Although I outlined numerous conversation questions/prompts, those only served as a guide. Throughout the process, I attended to the three-dimensional field by asking questions about *sociality* (e.g., emotions, feelings, hopes, culture, institutional narratives), *continuity* (e.g., the past, present, future), and *place*. I also asked for specific examples/stories, further elaboration, etc. Each conversation was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. An undergraduate research assistant transcribed each interview, sent it to me for review, and I listened to it and edited the transcripts, accordingly, typically adding the emotions and tones of voice associated with the stories. Throughout each phase, the participants’ role was simply to engage in the conversations. Between the conversations, I asked participants to write any reflections or thoughts that came up and that they would like to share. Although each participant disclosed that they were thinking a lot about our conversations between them, none wrote down any reflections. Admittedly, I was slightly disappointed, but I was not surprised. Personally, I know I often have really insightful thoughts or reflections as I am going about my day; however, if I do not write them down, I don’t remember them. My participants each admitted that was also

the case for them. Thus, I would have loved to read what those reflections were and used it as another form of data collection.

Phase I. In the first phase, I focused on creating a relationship with the participant, setting the scene, and gathering general context, relation, and space information. I was incredibly nervous since I knew that this first impression would influence not only the current conversation but our future ones. I was using a research protocol I had never used which was quite comprehensive, in-depth, and elaborate given the extensive conversations. I wondered how open and comfortable these men would be about what I presumed to be a significant and hurtful part of their life. Even more, would they open up to *me*? Were my expectations set too high thinking that participants would actually want to meet multiple times for such extended amounts of time? Would the interview last 30 minutes or two hours?

I was unsure of what to expect and skeptical of the depths we could achieve for a number of reasons. One, due to COVID-19, all of the conversations were virtual which I had only experienced a small number of times in the research context. Second, I was very aware of the current events occurring in the US as the election had just occurred and President Joe Biden was the President-elect at the time; for example, it was during my first interview with Xavier that the U.S. Capitol riots occurred¹. After I got off the call and saw the news notifications, I was unsure if I should re-connect with him and check in. I didn't know what was appropriate in accordance with the research process and the IRB. Moreover, I was still processing the events myself and was unsure of how to even hold space for a conversation like that. Ultimately, I opted not to. However, it was the first thing we discussed exactly a week later on our second call.

¹ On January 6th, 2021, a group of 2,000 individuals gathered in Washington, DC to protest the recent US election. Riots broke out and a mob raided the US Capitol causing lawmakers to hide. Multiple injuries and deaths were reported (Barry et al., 2021).

With all this in mind, I was extremely intentional in setting a space that was relaxing for all of the conversations but especially the first phase. It may or may not have made a difference for them; however, the last thing I wanted was to feel like I was formally interviewing someone. So, I did the near opposite of what I thought I may have done for a job interview. In nice athleisure clothes, I sat on my dark brown leather couch with my teal, blue/green tapestry hanging on the wall in the background. I set my computer on the coffee table. I sat back, took a few deep breaths, and started the calls. At least for Bruce, this setting seemed to make a difference. As he shared during our analysis meeting:

When I was reading through how you set the space, I was like yeah, she did a great job making me feel comfortable and just giving me space to talk because I would just ramble and I don't like rambling, especially in interviews. I just talked to you like a casual conversation though.

During this phase, I asked participants questions regarding their demographic questionnaire they completed as well as general topics regarding their overall sport experiences and relationships (see Appendix E for the conversation guide). These meetings lasted between 53–117 minutes. After this conversation, I listened to the audio-recording and reviewed the transcript while also writing in my researcher's journals any reflections I had. For example, I would write personal reflections such as, "This made me laugh" or "Wow, I really felt this." I also wrote reflections such as, "A lot of these coaches are not just attacking the participant's skill and ability but their actual personality and who they are as human beings."

Phase II. In the second phase, I asked questions specific to their emotional abuse experience including the environment/team culture, conditions (e.g., being in men's sport, the racial demographics of/experiences with their team, etc.), and the coach they were emotionally

abused by. Each conversation lasted between 95–117 minutes. After the second phase was complete with each participant, I listened to the audio files and revised the transcripts. Revising the transcripts typically included fixing any grammatical errors and editing parts that were inaudible to the transcriber. Additionally, I added context to outside noises, the participants' emotions (e.g., when Xavier started to tear up), and my own emotions. After Phase II and before Phase III, I met with Dr. Fisher who had reviewed the first 1-2 transcripts for each participant. We exchanged our thoughts and perspectives to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding. Of interest to us was that we both wrestled with “thematizing” across transcripts at first instead of really giving full weight and attention to each story.

Phase III. In preparation for the third phase, I listened to each conversation and read through each transcript a second time taking notes, writing reflections, and developing questions that were directly related to their specific experiences. This allowed for a deeper exploration, further clarification, and the development of interim research texts (Clandinin, 2013). For example, in my third conversation with Chris, I sought to clarify what changed his senior year in how he responded to the coach. I asked, “Your senior year, you started to respond to the head coach differently compared to other coach experiences. You engaged in confrontation. What made this year different where you ‘weren’t going to take it anymore?’ What led to this change?” Please see Appendix F for all of the questions I composed for the third conversation with each participant. Although I did not ask all of the questions I created, most were addressed to some extent. These meetings lasted 77–136 minutes.

Data Analysis

First, it is important to note that analysis and interpretation are not distinct and separate phases that follows data collection (Clandinin, 2013). Sense-making and interpretation occurred

at every phase including before the participant met with me, during and after our conversations, and while I was listening to the recordings, writing and reading transcripts, and re-listening and re-reading transcripts, especially in the question formation for the third interview. It is even still occurring as I continue to think through the findings of this study and my own autobiography (see Appendix A), especially as I strive to place myself and this study within the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Analytic Process. The first step in the analytic process was to take the field texts to interim research texts (Clandinin, 2013). I started by combining all three conversations with each participant into their own single document. This resulted in 68 – 81 pages of dialogue for each participant. Since they all moved between past, present, and future, and multiple activities and life events, I then created a separate document and reorganized their stories according to the various sports; I did this in chronological order (e.g., Chris was organized into the three main sports he talked about—soccer, basketball, and football—and I put his stories and associated feelings in chronological order within their sport category to make a flowing narrative). Then, I drafted a first iteration of each narrative for each participant.

Second, I emailed the narrative account to the participant (see Appendix G) to collaborate and revise, change, negotiate, and co-compose the accounts further. Then, the participant and I met via Zoom to discuss the drafted narrative account (please see Chapter Seven for a more thorough discussion of the changes each participant requested).

The analysis meeting with each participant looked very different. They each had a varying amount of changes for their narrative, and each call was filled with a lot of non-research talk, demonstrating the depths of our relationships beyond “interviews.” For example, when Bruce and I met for analysis, we talked about school and consulting work before diving into the

narrative. Then, he pointed out a few things he wanted deleted, changed, and added (e.g., he wanted to remove an identifying piece of information about a previous professor he had). I made the necessary changes and then he took a week with the document to read through and make minor edits which he then sent back to me to finalize.

When I met with Chris, we discussed a lot about PhDs and graduate school programs, including the dissertation and comprehensive exams process as he was looking into PhD programs when we met. As for the narrative, he didn't have many edits other than adding a title of a section since I told him I was unsure of what to title it.

When Xavier and I met, he preferred to put the document into a Microsoft OneDrive online location where we could both work and edit the document simultaneously. We spent two hours reading through his story line by line as he made decisions of what he wanted to keep, revise, or delete (e.g., he wanted some aspects regarding his family to be removed). After, he finished going through the document on his own and sent it back to me to finalize.

Lastly, at the end of the analysis meeting with each participant, we discussed the potential to continue working together in the future. All three participants said they would forgo their privacy and confidentiality to continue working on the research and eventually publish their story pending an IRB approved amendment to do so. Not only did they say they would like to, but they said it with excitement and gratitude. I was also excited and incredibly grateful. Additionally, they each provided written consent to use clips of their audio files from our conversations during the live dissertation defense presentation. Their wanting and commitment to continue working together speaks to the depths of our relations which is also a testament to the methodology. Narrative inquiry is supposed to be relational (Clandinin, 2013) and there is no

doubt we had a trusting relationship by the end. Personally, I felt this made the “goodbye” significantly easier as it was now a “see you soon.”

After I made the final edits to each narrative account, I sent it to the participants for one last check for the dissertation-specific narrative account. I have included a separate chapter for each individual and their narrative account and concluded it with a coda (i.e., overarching) of each of their stories. Also, within each chapter are connections to the landscapes of narrative inquiry (i.e., sociality, continuity, and place) as the analysis occurs in the depths of each individual narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Then, following those accounts, I provide brief connections to the literature for each individual narrative and insights into the researcher and researched relationships (i.e., positionality).

Looking Ahead

The following three chapters are condensed and reconstructed versions of the participants’ narratives. Most of the words are theirs although some are mine as we worked together to create meaning and find purpose, much of which they had already been working through on their own over the last several years.

Chapter 4: Bruce Wayne²

The Beginning: “I Can’t do this Anymore”

Baseball was actually my favorite sport and I wish I would have played it longer. I’ve loved it since I started playing when I was seven. I actually got into sports because my parents got divorced when I was seven. My mom sent me to family therapy, and they recommended I play sports. So, I started baseball. It was literally just a bunch of guys just having fun and messing around. We would show up to practice, have fun, have a game, and then go home. As a kid, I just liked playing the sport. Sports were supposed to be my release from everything, it was always a stress relief for me, and then it became a super stressful, hostile environment.

I do think all of my baseball coaches were toxic in some form or another, though. I think the last one just broke the camel’s back. Before then, my coaches weren’t terrible. They weren’t perfect, but I could tolerate them. The other coaches were at least friendly most of the time, like they would get mad or yell when we would lose or something. They’d make us run extra at practice or have a longer practice, but whatever, I hate losing, too. As long as there’s some sort of constructive aspect to it... Well, yelling is not effective communication, but I guess it sometimes works. So, I get it in those senses. I didn’t mind that but the constant harassing for every single mistake from my last coach, I was like, “This is terrible. You’re not making me better. You’re just making me hate baseball.” It’s just constant, and like, no, that’s just not healthy for anybody. Like my first ever little league coach that I played with for, for four or five years, from 7-11 or 12, was an alcoholic. He’d just yell at everyone and that wasn’t a good culture either. I didn’t grow much there. Then to get this toxic coach my last year, it wasn’t great.

² Please note that any dialogue they referenced with others was put in double quotation marks and any thoughts they had to themselves were referenced with single quotation marks.

There was a lot going on that year for me. I was getting bullied a lot in school. One of the kids like threatened to kill me in the locker room. He was like on drugs and dealing drugs as a sixth grader. He even pulled a knife on me in the locker room, very intense, very traumatic. He should have been expelled for it and then he wasn't. The school's solution was to just switch my PE class, but keep me in the same hour and the same locker room. So, I was like, "How does that fix anything? It doesn't, like okay." I had most of my classes with him, too. So, the school handled it terribly. I would miss school sometimes if I didn't feel safe. I would just wake up with a bad feeling and just tell my mom I was sick and not go to school. Until that year, I rarely missed school because I never got sick, maybe once a year. Then, like every other week I was sick and missing. So, yeah, I was dealing with that stuff during the entire year and baseball was supposed to be my safe place and my release from all the stressful things in my life. Then baseball became a stressful environment for me.

That year, I think was also the first year I played since I was like seven or eight without my best friend on the team because we'd always play baseball together. That's how we met, and we were always on the same team. I think just that was different for me. The coach, me and his son played the same position, too. So, then anytime I did anything better, I got harassed for it or benched or whatever. So, there was a lot going on that year in and out of baseball.

For example, when I say "harass," I mean anytime I would do something, good or bad, anytime I would make a mistake, it was like five minutes focused on me, telling me what I did wrong, and why I'm bad and terrible, and things of that nature. That's when the coach's yelling would actually get to me, and he wouldn't do that with anyone else. It was literally just me, which was frustrating and really annoying that I was the target of that but then I literally just

accepted it and they'd play me in a different position. He moved me from first to second and then outfield. He just kept bouncing me around.

One time that I remember clearly, he had just moved me to second base, and I missed the ground ball because it was my first week of practice in that position, and I hadn't played it before. So, I wasn't used to how the ball was coming in, I missed a ground ball, and he spent five minutes yelling at me and telling me how terrible I was, what I needed to be doing, and why I wasn't going to be playing. I was like, "I just made nine perfect plays and then missed one because it's a new position for me, calm down." I was pretty much silent during it, though, and I just kind of took it. I'm sure I was internally upset but I didn't show it. Then, when the next ground ball came my way, I didn't even try to field it. I just let it go past me. I don't know if that was more to make a point to the coach that like "If I'm trying, I'm going to try" because during the tirade he said I wasn't even trying, and I didn't care. So, I think I was making the point, like, "Yeah now, I don't care, thanks. Bye." Then, after that I just went and sat on the bench for the rest of practice and didn't participate. Coach was absolutely upset, but there was only 20 minutes left of practice, so I didn't care. It wasn't like a ton of time, but it was enough to annoy him. I think we were just mutually pissed off at each other.

After, a couple of my teammates came in the dugout and talked to me, and they said they understood that I was trying my best and they know mistakes happen. So, they told me not to worry about it. I think everyone was pretty much fine with it, but yeah. After that, despite getting really good at second, he moved me to outfield because he just didn't want me playing. Which, that was fine because I started playing baseball as an outfielder. I just didn't prefer it, and it wasn't my best position.

That was really the first thing that happened that made me start to not want to play baseball anymore. Like I said, being yelled at in certain situations to keep running or do sprints and like the normal coaching yelling, fine. He'd just yell at me in a five-minute tirade for one little mistake or if I struck out during batting practice, he would be like, "Alright you're done hitting for the day. You're not gonna have another chance." That was emotionally draining and not okay. I was also a super shy, quiet kid. I wouldn't talk. So, somebody yelling at me did not go well with me. I was just not okay.

His nature of just harassing me after every single mistake actually led to the team doing it. The coach was already toxic but then my teammates started treating me in the same way . So, eventually that abuse shifted the culture of the team. At the start of the year, I was friends with a lot of the guys because we had played baseball against each other for years, had class together, went to school together, all that. Some of them I played basketball with, too. We were all friends, and then by the end of the year, I was an outcast of the team. That definitely ruined baseball for me, and I think I would have stuck with it otherwise. I tried to make it through the season, but it was like three games left in the season and I was like, "I'm done. I can't do it." Which that actually happened during a game.

My last game that I played, I was in the outfield and missed the ball. It was just your routine pop ball, pop up, and I should have got it, no problem. I was staring at the sun in the middle of the summer, it was bright, and I didn't have sunglasses on at the time. I just lost the ball for a second. The ball literally barely tipped my glove. I was like two inches away from catching it. It was an honest mistake, and it shouldn't have been a big deal. The very next play, I went and caught the ball which ended the inning. No one scored, so my mistake should not have been a big deal at all. When I went into the dugout, though, the coach was yelling at me that I

made a mistake, and I should have done better and I'm not going to play the next game. Then, my teammates started yelling at me saying, "How could you do that? We could have lost the game." I was like, "Whoa, it was two outs, nobody was on base, no." Then, we just started yelling at each other in the dugout. I just screamed, "Shut the fuck up" at my teammate and all the parents just stared at me and I was like, "Sorry," but I'm not sorry. Until that point, I had never cussed in front of my mom before, and she was sitting in the bleachers. After that, my mom recognized the coach was yelling at me, but she told me, "You can't just blow up on people," and I was like, "Well, I am not just going to take this because a person can only take so much before they blow up so." She was madder at me for using the F bomb around other kids than she was at anybody yelling at me.

I actually didn't even finish the game. I literally left during the interaction... there were three innings left. I'm just like, "I'm done. I'm not playing anymore." So, that was my exit from baseball.

I broke and then quit.

A Break from Organized Sport: "That Year Didn't Count"

After that, I took a year off from sports, my freshman year, mostly because of anxiety. Well, I actually went to basketball tryouts. It was two days of tryouts. The first day went well and the coaches said I had a spot on the team. I just had to show up the next day because they're always, "You have to show up to both days to make the team. You can't just show up to one," which is reasonable, but then some of the other kids on the team started bullying me in the locker room and the next day leading up to the tryouts. It was mostly verbal bullying, like they were saying things and just trying to get in my head. I had been playing with them since we were in fifth grade, and I was kind of always the outcast. They were always dating every popular girl in

school, but I hadn't started dating yet. So, they would always say I was "gay" or things like that. Then, freshman year I was overweight, 6'1", 200 pounds at the time, which wasn't that overweight, but enough to be considered overweight. So, they made fun of me for that, and just had a lot of those types of comments the entire day. I was like, 'I can't really deal with this.'

I got so anxious and overthinking. I actually got really physically ill from it, and I was like, 'I can't go.' I actually think I even skipped school that day or I went home early, I think. By lunch I was like, 'Yeah, I'm sick.' The anxiety-induced somatic symptoms of being nauseous and lightheaded were too much. I just didn't feel good. So, I went home, and I just didn't play that year. I didn't try out for high school baseball either then because even though the coaches were awesome and loved me, it was a lot of the same guys, and I didn't want to deal with that. I still wanted to be involved in doing stuff, though. I joined a lot of clubs which I think helped me to just have an identity outside of high school sport. Granted, I considered myself an athlete and I still did throughout college, but I was in student council, science club, Spanish club, key club. I loved doing community service. I would do all these different things. So, I knew I had other interests outside of sport and had all these other things to identify with. Then, a lot of my time on weekends and after school, I would go play basketball. I was just constantly practicing, playing pick-up games, and going to be better. Really, I only took a break from organized sport, but it was still weird, especially to not have a schedule to go do this, this, and this every day. It was definitely weird. I don't honestly remember most of that year probably because all my memories when I was growing up were involved in sport in some way. So, having a whole year without sport, I was just like, 'Okay, well that year didn't count.' That's what led me to play football.

Football: “I Needed That Approval”

I never wanted to play football. My thought was, 'If I play football, it's the most masculine sport, and they're not going to bully me. They also play football. Then, I can play basketball, and I'll be fine.' The football culture was extremely toxic, and I didn't necessarily like it. Like every other word was somebody cussing, and it was very degrading and “tearing-you-down” type of language, and you could see how it would drain on other players. I never received it directly, though. The coaches liked me, I did my job, showed up, and worked hard every day. Well, actually, my first padded football practice I got knocked out and got a concussion. I was out cold on the turf, and I woke up like two or three minutes later with the whole team surrounding me. I didn't know what happened. The athletic trainer wasn't there that day, so no one was there to say “No, he's not playing,” and my coach had me in on the very next play. I think the coaches respected me for doing that, and after baseball I just wanted the coaches to like me. That's why I got back up. I just really needed that approval and that respect or value from the coaches.

I never wanted to give them a reason to not like me. I didn't want the coaches to think I wasn't trying or didn't care or anything. For example, when we would have water breaks, I would run to get water, and then be the first person back to the drill. I didn't want to let my team down, didn't want the coaches to think I didn't want to be there. So yeah, I think I just cared way too much what the coaches thought going back into sport. I probably should have valued myself more, but I definitely wanted them to value me first.

I will say, I think football was good for me to get back into organized sport. It definitely had a different camaraderie about it in the locker room. Our football team was terrible. My one year playing football was the first time we went to the playoffs in like 18 years or something, and

we haven't been back since. So, it was weird because there were no expectations, no pressure, and no absurd yelling. Also, it reminded me that all coaches don't suck. So, it was just a good thing.

Basketball: "He Just Never Liked Me"

I loved basketball, and it was a way for my brother and I to bond. He's 10 years older than me, but he's shorter. So, by the time I was 12, I was as tall as him, and I could go play pick-up games with him and his friends which was great. So, taking some time off from basketball led me to miss it, and by the time sophomore year came, I was pretty determined to play. I actually went to tryouts with a concussion. I was not supposed to be playing at all, but I was not missing out on another year of basketball. I told my coach before tryouts started, "I have a concussion, but I am going to play." So, they neglected the fact that I had a concussion because it was a formality that I had to try out both days. Being one of the top basketball programs, you were going to play whether you were hurt or not. They definitely had that like NFL mentality with injuries. Essentially, if you're hurt they don't care unless you're dead. So, kind of a bad mentality to have but at the time, I loved sport and I was wanting to play. I didn't think anything of it. It was draining, to say the least. We could spend hours talking about all of my injuries alone.

So, there's that. I also never felt like I fit into the culture. I wasn't the typical jock, and I think that put a huge strain on me because I was always the outcast of the team. The toxic masculinity that was present was ridiculous - like every stereotypical jock male thing that you see in movies and TV shows... Yeah, it was present, and in those locker rooms. Like how they would interact with other people, and they would bully other kids because they're the jocks and untouchable. Meanwhile, I was just friends with everyone. They had to have everything their

own way and if anybody was different they would throw around “gay,” “fag,” and those types of terms. Some people weren’t as bad with it, but for the most part, it was pretty bad. They would go out and party every weekend and get drunk, and I didn’t want to do any of that. I wanted to be healthy and practice my sport. That’s all I wanted to do, practice my sport and spend time with my family. Those things meant I was an outcast. It was kind of ridiculous.

There was almost a divide, too, of how my white and Black teammates treated others and were treated. So, I typically hung out with my Black teammates and did things outside of sport with them. Typically, the bullying and things and toxic nature came from the white athletes. My Black teammates were the nicest, funniest people on earth, and they got along with everyone. Wherever we would go, they were friendly to everyone, whether they were the drama kids or the nerdy kids. Everyone just loved them. Well, besides the coach who would yell at them and physically grab and hit them more than the white athletes. They got similar treatment as I did from the head coach. For example, one of my Black teammates went up for a block during practice and just completely missed and hit the guy on the head. Our coach went and attacked him and choked him. Like even though he had a college scholarship and everything, he was treated as lesser than compared to my white teammates who never had anything happen to them from the coach. In a two-week timespan, three Black players quit because of him, including the one that got choked. They all ended up coming back after the coach begged them, but it definitely led to some team dynamics.

My white teammates, on the other hand, they only talked to each other or the popular girls at school. They would not interact with anyone if they were considered a nerd. If they did interact with them, they were bullying them. So typically, I hung out with my Black teammates. We would go get pregame meals with them, hang out after games with them, ride to school

together, all that stuff. The similar treatment we got also helped us to bond differently than the white players. The divide got worse throughout the season, though which led to our teammates changing the way they treated us. So, these were guys that I had been playing basketball with since I was in fifth grade and suddenly they changed their opinion and just started acting differently. So, I definitely feel like that would have to be tied to the coach, more than anything else.

Despite all of that, we practiced hard and had fun with it, and when we were on the court, it was a good environment to be in. We were solely focused on winning. If we had a bad game, we didn't mind the sprints that next day. We felt we earned everything that came our way. If we had an easy practice, we'd be kind of upset about it because we wanted to be the best.

Our high school basketball team was kind of unique, though. My high school took basketball extremely seriously. We were consistently in the top five schools in the state. We had a lot of money and got a lot of special treatment. Varsity and JV had their own private locker room, like thousands of dollars would be spent every year to renovate it. It had TVs, gaming systems, everything in there. So, our team would hang out in there before classes and after classes and before and after practice. There was a Saturday where we had a two-hour practice, and we were at the gym for six hours because we were just hanging out in the locker room. So, we had a special locker room, we were winning a lot, and we represented our school, selling out every single game with 5000 fans in the stadium, even if we were playing a super tiny school that we were going to win against by 50. It was great, and we all got great treatment. So, that culture was definitely cool to be a part of. But then, it also came at the cost of dealing with the head coach that hated people. Winning hides a lot of things, and it didn't help that the head basketball coach was also the assistant athletic director.

Anyways, my sophomore year, I played on our sophomore/JV team and that coach and the assistant coach I was fine with, but the varsity head coach would also be at the practices with us and coach us and talk to us in between the games. He would make decisions ultimately for who's playing and who's not playing. So, sophomore year, I didn't do a ton but yeah, still played and still had good practices, still enjoyed basketball, but the head coach literally just never liked me from the start, which was weird. And still from baseball, I would overcompensate trying to get coaches to like me. So, for example, we would host one of the biggest Christmas time tournaments in the country and my sophomore year, I volunteered to help every day. I was there from the start of it at 8 a.m. till the end of it at 10 p.m., doing everything for the booster club, going in and helping them with food and catering, escorting teams, or doing sales. I did everything they asked just trying to get on his good side. Then, I would go to the summer camps we would host and work with the kids every day. Instead of going just the one day that was required of us, I would go all four. Then, I would practice for two hours before or after.

I also just loved having that routine of getting up early in the morning for that 5:00 a.m. practice and then going after school to have practice again. I was always the first one at practice. I'd get there 30 minutes early instead of messing around in the locker room like most of my teammates. I'd stay a half hour late. When I was in the locker room, I was always the DJ, playing music, and kind of that lovable teammate guy. I was the guy that like brought breakfast for everyone in the locker room on our Friday a.m. practices. That kind of changed though once my teammates saw how the coach treated me. It led the white kids on the team to stop liking me which was hard because we had been playing together since fifth grade and I hadn't had problems that whole time.

It just didn't make sense that my coach didn't like me. I was always trying to do stuff, and he just never liked me. I was like, I can't do anything else. I am quiet. I mind my business. I don't make problems in the locker room. I'm friends with most people in the locker room. There is no reason for you not to like me. And the fact that the other coaches liked me, I was like, "I don't understand it at all."

"The Most Toxic of All Coaches"

I would say his behavior was the most toxic of all the coaches I had, including baseball. Instead of yelling at me, he eventually just stopped playing me and even stopped talking to me, which made it really hard to go to practice every day. Honestly, I probably would have preferred yelling because at least that way I'm being communicated with, even if not in a good way. I feel like being ignored was way worse because then I don't know what I'm doing or how to fix it. It just got to the point he would send the assistant coach to tell me I wasn't going to play instead of telling me himself. And he always just got mad at the smallest things. Like, I would be guarding the best player and they'd score a basket, literally one basket and he'd be like, "Alright, sit on the sidelines, you're out, you're not playing for 20 minutes." It's like, 'Are they not supposed to score, ever?' So, it would be like that, and there was a stretch of time where I went a month and a half without playing in a game because he just didn't want to play me. I just wish he would have communicated with me. I tried to talk to him and ask him, and he'd be like, "Just go to talk to the assistant coach," and he'd just dismiss me every time. I was disappointed and frustrated. Which, the assistant coach was really nice, and we'd sit and talk. He would tell me, "I want you to be playing. I know you're capable of it." He gave me hope things would change, and they just never did.

One time we were playing our high school rivals and my whole family was from the other town, and they were all coming to the game to watch. I hadn't played in like a month and a half, and this was towards the end of that point where I hadn't been playing and then I asked him, I was like, "Hey, can I at least play tonight? You can keep benching me if you want, but can I least play tonight?" And he was like, "No." I was like, "Great, wonderful, it's fine, my family is not going to be there. It's great." So yeah, my family came, and I didn't play, and that was upsetting. We were even winning by like 30 points. So, even if I was the worst player on the team, which I wasn't, it would have been fine to put me in there for 10 minutes and we would have still won. Typically, if we were winning by large amounts, everyone would play. There were even games where the coach wasn't playing me, for whatever reason, but he would still put me in, in those situations. There were also games where he wasn't there, and the assistant coach was coaching, and he would play me, even in close games because he trusted me. Then, on that day with my family, the head coach was like, "Nope, you're not playing even if we are up by 100." I was like, 'Well, this is annoying.' Thinking about it at the time, it just made me not want to play and not be on the team cause like I'm there every practice, spending the most time practicing, doing all the extra stuff, and being the best team player I can be, being the best [individual] player I can be, having great practices, outperforming other players that are playing, and then you still can't even play me when my family is there. So... very frustrating. I mean that was like the only time most of my family would have ever seen me play because one of my uncles lives out-of-state and he was out there for that, and then my grandparents never got to get out of the house that often, and they were able to go. So that would've been like most of my mom's side of the family that would have seen me play, and he didn't want to play me. But, then

I played the very next game, which was a close game. It definitely didn't leave a good taste in my mouth.

Even outside of basketball, he treated me differently. I remember, and this is partially my fault, but I had him as my study hall teacher my junior year. We would have 5:00 a.m. practices, and then have a two-hour practice after school and we'd have games on Tuesdays and Fridays. I'd always just be tired. When I would get home, and when I had the time, I was a professional video game player. So, I was doing that for six hours a day, at least. I didn't have time in the day which meant I wouldn't sleep much. I would go to bed around midnight as a high school student and had to be up at 4:30 a.m. for practice. I was always exhausted, but I was always ahead on my homework. So, in study hall I had nothing to do, and I would take a nap. Twenty out of 30 of us in that study hall were athletes and 15-20 would nap, including three basketball players. Every single day, he would yell at me for taking a nap, but not a word was said to them. I was like, 'Great, cool, this is happening again just like in baseball when I would be the only one to get yelled at.'

Mismanaged Injuries

I also had several injuries that were mismanaged. Again, that NFL mentality. My first one would have been one of my concussions I suffered during a practice. It was a really bad one. I had color inversion. So, purple turned white, blue turned brown, super crazy. I couldn't walk straight, but my coach was like, "You're fine." I went to see the athletic trainer anyways. Then, after two days, they wanted me to start playing again. I was like, "I'm clearly not ready to play." Then, even a week later, when the athletic trainer cleared me, my first five seconds on the floor I tripped and fell over myself because I still couldn't walk straight. They still had me play in the game the next day.

Another time during practice, my teammate accidentally elbowed me in the face on a rebound, and it broke my nose. The coaches let me sit out the rest of that practice, so that was cool. Then, I went home, and my mom didn't take me to the doctor cause she thought I was just playing that my nose was crooked. So, she laughed at me instead of taking me to the doctor the next day. It's fine. It's all good now. It's only slightly crooked. By the next day, because I didn't go to the doctor, they made me keep practicing, and I literally couldn't breathe because I had so much lactic acid buildup. So, I started throwing up and every single sprint we did, I would go throw up afterwards, or every five minutes of scrimmage, I would go throw up. The coaches would just scream at me every single time, "Why are you so out of shape? How are you throwing up this much? You are so weak." I'm like, "I have a broken nose and can't breathe. I'm still here giving you 100%." So, I'm like, "I am sitting out." They're said, "No, get on the line, you're doing it." So, then they made me do it alone and I just kept throwing up. I was so miserable that day and then every practice for two weeks until my nose healed, I was throwing up every single sprint. I probably lost 10 pounds that week. It was not fun. That was definitely the most vivid experience for basketball.

That was my junior year and then like two months later I tore my Achilles, but they just said it was a sprained ankle and said I would be able to play. I was on crutches the whole day before the game because I was like, 'Okay they want to play. I'm gonna take it easy before the game.' I got dressed and went out for warm up. I jumped once and then collapsed on the floor because my Achilles gave out. So, that was cool. Then, the second I tore it, my coach was like, "You're not playing next year." He literally removed me from the team. I couldn't travel with them, be in the locker room, go to practice or do anything with them anymore. Like, typical protocol and team rules were that if you're still hurt, you still dress in the team gear, you wear

your team jumpsuit, you'd be on the end of the bench and talk to people when they come off. You're still a part of the team, and I was the first person that was removed from the team for being injured. The assistant coach allowed me to still be with JV and go to their practices and games, but as far as Varsity, I was not associated with the team in any way, shape, or form.

The Ending of Sport: "Everything was Stripped Away"

It was one of the worst feelings I experienced because I put everything into that team that I had. Every single waking moment of my life, up to that point, was put in that team. So, it definitely hurt and to not even be allowed in the locker room with my teammates and my friends... It was like, 'I've been part of this team for two years. You can't even let me have these last few days with the team, like two weeks left of the season.' He also didn't let me travel with the team, so I would have to drive myself. I definitely wasn't supposed to be driving with a torn Achilles, but I didn't have a choice because I wasn't going to not support my team. So, despite all that, I still went to games. I would sit behind the bench. I would still talk to people. I'd still be there pregame talking to people and go to postgame. I was still being a part of the team, even though he didn't want me to be. So, it was definitely weird, but I did what I could with it. It definitely sucked and that was probably the most hurtful thing out of everything I experienced. Everything was just being stripped away from me.

Then, on top of that, he told me I couldn't be on the team next year. I went to the doctor and everything, because it was only a partial tear, but they're like, "You don't require surgery." So, four months, and you'll be able to play again. I wanted to prove him wrong. I deserved it. I was good enough to play. It was my senior year, and I didn't want to miss because your senior year is supposed to be a great time for everyone. I couldn't miss out on this huge part of my life. So, I decided to do everything I could to prove myself and prove that I deserve to be there. So,

after four months of being in a boot and doing all summer camp workouts and everything, I was good to go for the fall. I went to all the open gyms at 5:00 a.m. every morning for the three weeks before tryouts. Then, I went to tryouts.

On the second day of tryouts, I was in the locker room and playing music. A sophomore at the time, who got his way with everything since he was already getting college scholarships, said, “I don’t like this song you’re playing.” I said, “I’ll switch it,” but he literally came up behind me, grabbed me, threw me to the ground, and slammed my head on the concrete floor. I got a concussion from it, my head was bleeding, and the coach walked in the room as it was happening. He saw me get up, struggling to walk, and he just didn’t say anything about it. He went and talked to the player, but they were talking about how he already made the team. So, he didn’t do anything to stop it, despite witnessing it. I actually feel like he encouraged it. That ended up being my last day in that locker room. Despite all that I had done to prepare for the season and give it my all, he still said, “Nope. I told you in the spring that you’re not playing for me.” I think the concussion also gave him a reason to cut me because I wouldn’t be able to play for two weeks. I’m like, ‘Well, I left it all out on the table.’ I can’t control his actions, but I wasn’t going to let him stop me from at least trying.

After that, I was recruited by my youth pastor to play at the private school he coached at, but it wasn’t the same. It was a good experience. I was captain of the team which I loved. I played well and won Defensive Player of the Year for the conference, and I had a great, healthy relationship with the coach, my pastor. It was a good ending to basketball, but I would have preferred to play at my actual high school and be a part of that team.

It actually came out my senior year, after I stopped playing for him, that it was because I wasn’t a booster. The fee to play any sports at our school was only \$25. So, that’s not going to

provide a ton of money for sports, especially with basketball having our luxurious lifestyle. Every year, we would get new tracksuits, new uniforms, practice gear, and new shoes, all paid for. We were treated like a college athletic department and that wouldn't go very far with \$25. So, there was the normal booster club where people give donations and stuff which helps sponsor and fund the teams, and then there were super boosters which was like, '\$10,000 pay your way to the team, your son's gonna have whatever they want.' It was kind of like the college boosters that don't actually exist but they're giving athletes cars to go play there. Same type of mentality.

So, boosters meant a lot. And all the kids above me that we're playing more, were spending that \$10- \$20,000/year to be playing. My mom wasn't a booster. I would play the select travel teams which would cost a lot of money, but then my mom was like, "I'm not going to spend \$10,000 for you to play basketball at a public school." I was like, "That's reasonable. I don't blame you for that. Not going to be upset by it." That came with the consequence, though, of not getting playtime and that preferential treatment. I definitely feel like if you were white and you were middle-class or upper-class, you were expected to do it, and then my mom was the only one not doing it. So, I definitely feel like that put a strain on my experience.

Understanding and Using the Past

I never even remotely thought about my experience as being emotional abuse or even out of the norm. I really believed I was just an athlete and getting hurt was a part of it. I didn't care. I mean, waking up at 4:30 a.m. and having two-a-days is normal, but the experiences within the sport that were happening from the coaches, I guess were normal at the time. Now reflecting on it though... yeah, that shouldn't have been happening. I think part of it is because, one, it's kind of normalized in the sport setting that coaches act like this, but two, once we're out of the sport

setting we, as in athletes, kind of just repress those things. We don't want to think about our coach hurting us anymore. So, it just goes away, but the damage is still there.

Part of the normalization is, you know, you'll watch movies that reflect accounts from the 80s and the coaches are yelling at their players and being emotionally abusive. So, you're like, 'Oh, that's how coaches coach. It's normal.' But now, it's just like, 'No, no, that cannot be considered normal, ever.' What really got me thinking was the documentary *Athlete A*. I had been following the story since it broke in 2016, but actually watching everything, I was like, 'Coaches just allow this to happen for the sake of winning.' That made me think about my Achilles tear and how I was treated as a person, because it's like, "Well, as long as we're winning. We don't care what happens to you because you're here for this X amount of years and then you're gone." So, I definitely think seeing that and the *Weight of Gold* documentary, and having those things come out and come to light definitely made a difference in how I viewed my experience. Then, even going with Colin Kaepernick's case with the NFL and Eric Reid, and how they were treated as less than a human because of their skin tone, and not being able to speak out because they were "just" an athlete. That's frustrating because it made me realize that a lot of people just view athletes as athletes, not as a person. I mean even athletes view themselves as just an athlete and they don't have an identity outside of sport. Participating in clubs and having an identity outside of sport was critical for me. Athlete was my primary identity, but I knew it wasn't all of who I was. Without that, I would not have had any positives coming out of sport. So, I think seeing all these things happen and hearing other people's stories made me reflect on my own and be like, "Yeah, okay, I get that. I definitely see where you're coming from."

Now, when I look back at the impact it had on me, I definitely feel like I changed a lot. I don't know how much of it was the concussions changing my personality, and how much of it was actually the sport experience. I'm assuming it's a combination of both being in that environment where I am constantly being yelled at and belittled and the concussions. By the end of my junior and senior year, I was much more confrontational and aggressive. I was just jaded towards people. After my Achilles tear and being told I wasn't playing basketball again, I kind of just had a chip on my shoulder with everything. Like if I would go play a pickup game of basketball, I played like my life depended on it. So, it just changed how I approached things and how I felt on a day-to-day basis and made me not a happy person. Now, I recognize that since giving up sport, I'm a much happier person. I definitely feel like I lost who I was while playing sport, but it also, obviously, got me out of my bubble and my shell, made me less shy of a person. Then, at the end, it also made me not like interaction with people. It's a double-edged sword.

Thinking about my experiences though, and what stands out most, six or seven years ago when I was fresh out of high school sports, I would have said, 'The friends I made and my connections with them.' Now, being eight years removed, I don't talk to any of them. So, I think I just enjoyed the things I learned in sport like how to be resilient, how to be a team player, and building my grit and character and work ethic, all those things. It definitely shaped who I am. I definitely think I got more positives than negatives out of sport because I don't think I would have stuck with it otherwise. I really give sport for a lot of credit for who I am, but at the same time, I wish it would have been different. I wish that basketball coaches weren't as aggressive. Overall, though, I got a lot of positives out of it including realizing the important things in sport. It's not just about actually going out there and doing what the coach says and trying to win

everything and be this “perfect” athlete. There’s more to sports than that, like life skill development and positive youth development. The things I got out of sport, and how I learned and developed, I credit a lot of it to sport. I just think of how I would have developed differently if I actually had a positive coach and positive experience, especially during high school when I devoted so much time to just basketball.

“The Only One Determining My Future is Me”

My sport experiences, the emotional abuse, and my resulting anxiety have definitely shaped who and what I am doing now. I used to want to prove myself to a detriment and was always overcompensating trying to get everyone to like me. Now, I make sure that I make choices that allow me, and only me, to control my future. I think the turning point for this was actually showing up to tryouts Senior year despite the coach telling me I wouldn’t make it. At that point, I didn’t care about being liked. I was determined to prove him wrong because the only one determining my future is me. I think that was the blossoming of it, but I think I got out of that mentality for a bit during my first couple years of college. Then, when I started applying to grad schools and stuff, I definitely felt like I needed to prove that I belonged because my undergrad GPA was not good. It was 2.38, and I did not necessarily deserve a seat at the table in grad school because of that, but I was dealing with my concussions. I had gotten up to nine during undergrad. So, I had to relearn how to learn while in college. For example, I was conversationally fluid in Spanish, and I lost the ability to speak Spanish all together. I had to do all these things and go through all these hurdles. So, when I applied, I was like, “Yeah, my GPA doesn’t say I deserve a seat at the table, but my work ethic, my actual goals, and how hard I’m going to work for this... yeah, I deserve this.” Thankfully, one of my graduate school professors saw that, and she pushed me for me to get in. So, I had conversations with her and the director of

the grad school, and stood up for myself and was like, “I deserve this, I’m not letting somebody tell me no.” I sometimes get too confrontational and fight back on some things. It’s just my natural defense mechanism now after having to do it in sport. I think I am learning to do it in a healthier way now, though, and that mentality of standing up for myself and my future has just kept progressing throughout grad school.

My sport experiences just definitely influenced the way I view authority figures and power dynamics. I will not let anyone take advantage of it now. For example, when I was at Team USA, one of the professors from my school was trying to make all the students do whatever he wanted. So, I was talking with one of the people at Team USA and got to meet with one of their professionals for lunch, and the professor tried to stop me from doing that. He’s like, “You’re not sitting with the other students, you’re doing your own thing.” And I was like, “Because this is my future, this benefits me. I’m not going to give up myself for you.” This professor had written me letters of recommendation before. I had him for several classes, and we had a good relationship up until that point. Now, he barely talks to me. In the end, I was willing to sacrifice that to further my career. So, yeah, it definitely changed how I look at authority figures and how I interact with them. Probably not always for the best, but I just don’t want to go through that whole situation again.

“My Heart Hurts for Others”

On top of that, my experiences led me to the field that I am in now, sport psychology. I think mostly I realized that my experiences weren’t great and weren’t fun, but more than anything, watching those documentaries made me think about the other people who are going through this, and it has to suck for those people, too. It just made my heart hurt for other people, and then allowed me to reflect on my own experiences. It made me more concerned about other

people and how to help other people. So, it definitely shaped the things I want to do with my career. Dealing with coaching education has become a thing I'm interested in, and I want to do an internship with Team USA and coach education to learn how to actually make these coaches better and how to influence them, how to actually teach them how to coach. Then, I'm also fascinated with athlete injury and how mental states are affected with that.

Like, in my years of therapy, I would bring up sport and specifically my concussions, and the conversation would always just end. And I went to therapy literally to deal with my concussion side effects because I had personality changes, anger management problems, anxiety, stuff like that from them, and obviously I didn't like any of those things happening. So, I wanted to fix them but even in counseling with anger management, which should be a thing that they should know how to do, but when I said it was stemming from my concussions, they said they didn't know how to fix that. I'm like, "Well, give me the same strategies. I'm still a person," but they would just stop. So, I thought, 'Well, this isn't helpful.' So, a lot of the stuff I learned to do was on my own, through like meditation, mindfulness and stuff like that. It was frustrating. I don't think counselors recognize how important the athlete identity is. We need to be training counselors to understand that sport is a different thing, different entity, and that the mindset of athletes is different. That's why sports psychology is a thing. So, in my graduate program, I was like, "Hey, we treat athletes like they're just athletes and not humans and it's a huge problem." Since then, my professors have started including sport and how we can work with athletes into their lectures. It was also made relevant in our multicultural class this semester, which is really cool because they're treating athletes as a whole new subculture to think about and that's great to see that recognition and how we're able to help people. So, I'm glad I was able to be the voice to start making a little bit of progress.

It's actually kind of ironic and funny, and really eye-opening that now I have a whole career that's going to focus on fixing these issues for other athletes. If I would have known this stuff like when I was 15, I probably would have been a great athlete because I wouldn't have had been dealing these things. I was resilient, but I didn't have the coping mechanisms to deal with my stress. It's nice to see it come full circle to where I'm able to fix the mistakes in somebody else, but I wish I could have done it for myself. Like, knowing what I know now, I was probably so stressed out about how the coaches were treating me and having to worry about my playtime and all this stuff that the stress from that probably caused some of my injuries. Even like my anxiety. I had no idea that when I felt sick and skipped school, that was just somatic symptoms from my anxiety. I was anxious and that's just how my anxiety produced itself back then. I wasn't actually sick because the next day I was completely fine again. Shocking.

So, I didn't know I had anxiety until college. I thought my anxiety was brought on by my concussions. My concussions definitely made it worse, but I didn't realize I had been dealing with anxiety since I was in like fifth or sixth grade. Now all of that just plays into what I am doing now and my future. As a senior in high school, I knew I wanted to go in sport psychology and help the mental health of athletes but never realized it was because mine took a hit for four straight years and I never dealt with it; so, these experiences obviously impacted my mental health.

Sometimes, I say I wish I could go back and change things, like I would've stuck up for myself more and not let the coaches treat me the ways they did, but I don't know if I actually would want to. It led me here. I don't know if I would have been interested in sport psychology had I not had all these psychologically stressful experiences. And I chose my undergraduate school based on the fact that I'd be going to a new city and starting new. So, would I actually

change things? I don't know. There are things that I'd theoretically like to change, but I think I'd want to change them more for other people and helping them in the future so that they don't have to deal with those things. Like now, when I have kids I'm not going to want them to ever have a coach like I had. Playing sports should be fun and yeah, if you're good at it, you want to be competitive and win. At the end of the day, though, you still have to have your sanity, you still have to be valued as a person, not just an athlete, and you're not just a tool being used to build a trophy.

You know, my basketball coach told me I would never amount to anything. Here I am getting my second master's and a practicing sport psychologist³. Even though he had this negative mindset and tried to bring me down, I rose past it.

Conclusion: Bruce's Story

The incident where I was knocked out in football and got right back up... that's the metaphor of my entire sport story. It is all-encompassing of the resilience.

Bruce's Landscape: Sociality, Temporality, and Place

Bruce's story took place at the intersection of many relationships and places, flowing between the past, present, and future. Growing up, Bruce's life was changed when his parents were divorced when he was seven years old, and his home turned into a single-parent home. Then, he went to therapy and engaged in a new relationship to understand what he was experiencing with the divorce. The therapist whom he was seeing was the one who suggested he become more involved in sports. His mom put him into organized sport, specifically t-ball, and he started to play basketball with his older brother and his friends, all of whom encouraged him

³ Bruce refers to himself as a sport psychologist, however, he is not licensed. He is practicing as a mental performance consultant and working towards his Certified Mental Performance Consultant (CMPC) and his counseling degree.

to continue playing. Subsequently, he associated sports with being a “stress relief” and a “safe space,” one where he could essentially escape the current situation in his life.

However, those spaces quickly became unsafe. He mentioned that each of his baseball coaches was “toxic” in some sense, starting with his first coach who was an alcoholic. By his last year of baseball, he not only had a toxic coach who influenced the way his teammates treated him, but his best friend was no longer playing on the team, and he was being threatened at school and felt unsafe. Thus, none of his spaces were what he thought they would be. His home was now a single-parent home, and, further, his mom never believed he suffered from physical or psychological injuries. His coach and the school administration also did not protect him. His teammates ridiculed him for small mistakes. Thus, his social environment (e.g., family, friends, school) played a large role in his experience and sense-making. He was already feeling hurt from those other social spaces and was now also being harmed in sport.

Bruce’s experience took place in many spaces, but mainly they occurred within the public education facilities of a midwestern city in the United State that prioritized sport success over health and well-being. Both baseball and basketball coach-abuse experiences happened on school teams (i.e., seventh grade baseball and high school basketball); that is, they occurred on his school’s baseball diamonds and in dugouts, on basketball courts and in locker rooms. The very places where he was being educated were the same spaces he was being abused. Moreover, the very coaches abusing him were working in the school. Thus, his experiences with the basketball coach on the court, in the high school, did not stay on the court. He was constantly reminded of the dislike the coach had for him at other places such as when his coach was also his homeroom teacher. Although this also meant he was able to connect better with the assistant coach he got along with in his PE class, the school was never a “safe” space for him, physically or

psychologically. Interestingly, even when Bruce was no longer on his high school team and transferred to the private school's team, he would have preferred to be on his high school's team. In essence, it would appear that the social benefits of being on his high school team outweighed the unsafe physical and social environments.

Lastly, as Bruce shared his narrative and flowed between time, he put a large focus on talking about the actual experiences that occurred in the past, the ways he is different now in the present, and the ways he hopes to continue to grow and change in the future. For example, he talked about the ways his concussions and the abuse caused him to have a short temper. He then shared how he went to therapy and did his own research on how to improve. Although he felt his temper had significantly improved since his senior year of high school, he still sees it as something he needs to work on and hopes to continue to grow in the future. Interestingly, he also used past movies he had watched to make sense of the experiences as they occurred and used recent documentaries to make sense of his experiences in the current. Thus, his sense-making changed as he aged and watched media where the portrayal of sport differed.

Chapter 5: Chris

The Beginning: “I Thank God Every Day for My Parents”

I grew up in a city that is basically made up of two towns. So, together, it's a pretty big city of about 80,000 or something like that, which is a pretty nice size. If you just took my town, though, it's a pretty small community. I had about 600 in my high school graduating class, which was definitely a small feel. Growing up, it was me, my mom and dad. My mom, she always put me in church and everything. I honestly could say until I got to college, I think I only missed church twice. I've been to church every Sunday until I was 18. When I went to college though, I didn't have a car; so, I couldn't really go as much I wanted to. But, yeah, I'm very religious, just going strictly off what the Bible says. When I was younger, I didn't think it made sense, but as I got older, I realized I needed that. I needed the structure, personally. Without a belief in God, you won't believe there is a consequence for all the wrong you're doing.

My parents were also my biggest supporters in sports. My dad was at all my games. My mom, she had to work sometimes, but for the most part, she was at my games, too. My dad and I always played baseball in my backyard when there wasn't a basketball court around. It got to a point where, usually every day after school, he would take me to the gym, and we would just shoot until like 7:00 at night. Then, we'd go home, and just watch a movie or do homework. He's my righthand man, and the one that really got me involved in sports. I love him for that. He was big on basketball, but one day his co-worker saw me play soccer. He was like, “You need to get him in soccer. I think he's pretty big for his age, and I think he could be pretty good at it.” So, my dad literally turned into a soccer fan. He just started reading up on the game and put me in it.

Soccer: “He was the Biggest Bully There”

I’ve been playing soccer since I was in kindergarten and stopped when I was in my freshman year of high school. I had a few coaches in soccer that were not of my demographic, and I was the only person in my city of my demographic. So, it was a little bit of a different treatment that I would get. I wouldn’t necessarily say racism, but I definitely would say the stereotypes of my race were definitely projected in the way people would talk to me. Like I would be “talked to” like I was less than some of the other kids or my parents didn’t really have a good opinion. They kind of treated my parents like they didn’t have an opinion, or like what they thought about the team didn’t really matter because we were the only different ones on the whole team and kind of the whole community.

So, one of the first times I remember a coach’s treatment really standing out was in soccer. There are times in soccer where it can get a little chippy, like elbowing people to get the ball or kick the ball past somebody and go for a full sprint to kick a goal. There would be times where I would do that, and it would be the coach’s son that I would be going against - like he’d be defender, and I was playing forward. One time, I gave him a little shove, you know, how we would normally play soccer. The coach blew the whistle, stopped everything, and singled me out. He had the team stand all the way to the left and just talked to me in front of the whole team. Then, he said, “Do what you just did again.” So, I was trying to do it, but then he came in and he kind of elbowed me and pushed me to the ground and was like, “How would you feel if that happened to you?” And, I was like, “Dude, I’m six, seven years old. What are you mad at me for? I’m just playing a game.” Even if it wasn’t soccer, like kids are gonna be kids. Kids are physical and rough for no reason. It’s like, ‘Dude, what? You’re a 30-something-year-old man, and you’re having a problem with a little kid.’

So, it was just kind of rough on me just seeing it like that. I'll say over time that really messed me up mentally because even when I was playing basketball or football I thought, 'Am I playing too hard?' It hurt, and I still think about it to this day. I wish I didn't care. I wish I didn't care about what everybody thought. I wish I could erase that from my memory, but since it happened so young, that's a part of my foundation. That happened when I was 8, 9, or 10, and since that happened at such a young age, and it was my first sport, it created the mentality of, 'You play too hard or too aggressive. You're too rough on people, and you can't be. You got to be nice to people. You gotta always play like you're having fun, not play like you got a chip on your shoulder, an edge.' So, I really just toned myself down and changed my style of play.

Then, in soccer, I had a lot of instances where the kids wouldn't really talk to me as much because I was different, or they would feel like "All Black people steal" or "All Black people do negative stuff." So, I remember there'd be jokes after every soccer game when we'd have a snack. They'd take their snack and distance themselves from me and say, "He might steal them." I'd be like, 'Wow, you guys are really just placing these stereotypes on me, you don't even know me. Where are you guys even getting these from? There's not that many black people in the city. So, did you see somebody act like this or are your parents teaching you this about people?' That used to bother me a lot.

Then, I felt like the biggest thing that used to frustrate me was how the coach responded to that happening. My perception of the coach was that maybe when he was younger, he didn't fit in with a lot of people. So, when he got older, I think he felt like everybody needed to like him. I think he almost played a role in my life where he was a big kid trying to impress the little kids, which would be my teammates. So, when he saw them kind of treating me like that, he wouldn't stop it. I don't want to say he encouraged it, but I mean he would throw a few jokes in

there, too, some subliminal messages. And, I didn't have to be the smartest guy in the room to pick up on them. So, instead of trying to stop anybody, he kind of just let everybody talk, and I was just like, 'Wow, you're supposed to be the mediator. You're supposed to make everybody feel welcome, and you couldn't even care less about me.' It just felt like he was the biggest bully there just because he had the potential to stop it, and he didn't want to.

So, being in that situation really taught me to hold people accountable for stuff because you never know somebody's full story. So, while that doesn't excuse the wrong that they've done, I think if you're able to really put yourself in somebody's shoes or like if you're even able to think outside of the box and think holistically, that'll definitely teach you how to forgive because we all have our own problems. I think people take that lightly. People say, "We have our own problems," and they still don't forgive somebody for the wrong they did to them. It's like you would want forgiveness from somebody else. So, I think that really taught me at a young age without me even knowing that we all have our own battles, and you have to pick which ones are really going to be something that you take and internalize. So, how some people say their childhood kind of determined how they are as people, I think sometimes people really do internalize a lot of the traumas that they went through, and I'm not saying that they didn't need to do that, but I think sometimes people internalize it without having the idea of maybe that person was going through something, too, and that's why they reacted the way they did. I'm not excusing it, but you gotta be more understanding, even if you didn't do anything. Put yourself in the situation.

I remember one time, craziest thing, my mom hates this. I remember one time it was my first game in seventh grade, I think. I scored three goals in the first half. People were like, "He only did that because he's Black. Black people are fast, Black people are athletes." Somebody

really said because I was Black, that it's just in my natural ability that I'm going to be faster. So, it was almost like being Black was an advantage. I was like, 'What? Like what? I'm just a person. I'm only in seventh grade. I'm not even, not even 13 yet.' I just remember my mom down crying when she heard one of the kids, and I wasn't crying, but I was like, 'Wow. People are really like this, like, people really don't like me because of my skin color...' It's just a lot of emotional abuse with that. It was a lot to grow up with. It made me stronger today, though, thicker skin now.

I did have one close friend, though. I think he kind of saw how I was being treated, and he would always invite me over to his house. He genuinely became my friend. He would tell me, "Yeah, bro I did feel bad for you, because of what was going on but, you know, as I got to know you like even my stereotypes of Black people changed because you were completely different from how coach was making it seem like you would be growing up." Then, he kind of just took me under his wing and kind of just made me feel welcome, and his parents would take me back to their house after soccer games and we'd play video games and just do kid stuff. So, I definitely made a good relationship out of that. And I think the best part about all of that was just the fact that somebody told me that they could see me for who I am, like as a human being. I think that was worth more than any of the times I was hurt. Just having somebody say, "Hey man I see you for who you are," I couldn't have asked for anything better than that. That was true friendship. I loved all of that. His dad coached me for a year, too, which was pretty cool. I was the only Black kid on the team, and it felt really special that he took me in, and while other people didn't really seem like my friends, it was just nice that he was like, "Regardless of if you guys don't like him, he's a cool guy to me."

In the end, it's kind of sad, but it's not. It's one of those things like it taught me that people aren't always going to be fair to you. It taught me that at a young age. I used to really beat myself up over that. I wanted everybody to like me, and everybody to be my friend, and then when it got to a point where I saw adults were treating my parents with less respect and treating me with less respect, it was like, 'Damn, this is really how the world works.' So, I learned that at age six and seven. You know, like people care for you, but there's also people that could really care less about you. As I got older, I was able to accept that and when I accepted it, I realized, you know, not everybody on my team is gonna like me. I may not have a personality that fits with this culture. I just have to find who I am as a person and once I figure out who I am, I can hang out with people that best suit me, that will make me better, and make me stronger.

Soccer grew me a lot as a person, though. It taught me how to step out of my shell, showcase my own abilities and talents with other people, and just feel comfortable in my own skin. Even though I had those trials and tribulations at the beginning, eventually, it kind of snowballed to make me who I am today. It made me believe in myself and believe in my teammates, be able to have love and compassion for everyone. So, for sure soccer did that for me. I love the sport, but I think I ended up quitting because I just felt like I was being singled out so much to a point where I was worrying so much about how I was going to get treated in the game, more than my performance.

Basketball: "The Life of Being the Coach's Son"

I loved soccer, but basketball was more where my heart was, in terms of being who I am as a person. My dad coached me in the rec league from when I was in third grade to seventh. It was special, but it was definitely hard because my peers were playing with me, and they would feel like if my dad was being nice to me or something, they're like, "Your dad's the coach." You

hear those rumors going around that the coach only cares about his son. It's like, 'Naw,' and then eventually I think my dad was not necessarily trying to prove to them that that's not true, but eventually he got harder on me over the season because he didn't want the parents to feel like it was just him coaching me. So, that hurt me a little bit, but I understood. I didn't want him to get fired because he's my dad.

Basketball was the opposite of soccer where the whole team was all white kids except me. I think I may have had even just one white kid on that team. It was all Black. So, that was a completely, completely different ballgame in that aspect. Believe it or not, though, I may have had more conflicts with the basketball team than I did even with the soccer team, strictly from the fact that my dad was coaching that team. I think there'd be players that kind of had a bad attitude when they wouldn't play. No matter what it was, if you got benched for not passing the ball to the right person or something, it would always go back to, "Chris, your dad is blank because he's only doing this because he wants to give you more playing time." I think everything turned into 'Let's turn on his dad, let's talk about his dad,' and that made me not want to play because it hurt me. Like, they're talking about my family, and I'm sitting here and had to take that. Then, if I defend my dad, everybody's going to come after me and be like, "See, that's what we're talking about." So, I kind of felt like I had to be quiet, keep my mouth shut. I think it was so much negativity on whose dad was the coach and it kind of just took away from the love of the game.

I did feel like basketball was my sport more than soccer because I was able to actually utilize my size for something that wouldn't be frowned upon. It allowed me, mentally, to really believe that I could be myself on the field. Although, I was still messed up from my soccer coach. I would literally always replay that in my mind. I was always like, 'Am I playing too

hard? Can I really hurt somebody?’ For example, I was always built like a football player, because I’ve always worked out and stuff. Basketball players are usually tall and lanky. I’m more of a stocky kind of build, more muscular. So, for me, driving to the lane or driving to the basketball rim, it would be easier for me to get people out the way because I’m bigger than everybody else. So, when I would do that people would get upset with me and be like, “Bro, you’re driving to the rim way too hard. You knocked the wind out of me when you were driving to the rim, and I was trying to guard you.” So, that would be playing in my mind. I’d think, ‘Man, I need to calm down a little bit. I guess I’m playing too hard with everybody, and people don’t like playing with me.’ Then I was like, “Man, maybe coach was right from years ago, like maybe I’m just playing too hard.”

From the basketball aspect, I’d say the benefits I got out of that was that I definitely made a lot of friends in basketball, and I think after a while it taught me not to care so much about what people think. People aren’t always going to like you, and they may not like your family, but I truly think it’s a blessing that I went through that at a young age, because now that I’m older, I don’t take stuff as personally. I let it be. It is what it is. I think that’s one of the most valuable things because I was definitely a big people pleaser. I’m still kind of like that to this day, but I was such a big people pleaser. You know one person would say he didn’t like me, and I’d be destroyed the whole day. So, just seeing all that in basketball really just got rid of a big problem that I would have to this day, if I didn’t go through all that.

Football: “Where I Experienced the Most Emotional Abuse”

When I started football, I had been working out a lot and really starting to come into my own body. I was always bigger than everybody, and I didn’t want to hurt anybody. I would always downplay and not be as aggressive as I could have been. I just wanted to still have friends

at the end of the day. I sort of sold myself short. Definitely, though, when I started playing football, I cared less and less about that. I wanted to show that I belonged. So, football was good in that I came into my own body and was also able to use my size and frustration and really unleash. But football was where I experienced the most emotional abuse from coaches.

My Team: “Mini Families”

My team was very cliquish. It wasn't a team. It was more so like the lunch table analogy, like how there's a cool kid table, the jock table, the nerds, and stuff like that. After the redistricting in our schools when we were younger, everybody kind of was staying in their own group that they grew up with together since elementary school. So very, very divided. I think we did have common goals, trying to win football games. So, I mean we came together when it came to stuff like that. We didn't hate each other, but no team chemistry, especially in comparison to other cities and schools around us who all grew up together. Those other high schools, though, were all in the same classroom from the minute they were babies all the way up until they were at high school. So, they all had a huge brotherhood that you could tell by the way they played, the way they defended each other when things got tough during games, and stuff. It was like, 'Wow, they really look like a legit family over there.' Meanwhile, we're kind of like a bunch of mini families wrapped into one football team. So, I was a little bit jealous of that because I felt like that was a little bit more beneficial for them because it just seemed like they had so much fun, and they literally established a culture within that high school that lived up to the reputation they had to the city and everything.

Honestly, I think I had a pretty good relationships with my teammates. I don't think I had any conflicts with anybody now that I can think about it. I would say before my senior year, I was kind of more secluded to myself. I stayed within my little group of friends and everything,

but my senior year, I actually started going to high school parties, stuff like that. So, I got to know a lot of people and literally my whole life changed my senior year once I started letting myself out more and kind of exploring stuff. I will say, like one thing me and my friends always talk about is when you're a Black kid on an all, or mostly all, white team, you're going to stand out. So, it's like me and my friends would maybe say stuff in the middle of the locker room and, I truly feel like a lot of the laughter or stuff would only come at the expense of me being Black. It's like, if I wasn't Black and I said something like this, you guys wouldn't think it was funny. So, it'd be like, "Oh, he's the funny Black kid on the team, or these are the funny group of Black people on our team." So, sometimes I'd wonder, 'Do they like me for me, or do they like me because I'm Black? If I was the average normal kid walking into this locker room, saying the exact same things like I'd normally say here would I get the attention that I get or is it strictly because I have a different demographic and different stereotypes that come with that demographic and people view me differently?' It was always something that I would think about, but for the most part I loved my teammates. They were pretty cool.

There would be some racism. Not like racism... I guess I would say insensitive racism which is like, 'I know you're not racist but what you're saying, if I didn't know you, someone might beat you up for that.' I'd be like, "I know you guys are joking," but I really just wouldn't know how to handle it. I wouldn't know if that was like malicious or what or not, but at the same time during classes, they're the main ones talking to me, and they're being super friendly with me. They would act like a real friend and everything. So, I truly just didn't know. Like nowadays I wouldn't stand for that at all, but back then, I'm still trying to make friends and still trying to understand how life is in my city. So, I wouldn't say it hurt my feelings or anything because, you know, I've heard it since I was a kid, random stereotypical stuff. So, it really kind of goes in one

ear and out the other, but now as I get older, it's not normal, and that's not supposed to be said to you. You're not supposed to be used to hearing stuff like that. At least it was consistent, though. It wasn't like somebody was mad at somebody then the racist stuff would come out. It wasn't like I was walking in there scared wondering, 'What's gonna happen today?' It was an everyday thing. You knew what to expect when you were going into that locker room. And the coaches didn't play a part in it because they weren't around, and they never said anything racist themselves.

Coaches: "Treated Like a Stepchild"

So, I wouldn't say the coaches were racist, but it's like, I think you hear stereotypes about football coaches all the time and I experienced some of those. The way they communicated with and treated us depended on if they liked you or not. If they liked you, if they knew your parents, literally you can see they were treating them like they were their sons or something, you know, looking out for them, giving car rides to school and work, sleepovers at their houses because they knew their sons or something, just a lot of beneficial stuff. If they didn't know you nor care for you, then you were treated like you're a stepchild. It was literally that divided. It wasn't halfway this or halfway that. It was either this or that. You're either one or the other.

For example, if I was to mess up a drill, they'd yell at me, curse at me, say I'm not paying attention to what they're saying or, "Get out of here and watch this person do it," but if it was the person that they liked, they got endless chances, no matter if they were a good player or not. Like, there was a play that if the linebacker screamed out an odd number, that meant I had to run left. So, if I accidentally ran right or I flinched and was going to go run right and then ran left, they would pause film, circle my whole body figure with a highlighter on the screen, and say, "This is exactly what not to do. If you're not paying attention, you're going to look like so and

so.” Then, if a person that they liked did it, they would skip over them in film and wouldn’t even acknowledge it. It was like, ’Why are you always on my back about something and why you always on so and so’s back about something? But whenever your favorite player does it... you don’t hold everybody accountable the way you normally would hold people accountable.’

Freshmen Year: “It Wasn’t a Genuine Love to Make me Better”

Man. So, I played my freshman year and played part of my sophomore year, and freshman year is when the abuse started a little bit, like the snowball of abuse was kind of building. For example, I played the defensive line, the nose guard. I remember there was a kid that was behind me. He was Caucasian. When I would mess up, the coaches would always tell me, “Chris, they gonna take your spot. I’m physically about to put him in your spot because you don’t know this play.” They would always pressure me and be like, “You’re not getting it off of this right. I taught you three times, and you’re not getting it. So, you know, get your butt over here and bring in so and so.” And, so, over time, they kind of made me feel like I just was incompetent, or I couldn’t learn something, or if I did learn it, I was on the straight and narrow path. No matter how good I am, I’m just going to get replaced. That was just a lot for me because I couldn’t talk to my friends as much because I always felt like I had to have a side job of making the coach like me more. I wanted to make myself seem like I was somebody that I wasn’t grown into yet. It was just like really hard because I had to play a different role for myself. And it was just kind of hard when coaches are always telling me every five seconds, “Bro, you don’t get it, you’re not good enough. We shouldn’t have started you. You shouldn’t have this position.” I’m just like, “It is only my first weeks in the football program and you guys are being hard on me.” I definitely believe in hard, tough love and everything because I think if

you baby somebody all the time, of course, they're not going to grow; but, like I truly felt like this was malicious.

I felt like it was really like, "You're good enough to play, but we don't want you here. So, we're going to try to break you until you want to quit and then we're going to put somebody else in your spot." Like I didn't feel like it was a genuine love to make me better. They didn't know me, but they already knew the person they wanted to give that spot to. Then, I remember they would move other kids up whose parents knew the coach and they just left me down and it kind of hurt because I was like, 'Wow, like scouts look at that type of stuff. Like they like to see how we moved up.' They kind of screwed me over in a way with that because I think there was a hidden agenda. I got a special type of treatment that a lot of kids didn't get. You just never know what somebody's thinking about you.

After freshmen year, I went back out sophomore year, but I ended up having a surgery on my gallbladder. So, after that, my doctor cleared me, but I wasn't mentally ready to come back. I always felt like if somebody had hit me in my stomach, it would destroy my stomach. So, I played a little sophomore year, but I quit. Junior year I still was taking a mental break because I just didn't know if I'd be able to play again, and just kind of scared that I'll hurt myself again. But senior year, I went back out and I think that's when all the verbal abuse came about.

Senior Year

"I Changed." Going into my senior year, a lot had changed for me, just in terms of my own mentality and also, my parents got divorced prior to that year. Before my parent's divorce, my mom was really strict, and I didn't really socialize outside of school and sport. For example, after football games junior year everybody would go to Steak 'n Shake or something. My mom just never let me go out to eat at night and didn't want me to go out to people's houses who she

didn't really know. So, everybody was bonding, having fun, and socializing outside of school, but I had to go home. Some of it is the idea that as a Black person being out late you don't want to get in trouble with the police, and you just never want a reason to get pulled over or get shot because I was in a predominantly White area—I'm definitely not trying to place everybody into a category. So, yeah, I do see it as I'm older why she was strict, but I think she was a little too strict, and that was hard, socially, for a while. I think I also internalized not having friends because of that. So, I kind of blamed her for a lot of stuff, like maybe that's why I didn't have friends and why I didn't fit in. When they got divorced though, my dad wasn't in the house to watch me and my mom was always at work and stuff, so I could really just be a kid and sneak out and stuff. So, being able to actually do things really helped to have friends.

Then, the other part of it was, I just didn't want to be sad anymore. Eventually, you get tired of being sad all the time, and you just gotta find a way to make yourself happy. So, that's why around sophomore, junior year I started identifying that I was sad, and I started identifying what really triggers me and makes me upset. Then, I changed it by going out more, talking to more people, and all that stuff. I changed. I basically told myself that I'm not going to keep dealing with this stuff and that gave me the confidence to actually go out and interact with other people. I mean, I always got along with my teammates, but actually being social with them outside of football was different. Eventually, it got to a point where I was really known in my city, and if I went to a high school game, no matter the school, everybody knew everyone. So, when I made all those friends that made me feel like, 'Wow, maybe this whole time everybody did love me. I just wasn't in the scene like that. I wasn't out and about for people to get to know me and put a name for my face.' I never thought I was a loser, like I had friends, but it kind of destroyed the narrative in my head that people don't like me, or people don't want me to fit in

with them. I was fitting in with everybody, and that changed my outlook on life. I was really hard on myself for stuff I couldn't control. Now, I was gaining confidence that it wasn't me.

So, then senior year I just wasn't going to take the same approach I did freshmen year and take the abuse from the coach. That was a big thing for me and being like, 'You know what? Life is life, and I gotta do what I gotta do. I have enough stuff going on at home with the divorce. I'm not going to take this.' So, I think that kind of took the innocence away from me, the niceness. And, once I really started believing in myself and believing I wasn't the problem, I stopped making excuses for myself and letting others make excuses for me. All of it just kind of makes you mad over time. So, I just stopped caring, and I never wanted it to get to that point, but if you wrong somebody enough times, eventually, they're gonna stand out against you. I think once I started realizing, 'I don't have to take this, or I'm about to be 18 years old, like I don't have to deal with your abuse or the way you're treating me,' that's when I started to be like, 'Alright, I'm not standing for this anymore. I'm about to just be my own man and I gotta learn how to be a man.' That's when I started questioning the coach.

"I Don't Want to See You on This Field Anymore." So, yeah, it really started with the coach before I was even on the team senior year. The coaches wanted all the players that were coming back senior year to go to summer camp, and I didn't go to the dang summer camp because I had to get a job to help my mom pay some bills around the house. So, when I came back my senior year after training camp, I walked in, and the coach just started laughing.

I was like, *"What's going on?"*

He's like, "You're really going to try to come on this team?"

So, I said, *"What do you mean?"*

He said, "You quit on us your sophomore year."

So, this is almost two years ago. It's like, "*Why do you still remember this?*"

And he's like, "Well, I never forget who quits on me and you're not mentally strong enough. You can't handle this team. So, you know what, get out of my office. I don't want to see you on this field anymore."

So, I thought, 'Wow, can he say that?' But, at the time, I'm thinking maybe he's trying to motivate me, or maybe he's really trying to push me, maybe he's like in the movies just trying to give me tough love and wants me to come back. So, I showed up to practice the next day, and he just threw this fit saying, "Oh my gosh. Why are you here? I told you not to come here."

I was like, "*Well, I can play. You can't tell me I can't play.*" But now, I'm mad because it was like, 'I'm tired of y'all talking to me like this.' Now, I'm becoming a man, and I'm getting older. I'm about to be 18 years old, and I'm not tolerating the stuff I tolerated as a kid. So, we started having a shouting match. I was like, "*Dude, you don't want me here.*"

He's like, "Man, you're not going to tell me what my agenda is, you're a quitter. You quit on my team." Then, he stopped the whole practice and made everybody come over and look at me and said, "Don't be like him. He quit. He quit on us his sophomore year, and he made up an injury. So, let this be an example to you that if you're going to quit, if you're going to quit on your team, then don't come back."

So, I was like, 'You know what? I'm not gonna let you get in my head, and I'm going to play. Even though at this point I don't want to play, but I want to make you mad because now you're coming at me, and you're trying to embarrass me. So, now I'm going to come in here and I'm about to wreak havoc. I'm about to really play my best. You will get the best out of me, and we'll see how you treat me as the season goes on.'

So, that was how senior season started. After that, we didn't really talk, we just avoided each other, but he treated me differently than all the other seniors. He basically took my senior privileges away. For example, it's a tradition at our school that seniors get to pick their jersey numbers first, but he made me go last and instead just handed me a jersey.

It was number 61, and I was like, *"That's not the number I want. I want to pick my number. I'm a senior."*

He was like, "Nah, as far as I'm concerned, you're still a sophomore because you quit your sophomore year. So, you're not going to get to pick your number."

So, I'm like, *"Wow, you really don't want me here. You're doing everything you can to make me quit."*

Then, the part that killed me was when normally we got to pick our helmets out and everybody got new Nike-brand helmets that were very high-tech looking and gave better protection. The coach gave me one of the old helmets that doesn't have as much protection from concussions, and he was like, "We're all out of the good helmets. We gave them all to the freshmen and sophomores, and this is the last of the helmets that we have." So, now I have a bad helmet, the jersey that I don't want, you showed me up in front of the whole team, and instead of getting to pick my locker, they threw me in the back with the freshmen and sophomores who got moved up to varsity.

We also had team dinners the day before game days. The seniors used to be able to get their food and eat first, but I had to start going up there with the sophomores. So, I couldn't even go eat at the same time as the seniors. They were literally treating me like all the sophomores because I didn't go to camp, and I had that surgery and quit sophomore year.

There was one other kid that also didn't get to go up with the seniors, number 62. We were like brothers because we got the same treatment. It was always 61 and 62. He may even have gotten it worse than me in the aspect of playing because he didn't even get to play. They kind of treated him as just an extra body on the team. I probably would have rather been him, just in the aspect that they blatantly either didn't know who he was, or they just didn't care about him. I feel like for me, I had a target on my back. It was like, "You don't like me, and you don't want me on this team." For him, it was like, "We don't care enough to know who you are, but we're not going to bully you into trying to quit." So, that was all happening throughout the season, but there were a few specific incidents that really stand out.

Week 3: Running Sprints. So, week three we were running sprints at like six in the morning as a punishment. They had us run halfway down the field, halfway back. We had to do that twice, which was one set, and we did three sets. I remember the second time, I really felt like I was gonna pass out. I was just really sick to my stomach, dizzy, everything, and I told the head coach, which I shouldn't have. He's like, "No, you're quitting. You're a pussy." I asked for water, and he was like, "Man, you can get water, but if you do, you know the chances of playing... you're done." So, he kind of put me in a corner where I just thought... I wasn't playing already, and if I want to have a chance to play, then I guess I have to run, whether I feel sick or not. I ended up passing out. That was one of the rougher things I experienced because I had never felt like I was going to pass out from doing a workout before. Then, to hear that you're going to corner me by telling me I'm not gonna play or have any chance to play if I don't run those sprints, and then I pass out. He shouldn't be a coach. You never know what anybody's health conditions are. I could have died or something, somebody could have died. It's just like, 'You didn't even care, you were just trying to prove a point, make a punishment of somebody.'

My mom was very upset about that, but I begged her not to go to up to the school to say anything. I just could see how hurt and angry she was for me, and I never wanted anybody to be on the receiving end of that, even though I thank God that I have a mom that cares about me. Truly, I thank God every day that I have a mom and dad that care about me enough to go to the school and say something. I just feared her being talked about and being frowned upon just for trying to stick up for me. I didn't want that to turn into anybody saying she was an angry Black woman. So, I was just like, "Mom, just trust me. Next time, I'll tell myself regardless of what he says, I'm not going to run. He didn't make me run. At the end of the day, I ran." I tried to prove that although he cornered me, at the end of the day, I did have a choice. Athletes know their bodies, and I knew I couldn't do it anymore, but I did because I was trying to prove a point and kind of fit in. So, eventually she said, "Well don't make anybody feel like you have to do anything that you don't want to do, regardless of what the circumstances are." When she told me that, it was kind of like, "Let me take the blame for it because I did run. He didn't get in my body and make me run until I passed out." So, I kind of took credit or owned up to what happened to my body as well. I do think she did talked to the one Black coach I had. He said he was gonna do something, but he wasn't a man of his word, so I don't think he ever said anything.

Week 5: "They Mentally Beat Me." The first four weeks, I didn't really play. I brought it up to the assistant coach, the Black coach, during week 3 and he was like, "Well, just keep showing up and keep playing and eventually you'll get to a position." So, when week 5 came, he said, "We're going to try to start you week five." So, I invited all my family to come see me... family from Arkansas, Oklahoma, driving like 9-10 hours to watch me. I even told my assistant coach that they were coming and that I was gonna put a show on and really give everything I had just because they were coming. So, I'm pretty sure he relayed that to the other coaches. He may

not have, so I'm not going to accuse him of anything but yeah, man... Then, the game starts, and he pulled me to the side and was like, "Man, I got bad news. Coach doesn't believe in starting you. He really is upset you didn't come to summer camp, and so we're not going to suit you up this game." So, I had to walk out there without my pads, with just the jersey on, no helmet, and just stand on the side like I was a manager. My family was just looking at me. They're hurt I'm not playing but also, they sacrificed, they called off work, and they did all this to come see me. Now, they're not watching me play, and they're just watching me sit on the bench. They could have done that at home and it, it hurt. It hurt really bad. After that it was just like, "Y'all win. I can't beat y'all. I can't make you play me. And if you don't care about my family coming..."

After that, I stopped caring. They mentally beat me like I think they won at that point. During practice and walk throughs, I'm half-assing it. I was tired of the criticism. I was tired of being different. I just kind of wanted to go to college and just move on and forget everything that I had lived here. I was just over it, but if you don't want me here, you can kick me off this team. I'll stay because I paid the money, but you won't get the same production out of me anymore.

After that, I switched from talking to coaches and trying to prove anything to them to talking to my friends and the players that weren't getting playing time or felt like they're kind of against the world, too. Those are the people I talked to because they could relate to me. Then, when I started hearing about how they were treated that kind of fed into my heart and my spirit, and it made me just feel like we're all villains in the coach's story. So, my motivation became to not leave them hanging.

I really do think the way I was treated was definitely a special type of abuse. The other kids, regardless of if they were white, black, or anything, they probably got the same treatment that 62 got. They wouldn't play, kind of were ghosts, treated like water boys to get the water for

players who started and stuff. For me, I never would allow myself to do that. I wouldn't have allowed them to make me a water boy. I wouldn't have let that happen. I think they did because they didn't believe in themselves as much or they didn't have such a strong personality. So, they allowed the coaches to kind of like treat them like they were less than who they really were as people.

Week 6: "I Gave Them Ammunition." Being late to film was where you could always tell who the favorites. If they liked you, they didn't care. If they didn't like you, you got punished. It happened only one time to me. I was only five minutes late, but the lights were off and when I opened the door all this light came in from outside. So, it brought a ton of attention, and they cut the TV off, and everybody looked at me, and they're like, "You're late. Go sit out in the hall and wait till we're all done." So, I was only five minutes late, and then I had to sit there for 55 minutes and not learn anything. Then, they pulled me off the practice team for the day, which meant I couldn't even practice. I literally had to sit down and watch the whole time.

I was more embarrassed than I was hurt. I was like, 'Dang, I just gave them ammunition to be able to say I was late to practice and that I don't care.' Now I'm kind of feeding into their egos. The whole year, I just wanted to give them no reason to be able to say I did anything wrong. At the end of the day, the year, or maybe even 10 years from now, I wanted them to look back and be like, "You know, I did this kid pretty wrong. I shouldn't have done him like that. He didn't give me any reason to be treated like that," but I felt like that kind of ruined everything. I was devastated about that, especially then when they pulled me off the practice squad. Obviously, they're trying to humiliate me, like really trying to humiliate me in front of everybody.

I will say though, it really does teach you. Like seriously, I'm going to be applying for jobs or trying to get my PhD, and I can't afford to be late. Somebody's always going to be trying to work harder than me, and I truly do feel like that taught me that you only get one shot. Regardless of whatever it is, you only get one shot to really put your personality out there and your character. So, I hated it then, but now, maybe it taught me discipline.

Week 7 and Beyond: "Malicious Intent." So, then week 7 came, and even though I didn't play, I remember the assistant coaches sent some of my film to scouts for football. They were advocating for me saying, "He may not be ready to start his freshman year but over time, you can mold him. He'll be a great player and asset to your team." Well, I came to find out the head coach called the scouts on the side, and told them, "Chris is incompetent. He can't learn. He hasn't been playing all these weeks because he doesn't show up. He's not committed to his team. He didn't come to summer camp. He quit on us two years ago. And he's just going to quit on your program if he gets up there." So, the scouts pulled my video, and they stopped watching.

That same week, I actually started to play. It was very short-lived, and that's when the abuse came in. They would give me time to practice with the practice team, and the head coach would always yell, "That's why you're not good enough to go to college. You're never going to be good enough to go to college. You don't belong here. I don't want you here. I don't even know why you're on my field. You wasted eight weeks of my life. Eight weeks of your life being on this team, and you're not going to play no matter what you do. And that's why you're just not going to be in college. You can never go to college and do this other stuff." And, he wasn't even saying I just can't play college sports, like he said I can't go to college in general because I'm just incompetent, I can't learn stuff, and I'm a quitter. So, just hearing that so many times after a while, I mean... when I got my first acceptance letter to go to University, I just broke down

crying because I just didn't think I was smart enough. They truly had beat it in my head, since I was a kid that, 'You're not smart enough. You're black, and you're only good at being an athlete. If you're not an athlete, you're not going to be able to be anything in life. All you can do is be an athlete for entertainment.'

That was just that was so much on me. So, I just remember just breaking down crying when I got my acceptance letter because it just felt like I proved people wrong, but it was just so much more. Like, 'What did I do to you guys? Why do y'all treat me like this?' I didn't deserve to have my college scouts removed. I didn't deserve to have my identity stripped from the team, to be made fun of in front of my whole team and have grown men every day come into their jobs and hate me. It was just so much, and then they lied to me when my family came down like we're fools. They took that from me, and they're embarrassing me. I was so dedicated even playing through my health because I wanted to prove them wrong. So, it kind of made me not like the world in a way. Now, through college, I've calmed down. I've learned a lot from it, but it was just like, 'Man, that was a lot, and that stuff is not normal. No kid should go through that' and I recognize that even more as I study sport psychology.

In the end, I didn't have a relationship really with any of my coaches, especially after the scouting stuff. Even the one Black coach, he probably hurt me the most out of anybody because I trusted him since I had known for a while, and he was the one giving me hope of playing. He was the leader of an after-school club I was in for minorities, involved within Black organizations and stuff within the school, and he was a track coach. We even had a great relationship when I was younger, like freshmen, sophomore year. He was always building me up, made me feel like one day, I'd run the school in whatever sport I play, but that relationship really changed during football. He really just quit on me. I felt like he kind of relayed me false

information, maybe because he was trying to impress the other coaches. I'm not going to go as far as to call him an Uncle Tom because I'll never know what anybody's true intentions are, but he hurt me the most. You know, at that time, it was me and 62. It was just kind of like, 'Man, you're supposed to be defending us. You're a Black coach, so, you obviously know we look up to you, but you seem like you're kind of lying to me, telling me that everything's going to be cool.' I even told him, *"Just be straight up with me. Tell me if they're not going to play me."* And he'd be like, "Nah, you're good. Everybody cares, and we just want you to be here." At the same time, I never want to put the idea that 'Just because you're Black and I'm Black, you have to help me out. You don't owe me anything.' At the end of the day, I preach that I want equality and if that's the case, then I have to hold myself accountable. I can't just say that every Black person I meet owes me something because we're oppressed in America, or we believe and say we're oppressed. So, I didn't want to put that pressure on him but, after a while, it did hurt. I felt like he was lying to me, and just sending me off. I felt like he was just kissing up to the head coach. It's just like in that situation of me being under 18, and I'm kind of looking for somebody to advocate for me and defend me when I'm not old enough to really defend myself. So, that was very hard, like this guy kind of turned against me and it was just like, "If I can't trust my own people, who can I really trust", you know? At least with the other coaches they were straightforward on how they felt about me and where I stood versus this coach who gave me false hope. It was just, I think a mixture of malicious intent, racial diversity, and just not liking me.

So yeah, that's, that's my story.

Thinking Through Sport

What is a Coach?

I think that we mistake coach for, not God, but I think we mistake the word 'coach' for knowing the answers to everything. I think, and I'm tying this into life, but I've learned that as I've gotten older. The world isn't full of kids and adults. We're all kids, either you're an older kid or you're a younger kid, and we're all still learning the world. So, with that, I think people think coaches have all the answers and dictate the system of how a team goes, and I don't think that's always true. I think coaches are learning every day, just like we're still learning. Like how I said when I was younger with that coach that I had in soccer. I felt like he was trying to be friends with all the little kids and that's a childish thing. There are big kids out there that just want to fit in with their cliques, and they want to be loved by everybody. So, for all I know, maybe he wasn't loved when he was a kid, and he's just still going through a teenage mindset as an older, middle-aged 20-year old. Maybe he still is lacking that type of love that maybe a kid would have. So, you kind of got to understand that not all coaches have the answers to everything, and they may be there to guide you cause maybe they've been through the stuff that you're going through as a team and know how to build teams up and talk to people; but, at the end of the day, they're not your overseer. They're not, you know, God. They don't know everything. They're strictly a coach. So, I think people misinterpret the word "coach" for overseer.

But, as a coach, literally, it's your job to advocate for people. And, in my case, it really just seemed like all the coaches were best friends. But they were also grown men. When you're a grown man, you have to stand up for what you believe in. It's your job, too. Friends hold friends accountable for stuff. Like my friends hold me accountable for stuff. They're not going to go

around and tell my friends what I did; they're going to call me out right then and there, straight up. I can respect that because at least they're being honest with me. These coaches, though, were cool to your face, and maybe really deep down they wanted to stand up for you, but it's almost like they were too scared to stand up to the bully or something. I feel like as an adult, that shouldn't happen. I know we all have our own battles, and our own path to how long it takes us to develop and mature, and maybe they didn't hit that age or experience yet. Maybe they're different now, but it's like, they're in their 30s and 40s and still kind of letting somebody be a bully and not standing up to him. It was just more disappointing than it was losing respect.

Sadly, these are the foundations of people's lives. They're going to be adults one day, and the way you treat people, especially as kids sets the foundation for how they view the world, you know? I'm glad I didn't fall into that idea of, 'The world hates me, and I hate the world,' but some kids don't have that mental capacity to be like, 'We all live different lives.' So, that could've really messed somebody else up if it wasn't me being in that situation. It really just taught me that I just can't be a person who's bitter over the past like that. I gotta be a person that grew up, learned from that, and can help somebody else to not be in a similar situation. So, definitely I can say that if it was ever me in that position as a coach and that type of culture or any situation where somebody is looking up to me or I knew they needed me, I was going to advocate for them, especially if I am given the tools to be able to do so.

What is a Team?

My experiences made me realize that everybody has different backgrounds and ways of being, and when you're on a team, you're going to experience all of those. So, when you have people with different backgrounds, you get stuff like racism, homophobia, people that don't like you, people that want to set you up and make sure you aren't successful in life. After everything,

I now view sport as even though it's a team sport, it really is about individuality. We all have certain roles that we bring to a team, whether it's a team of 75 or a team of 15. If you have people that play their roles, to the best of their abilities, that's how you can use sport or turn sport into something that can be a family tie. Once everybody understands who they are as an individual, that can increase productivity or the chemistry of your team. But, you also have to understand what your goal is for your team. So, if you want to have a team that's full of dogs that have a mentality of, 'We don't care what people think,' then you need to have everybody master their individuality of what their role is on that team. Otherwise, you can't thrive. Everybody has to know and play their role to the best of their abilities. If you're like me when I was in high school and always trying to be liked by everybody... well, I destroyed my own prophecy of me trying to be a better player because I cared so much about what people thought. Maybe if I didn't care what people thought and I focused strictly on my work ethic and tried to figure out how to turn my circumstances into something better for myself, then I'd be in a different position than I am right now. So, I think it's all about mastering who you are as an individual for the betterment of the team.

Reconciling Sport and Life

When I think back on my experiences, it's really been a process. I wasn't always thinking the way that I think now. I would say in terms of what it taught me... it fueled me being upset, and I think I needed to be upset and sad and everything. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to think the way I do. So, I can't say that at that particular point in time that I was trying to be a philosopher and thinking some type of unordinary stuff, trying to find the true reasons for stuff; but, I would say it got the ball rolling for, 'I'm sick and tired of feeling like this, and I need to understand.' I think the most important thing my experiences taught me is just that it planted the

idea and the seed in my mind that I just need to change. It also taught me how to read people. I'd say that's the biggest thing it's taught me. It just taught me how to read people and understand that we all come from different backgrounds.

You know, a lot of my thinking through this stuff comes from my faith, and I have to remember, too, that there's probably people in my life that I've wronged or people that I feel that I've done wrong to. And, at the end of the day, not everybody likes everybody. So, it's just one of those things that I had to understand. I may be a villain in somebody else's story and whether I knew I was wrong or not, I wouldn't want anybody to wish anything bad to happen to me. I would hope they pray that I learned from my mistakes one day or that I snap out of it. And, if I would want somebody to do that for me, who am I to not want that for somebody else regardless, if they care about me? I really just started to understand that and look at myself in the mirror and remember that no one is perfect. My parents also just really taught me the importance of turning the other cheek. So, you know, they'd be like:

You can pray for better times and pray for better treatment, but don't pray anything ill upon anybody. You can pray that one day they'll see their ways and get over it, but at the end of the day, if they don't care, who cares. That's their life. Everybody has a reason for why they think the way they do and act the way they act. We all have different reasons, and whether it would make sense to me or not, I didn't live his life. I may not even fully see it from his perspective, but I don't know what his home life is like.

So, they would always preach that to me because we all have our own battles. Everybody has their own problems that they're going through, and you can't dwell on it. Literally, life is not fair. At the end of the day, no one is crossing the finish line at the same time or meeting the same accolades at the same time. We all have different paths that we take. You know, there are people

that'll live to be 70 years old that may have done bad things in their life. Then, there are good people that may end up dying in their 10s, 20s, 30s. At the end of the day, you just have to deal with the deck of cards you were dealt. So, I think now that's why I've really learned that this is probably why I'm so relaxed about everything that goes on. It's just like, 'These are the cards that I was dealt for some reason.' I can use the way I've been judged as ammunition.

I'll say my biggest reflection from thinking through my experiences is how they taught me to forgive. We're all a bad guy in someone's story. Understanding how I was treated made me understand the need to forgive, even if they didn't ask for forgiveness. I also struggle with that, too, though. Even to this day, I still get upset with some people that I feel have wronged me; but, I also have to understand that I'm not the good guy in everybody's story, either. So, just like I have regrets about whatever's happened in my life, I want to be forgiven, and if I want to be forgiven then I have to give that out. Truly, the wisdom that I'm getting is from the stuff that I've done that I regretted or that was wrong and knowing that I am imperfect as well. That has made me able to see that everybody else is probably going through the same stuff I'm going through. So, I have to be courteous of that. I have to understand that and because I'm imperfect myself doesn't mean I deserve anything less than being treated with dignity.

So, yeah, in the end, I'm glad I went through it. I hate that it happened, but I needed it to really understand that I'm not perfect either. I'm glad I went through that. I'm really glad I went through that because I probably wouldn't even think the way I think if I didn't.

Conclusion: Chris' Story

My story is one of perseverance and how adversity can dictate one's mindset when you are trying to build a foundation. This can dictate how I see myself as a person, even outside of sport. So, that's perseverance and I persevered through all that.

Chris' Landscape: Sociality, Place, and Temporality

Chris' experience was certainly shaped by not only the relationship with his coaches but also by his teammates, teammates' parents, and his own parents. He went through a majority of his soccer experience without being accepted or welcomed by his teammates. In fact, they often made references to his race and neglected him. Both he and his parents overheard his success being attributed to his race; this affected not only his parents but subsequently hurt Chris. The relationship that Chris alluded to saving him was the single teammate who invited him to his house—originally because he felt bad for him. However, they eventually formed a true friendship. Although he shared that this one friendship—with someone who accepted him and loved him—was all he needed, not having healthy relationships with the other teammates certainly affected his sense-making of his experiences. This is especially true when Chris shared that his coach joined in on the bullying, sending subliminal, harmful messages to him.

Social relationships also played an interesting role in Chris' football experiences. In the beginning, he did not have many social relationships outside of his parents because his mom was “strict”, and he was “shy.” He shared that his mom's strictness had a lot to do with being Black and the fear of being hurt by his coaches. However, once his parents divorced his junior year, he chose to step out of his “shell” and become more social; this occurred both within and outside of sport. Due to the treatment of the coach, he was able to relate and connect to his teammates on a deeper level because of what he experienced. For example, 62 and him were like “brothers” because of the similar treatment they received. Additionally, he chose to seek out friendships with and confide in the other players who were also being dismissed by the coaches. Those relationships were key to getting through football and were one of the few reasons he stayed in football despite the abuse. Regardless, neither of Chris' coaches helped the team culture or

teammate relationships; instead, they continued to harm him and created a divide amongst teammates. Seemingly, most hurtful to Chris was not his relationship with the head coach but the lack of support and advocacy he received from the assistant coach, who was also African American. Thus, the assistant coach served as another harmful relationship, one he did not think would be like this.

With regard to place, Chris -as a Black child - grew up in a predominantly white Midwestern town. Thus, the places he experienced abuse were filled with mostly white individuals, including on his soccer and football teams as well as in his larger school. His soccer experience occurred on a recreational community league in his hometown and his football experience occurred on the public high school football field. However, his sense-making mostly occurred in the church and in his home with his parents.

Chris followed every past story with a current version of who he is now and how he makes sense of it as well as ends with a vision for the future. Although he expressed that he was angry, sad, and disappointed at the time of the abuse, he relied on his unique ways of thinking and on his parents to get through. He mentioned that although he uses religion now, he didn't always make the same connections then. He stated, "I wasn't always thinking the way that I think now." For example, he didn't immediately forgive his coaches or see the broader meaning in the trials and tribulations. However, he does now and can see the implications for the future.

Chapter 6: Xavier

Xavier Grey: “A Filter of Negative Energy”

Actually, can I read a part of my journal to you? I think it may be useful to you.

November 13, 2018: *I fucking hate confrontation, arguments, etc., because apparently no one knows how to shut up and listen and accept what I have to say. That's one, but in terms of me, as soon as I get started willingly or not, I want to stop. I literally just want to walk away. It forces me to put my feelings about something into words. Words which is kind of hard when your emotions are all over the place, and you don't want to cry in the middle of a conversation because you can't control it. I'm always better responding to situations like this when it isn't happening in the moment. My thoughts don't get jumbled. I actually have time to process what I'm going to say and how to say it in the way that I want it to be taken. I need time to process these things and I need to learn how to put how my feelings into words. I don't want to blame society for this, but that's kind of a big factor, even though I don't give a fuck about how people view me. One of the things that has always gotten through that 'I don't give a fuck barrier' is calling me a 'crybaby' when I can't even control the tears coming out. Is that what anxiety is? I literally had to stop my work out and go to the bathroom because I couldn't stop thinking about the conversation I had with them and the more I thought about it, the more the tears came. It's frustrating, and it really ruined my day, especially because after I took the time to write out exactly what I wanted to say to them to try to make the situation better, they had already left.*

As far as the crybaby part, guys aren't really supposed to express their feelings or if they do, then they're seen as less than whatever the value of being a man is. But when I'm upset, I am both angry and sad. I try to stay composed because I feel like my tears invalidate my argument, and I also don't want to be seen as weak. It's also funny because people would say that I'm an

optimistic person, but deep down, like I'm not. Like, yes, but no, just because there's so much there. I like to solve problems, find solutions, and I guess I'm always searching for a solution to all the world's problems, but that's way too much to do, and I feel it all.

So, I've always been put in this mediator role. That's what I do, it's everywhere. It's with my family and with others, as an RA, like just throughout my whole life that's been a thing. I guess it's just been from me being patient with people, having empathy, looking at things differently, or searching for and giving people different perspectives. I feel like I have this natural ability to, I guess, see what people are thinking and why they do the things that they do. Before I even learned psychological terms and whatnot, I had already been doing all that stuff. Recently, I've just been working on, I guess, delivery with certain things and the right and wrong times to deliver stuff. Not everyone needs advice and I need to ask them if they do. It's crazy to look back at my journal and look at this stuff. It triggers a lot. I even gave code names for myself like 'Facilitator.'

October 29, 2018: *My purpose in life is to empower others by spreading knowledge of creating a more positive outlook on life. Opening their minds to becoming better versions of themselves and having the confidence to reach their goals. Doing so without putting others down but lifting them up. I believe if this is done, equality will shower upon the world and will only flood everyone with success. If everyone is to bathe in this shower of equality, my faith in humanity will be restored. The only way I'm able to be so positive is because of the negative I've had in my life. I was fortunate to not be sucked into the darkness and consumed. Instead, I live alongside it. Darkness and I work together to find the light at the end of the tunnel. In life, you never know where it will lead you, and so you're always in the dark. It starts with the idea of making it go the way you want and that idea or the light bulb will guide you through the*

darkness. Don't let that light go out as it is your guide through life. Find that light. Create that light. If everyone works together, we will light up the room with ideas to the point where it's nothing but light. In other words, bring ideas together- bringing ideas together is the way to succeed. We need each other to make the earth look like the sun.

So, that was October 29 and then the next entry was November 11 at 11:45 p.m. Let's reflect on this week's positively negative thoughts. I've been thinking a lot about how I'm a positive person, but I feel as if I have this negative dark void about me. It makes me think that my life is a contradiction. Why do I mainly listen to sad music? I thought about this at work today; I came up with some decent things. Sad songs bring me back to hard times in my life and they make me feel. I like that feeling because even though it's negative, it shows me that I'm in a better off place at the moment that I feel. If I'm in a better off place at the moment than I feel, then I feel happy because I know I've gotten stronger.

So, all that kind of goes into today, and I kind of talked with my mom about the actual situation that we're talking about, just like the emotional abuse situation. It's kind of... it's weird. I feel like I downplay what it did, but at the same time, I just transferred all that negative energy that the coach gave me and just turned it into motivation. I guess that's why I struggle to classify it as me being emotionally abused, but I know what he did was wrong. I just kind of feel like I am a filter of negative energy. It comes to me and then I just flip it around and then throw it back positive. I downplay the things that happened in my life a lot. I don't know why I do, though. Maybe just to not have it affect me as much, just for my own sake to not stress over it. The situations I get in are not going to define me, especially because when people make decisions, they probably don't think about all the things it's going to affect. We all have to make decisions in life, and it's going to affect someone else. I don't take it to heart because I know

there's other things going on in people's lives. If I don't take it to heart, then I feel like it's not gonna affect me that much. I need to protect myself and my energy so, I'm not gonna sit here and try and dwell on it. I can't control it.

Family: "The Glue"

I'm pretty close with my family, especially my mom. From the beginning, it's really just been us until my sisters came along. I'm the oldest, and I have four younger sisters. My oldest sister and I have different dads. My second sister and I have different dads, and her dad was married to my mom. Then, my third sister has the same biological father as me and a different mother, but she lives in the same town as us, so we're pretty close and we hang out with their family. My fourth sister is actually in heaven. I would say that I've had a lot of ups and downs in family life. I got my name changed from my biological father's in middle school. So, I was navigating through that, and finally coming to terms with him choosing to not be in my life. When I changed my name is when I was like, 'Alright, I'm cool now. I'm not gonna let that affect me. I'm not going to talk about that.'

So, there's that. Things were just up and down, sometimes we're together, and then usually there's a lot of drama going on. It's been this weird back-and-forth type of thing. In a way, I've always been the middle person for a lot of situations. Things affect everyone, but they always trickle back to me, and then I feel them, and I don't have to, but I try to alleviate some of those feelings and just try to help them navigate through the difficult situations that we've been through. Most recently, I've really been trying not to be that middle person because I realize how much it affects me emotionally, and this is where I need to start discerning my feelings from others because I'm an empath. I think that's really where it stems from because I feel all that

stuff that's going on. I can see all the factors that play into why our family is at the state that it's in and being in that position is tough, and I've been there for a long time.

So, my mom and I, we've just always been a support system for each other. I get a lot of my mannerisms from her. How I think is from her, but how I act is what's different. She's the type to be confrontational and vocal about things where I'll just kind of sit back and just chill. Because of that, there are times where we get into situations and she's like, "You need to say something," and there's times, where I'm like, "No, you need to stop saying stuff, like come on, chill out." Yeah, our relationship has definitely been a journey, not always the best because I've always seen her as like a very strict parent, and I can claim that I didn't get freedom as a child. With her being so strict, it felt like I would get in trouble a lot. So, I used to think it was because of me, like, 'Why do I keep messing up? Why do I keep doing all this stuff?' In retrospect, it was just her wanting the best for me, you know? Even though I didn't go out that much, no matter what, through anything, we've always been there for each other, supported each other.

I feel for her the most, for sure. I see the sacrifices that she has to make as a mother and just really who she is. I noticed that very early on and never really felt like I could do anything to show her that I knew. If you just think about all the stuff that we've been through... she's essentially been a single parent raising three kids, at one point had six jobs, and going to school. Maybe it was just her purpose, but she basically gave up on her dreams for her kids. I just noticed that stuff early on and didn't feel like I could show it in any way, but it'd always be in the back of my head.

Social Life: "The Floater"

I don't really recall my middle school days being all that pleasant. I definitely think I was bullied a lot throughout middle school, maybe it was out of love. I would say I'm a pretty

sensitive person. People like that are gonna take those things a little harder than people that aren't. That's why I saw it as love. I might even change it from bullying to just poking fun, I guess. Even though I'm trying to downplay it for some reason, but I feel like they weren't doing it to be intentionally mean, but just kind of poking fun, you know? I guess it had a larger impact than they thought it did. It was mostly teammates just name-calling and sometimes I laughed at them, if they had good jokes at least. Most of the time, I would just brush it off and be like, "Cool. That's a good one. Everyone uses that."

Other than that, I was pretty friendly with most people - like there were definitely people I didn't talk to, but I was always cordial with people. I didn't really have bad relationships with people in school or on teams, but I didn't really hang out with people outside of sports because I had to get permission to go outside. I had friends on my teams, but I didn't really hang out with people outside of school. Sports were definitely a social time for me. I was friends with a good amount of the guys on my sports teams. They're the people I'd hang out with.

My mom being pretty strict just made hanging out with friends difficult. My mom always said, "Oh, it's a school night, you don't need to be hanging out with friends. Do your homework." So, I think I just avoided asking to do stuff. I also never really hung out in big groups of people. I liked one-on-one situations a lot more, like smaller groups. I give that just to personality. In high school, I really didn't feel like I had a group to go to and it seemed like everyone else did. I was just basically a floater. I would actually do that in the lunchroom. I would go from table to table just talking to people, but I never necessarily felt like I belonged to a certain group. I don't recall people hitting me up to chill outside of school. Most of my social time was just with my teammates since we'd have competitions on the weekends and throughout the week.

“Sports Made Me Who I am Today”

My mom was the one that got me into sport. T-ball was the first sport I played. She put me into a league when I was seven. She also put me in a lot of different two-week sport clinics, including a wrestling clinic where I actually won the tournament. I didn't wrestle again until middle school. Middle school is when sports got serious. I wrestled, ran track, and played football. I really only did track because mom ran in middle school and won state, and she still brags about it to this day. I decided to wrestle because I realized that I wasn't too great at football, and I wanted to get better. The eighth-grade football coach was also the wrestling coach, and he told me to come out for wrestling cause it'd make me better at tackling. So, I went out for the team and ended up being good. During the summers, I went to the community pool and dove all the time. It was just a hobby I did. I taught myself how to swim, flip, and dive. I was always super active.

Football: “It Just Didn't Make Sense”

I started football in seventh grade as a running back and I wasn't good compared to my teammates. I got one touchdown and eventually moved to defense. Football was definitely a struggle. I had a lot of support though, so that helped. I think it's just because I compared myself to others, like there was definitely competition within the team, like who's the fastest running back or who scores the most touchdowns. My grade and the people older than us were a really good team. They didn't lose throughout the season at all. I think a lot of them played football before I had, so they already kind of knew what to do, and it was definitely different because a lot of the sports that I do are individual and not so much team. I stuck with it until junior year of high school, but then I kind of pulled away from team sports. I just didn't like depending on other people for success in sports.

My freshman year of high school, I was a lot better and definitely was enjoying it a lot more. I think I got a couple of interceptions. If I'm not mistaken, we went undefeated that year. My coach was an awesome guy, and I still talk to him to this day. Probably one of my favorite coaches - great, genuine, and very encouraging. In general, all the football coaches were cool; I didn't have issues with any of them. They all were respectful, including the head coach, although he definitely had moments of getting upset and yelling. Back then, I didn't think much of it; but now, I'd say that was just unnecessary. Coaches should coach without letting their emotions take over.

Things got hairy the summer going into my junior [year]. I wasn't as close to the varsity players, which was the grade above me, and they were definitely the favorites. They were pretty good athletes on the team, and the new head coach definitely put a lot of focus on them. It was that summer that the emotional abuse happened. The season hadn't started; we were in summer practices doing two-a-days. It was really wearing on me and I began to lose interest. It was also about time to get a job because I was starting to look at colleges and wanted to save money in case I didn't get to wrestle in college. On top of that, I got into pole vaulting and really liked that. Considering all that, I made the decision that it was time to let football go so I could focus on wrestling, track, and the job that I got.

I let my coach know about my decision and the response I got, was, "Oh, turn in your stuff on Monday. And good luck trying to get a wrestling scholarship. It's pretty hard."

His response seemed pretty sarcastic. I remember looking at the text on my way home. I was just like, 'What the hell?' I screenshotted it and sent it to my mom, and she called the school. My mom told me that after that the coach went around telling people that I was skipping practice, and that I wasn't really in it, which is not me at all. So, it's just like, 'Why, why would

a coach do that?’ Especially because he was a new coach that just came into the program, only his second year. We did pretty decent with him coaching us, too. I was on varsity, kind of. I got a jersey and I dressed, sat on the sideline, and shivered the whole time, but... then he wanted to get upset because I was leaving. It just didn’t make sense and was kind of surprising that he even cared that I stopped. He put so much focus on the older guys because they were his favorites since they were good athletes. I didn’t see myself as a quitter because it was before the season even started, we were just in summer practices. After that, I didn’t talk to him again. My mom blew up on him, and then he apologized. She was always there to defend me.

Wrestling: “Where I Built a Lot of Mental Toughness”

Like I said, I started wrestling in middle school to get better at football, and then I eventually ended up liking it a lot more and was a lot better at it. So, I put more time into that. I wrestled Freestyle and Greco in the summer which are just different types of wrestling than the traditional scoring system we used in school. In middle school, we actually were back-to-back state champions. Wrestling was pretty big where I’m from.

One thing happened in seventh grade that I’ll never forget. As most athletes would understand, I would get nervous before competitions. One day while I was warming up with a teammate, I passed gas and stunk up the air. My teammates knew it was me, and they started calling me a name, ‘hot breath.’ The nickname eventually got back to the school and spread. Everyone was just calling me this name that was made up. For the record, my breath didn’t stink.

In eighth grade, my wrestling coach was definitely a dick but in a funny way. He was cool. He was a genuine person; it would just come out in that way, like... a tough love kind of thing. The things he said definitely weren’t politically correct by today’s standards, but the way that it came out was motivational. If you want someone to do better, you tell them “You suck,”

and then they're like, "No, I don't." Then, they actually try harder just to prove you wrong. That's kind of how he was. I guess it helped because I participated in state and helped win the 2012 state championship.

Wrestling throughout high school, overall, was a good experience, and I improved a lot. I had good relationships with most people. There was some drama on the wrestling team, though. There were three or four guys older than me that were assholes to everyone. They were damn near the coaches' favorites. They were good wrestlers, for sure. And I think that was the biggest piece of it, but you know how a little sibling will paint themselves to be an angel, and as soon as mom turns her back they strike... yeah, they were just a bit devilish. Aside from them, the wrestling team is who I was closest too in terms of friends, especially my practice partners. My teammates certainly would say some microaggressions that I didn't really realize were microaggressions at the time, but I never got those from coaches... If I remember correctly.

As for coaches, I thought I had like a really good relationship with the head coach, still do actually. Anytime I go to the high school I stop by the weight room and see if he's in there. So, we're cool despite what he did. He was just a really chill dude, honestly, and he definitely cared a lot. I liked his motivational speeches after practice, and I guess just how he carried himself. I basically just admired that on top of him just being really chill, [he was] also a fun guy. Some of my teammates didn't like him for some reason. Maybe it was because of his administration abilities as a coach. One time, he told me to cut weight to make 138 lbs., but then had me wrestle up at 145 on varsity, like... 'What? Why did I just cut all that weight for a week and a half for you to bump me up a weight, and now I'm like 5 lbs. less and a rag doll to these guys. What are you doing?' I guess that would just be an example of why I think people didn't necessarily like him, but at least he was always pretty cool on a personal level.

In general, though, wrestling practices were hard. They were always the hardest thing of the week cause they really pushed us, like conditioning and mental toughness. The two-hour practices were basically just conditioning. We'd do technical work, but most of it was conditioning and that's where I built a lot of my mental toughness, which I think kind of adds to the whole reason why I downplay my emotions in these situations. Mental toughness is just persevering through training. Wrestling is not an easy sport at all. Those practices were hell, especially when I was cutting weight. It took discipline with your eating and having two-hour long practices that would have you crawling afterwards. You had to have some mental toughness. Fortunately, I didn't have to cut too much weight, but I still did frequently. All that stuff really made me start to question myself, like, 'Why am I- what am I doing? What is my goal? Why am I putting myself through all this?' It's funny actually, one day I asked my teammate, "Why are we wrestling? It's violent, like we're being aggressive to each other." He'd been wrestling since he was a kid and was one of the best on the team and his answer was, "I don't know." We both just kind of sat there dissociated for a second... like, "Why are we doing this?" But anyway, mental toughness was just trying to push past that mental barrier of your brain telling you to stop, even though you actually have more in the tank. Once you master that, you can basically wrestle anyone without fear because you can put all your faith in your training. You've done things that are a lot harder than that six-minute match. That's how I view mental toughness.

Now, the coaches, they definitely think of it the same way, but I think they also lumped injuries into it. For myself, like I could see that. If someone's hurt, that doesn't make them injured. There's a difference between being hurt and injured. But, I would say that some toxic masculinity traits were thrown into their version of mental toughness with wrestling. More

specifically, injuries, and you know, the go-to words that people use like “pussy,” or “Oh, just wrestle through it” and all that stuff. That was very much present.

“I Don’t Like Being on Ill Terms with Anyone.” Going back to my freshmen year, I wrestled on junior varsity and actually went undefeated that year, 25 and 0. My football coach was also the JV wrestling coach, who I loved, like one of my favorites. Then, there were two other assistants, and they were okay. There was one meet, though, that we went to against our rival team, which is just right down the street from us. We blew them out of the water, then headed for the bus to go home. As I’m getting on the bus, I walked to my usual seat. I always sat in the one-seater in the back; but, when I got there, some of my teammates were playing this racist song with like hard “-er,” talking about lynching and all that, and it was pretty bad. I was like, “Can you guys turn that off?” They kind of said “no,” and throughout that bus ride they kept saying stuff alongside of the song. Now, I’m a pretty patient person. I can take a lot before I get upset; but, they said something, and I got up and was like, “Look, you gotta stop.” I ended up punching him in the face and just sat back down, but he decided to retaliate. He got up and choked me. He told me that he was going to lynch me like my ancestors, and then he sat back down. They planned to jump me in the locker room when we got back to the school, but I avoided the locker room. So, I didn’t get jumped or in trouble for fighting. On the bus, there were three people in the surrounding seats and a couple of people up front that heard it happen. There were also two coaches up front, too, but they didn’t hear it. One of the kids who heard it ended up telling their mom and then everyone found out.

So, the one that choked me ended up getting expelled for the rest of the year. The others got suspended, and then they fired the wrestling coach, literally one of my favorite wrestling coaches. He didn’t even know about it when it was happening, but just because he’s the coach

and they had to put it on someone. He had been there for like 30 plus years. He was also a teacher, my science teacher, and he was able to actually keep that for a little bit, but then they asked him to retire. So, everyone was really, really bummed. I didn't take it as, 'Oh, it's my fault that he got fired,' but other people definitely said that to me. It was a whole thing, and it was even in the newspaper.

The school board even told him that he couldn't contact me or whatnot. It was really, really weird. I was like, "No, what? This guy's awesome. What are you talking about?" Like why would they say he couldn't contact me? I even went to the school board meeting, just to say, "This is not right." Like, me, the person that it happened to, is even saying, "Yeah, there should be no blame on him for it." My mom went and talked about him, too, and a lot of others from the school. Despite all that, there were no ill feelings between him and I at all, thankfully.

After that, me and the kid that got expelled ended up going to lunch one day at Subway just to kind of talk about everything that happened. He told me that he was sorry, basically. I think I'm a very forgiving person. So, I wasn't like pissed off at him or anything for it. I think it was a good thing to go through, to actually sit there, and talk to him about it, and see I guess what he learned from it, if anything, and just kind of squash any beef between us. Eventually, we made up. It seems that that's always kind of been a thing with me; hence, I had good relationships with most of the people throughout middle school, high school, college... I didn't like being on ill terms with anyone and I don't want to say that I was a people pleaser, but I definitely didn't like conflict. So, after all that, not much happened.

"His Intent Was Not to Harm Me." So, freshmen year, I went undefeated and had that incident with my teammate. Sophomore year is when I kind of had the issue with the coach. Normally, to make varsity you have to wrestle-off the teammate who is the same weight as you,

but during my sophomore year the varsity wrestler at my weight broke his thumb. So, I got moved up to varsity for most of the year. As the championship season was approaching, he actually got better and came back. But, I was already on the varsity lineup, and obviously, if he were to go to regional, sectional, and state, he'd have to challenge me and beat me in a match. Instead, the coach said that he was just going to have that athlete go without even having him challenge me. There was an assumption that he was better despite him missing the whole season. It would have been my first time actually going to regionals, at least for varsity. So, I was pretty excited and to not even get a chance to wrestle for it was shitty.

I don't think I told him how not having the wrestle-off affected me. I don't think I've ever had that conversation with him; but I do remember us sitting down one time when we were going over film on the iPad. I remember sitting down with him and having like a conversation, more of a heart-to-heart, and kind of like, "I see your potential," type of thing, and that I just needed to keep working hard. It actually made me feel pretty good; like it showed that he truly did care even though his actions before made it seem like he didn't. But... that's what made me realize that his intent was not to harm me for the decision he made.

"I Stopped Wrestling... It was in my Best Interest." My senior year, I actually got third place at regionals, and this was my first time ever going to the state series. I ended up deciding to not go to college for wrestling because I got offers for pole vaulting. So, the state series was it for my wrestling career. Two days after placing third, though, during practice, I broke my thumb. I didn't know it was broken at the time; so, that same day I went to track practice and pole vaulted. By the next day, I basically couldn't move it. So, when I was at wrestling practice, I talked to my coach was like, "Look, I don't think I'm going to be able to go to sectionals and wrestle." So, I stopped wrestling. That was my last time, at least competitively.

I mean, I could have wrestled, and it would have been very, very painful, but I knew I had a track season, and I had goals that I wanted to, you know, reach for in pole vault. I can't pole vault with a broken thumb; so, I decided I had to recover for this. I think it was good on my end.

My wrestling coaches were like, "Are you sure? You might regret it. This is your last year." I was just like, "I get that, but I don't think I will." I loved wrestling; I really did. I still do. It has had a very huge impact on my life. So, it was definitely a hard decision to make; but I just did what I thought was in my best interest. They actually ended up taking me down to state with them still. So, I was there to watch my teammates wrestle and because I didn't wrestle at sectionals, there was an alternate and that happened to be my track coach's son from middle school. So, he got to wrestle at sectionals, which was cool. I feel like the coach made up for the time that he didn't let me wrestle-off for the championship season because he was the one that took me along to state my senior year after I broke my thumb. Like I said, we're cool and still have a really good relationship.

Pole Vaulting: "I Made the Right Decision to Let My Thumb Heal"

So, in middle school, I ran track, but I didn't go out freshmen year because I made it to state in wrestling. I was actually running laps with sweatpants on and all that good stuff for wrestling when I saw track practice going on and they had the pole vault pit out. I was like, 'What's going on over there?' So, I walked over and was like, "Hey can I try this?" The coach was like "No, because of liability reasons and whatnot." So, I was like, "Okay, I'll come out for track next year, and I'm going to try pole vault." Sure enough, next year, I did, and that's when I started pole vaulting, sophomore year of high school.

I caught on to it pretty fast. My first meet I jumped 9' I think. I went from 9' my first meet ever, to jumping 13'3" at sectionals that same year. I almost made it to state. I would have

had to jump 13'9". I made the attempt, and it was the best vault ever. It felt pretty good, but it was the last attempt, and my elbow nicked it off. I vaulted at state junior year and placed 11th. Senior year, I qualified again, and placed 3rd, jumping 15'6". So, I made the right move to stop wrestling to let my thumb heal.

The Ending of High School Sport: "Forgotten About"

There were a couple incidents my senior year that happened. It was a whole thing, actually. The athletic director actually forgot about me twice during important events. So, you know how when athletes commit, they do a signing and whatnot and there is a little ceremony? Well, yeah, they had scheduled one for like several athletes, and I had just committed to my college and would have wanted to be in that, but they forgot to put me in it. They had the media come out and everything, and all those people got their pictures taken and put in the paper. Meanwhile, I was just on the side, forgotten about. I just remember standing there watching them. Eventually, they made one for me, and I got a cake and whatever; but the news didn't come out that time.

Then, at the end of every school year, the school has an awards banquet for all the senior athletes. My mom went and was ready to take pictures and videos and all that. They actually forgot to mention my name during the ceremony, and I didn't get a plaque or anything. So, of course, my mom had a stern talk with the athletic director because that was not the first time but the second time he forgot me in some important recognition. At the time, I didn't really let it affect me that much. I mean obviously it was bogus, but I always try to give people leeway when it comes to stuff like that. I think the second one definitely hit a little more than the first, because I was like, 'Oh, it was just a mistake.' Then, for it to happen a second time, I was like, 'Okay what's going on here?'

My mom, though, she's the person that always is like, "No, no, no, they did you bogus." I probably wouldn't have said anything. I probably would've just brushed it off, and nothing would have happened. So, I think it was good because she was there to defend me and support me. So, I really appreciate it, but I guess our methods are different. She's definitely more of a confrontational person in the best way possible, and I'm not. I also think it comes from a different place when it's the parent. They receive it, like, "Oh, shit. We fucked up." "Yeah, you did." They also know that they're not to mess with the Greys because of that. So, all my sisters' coaches have been on their P's and Q's.

College: "Must be Preparing me for Something"

During my first year of pole vaulting in college, I thought I was going to clear 4.90m because I improved so quickly during high school. But, I had a lot of adjustments to make. In high school, I didn't really have a coach. I did, but he was a volunteer and not able to be there much; so, I had to really learn from YouTube. Switching to having a coach was definitely an adjustment and I had to rework a lot of things. My sophomore year, I figured some technical things out and ended up qualifying for nationals. Four days after jumping 4.80m, I was playing ping pong, went to pick up the ball from the ground, and broke my back. It was a stress fracture, basically, but really overextension. I chipped my L5 and then I guess I had previous fractures on my L2, which I think was probably from in middle school when I had a "strained back." The first thing on my mind was if I was ever gonna pole vault again... but I made a full recovery. I went to physical therapy and a sport psych intern, and it helped so much. I weighed out the risks and benefits and decided to return. The thing was, I started at ground zero. I hadn't worked out or ran in so long that I had to relearn how to pole vault which was perfect because the reset helped me refine the fundamental skills. My junior year, I was super close to my goal of qualifying for the

indoor and outdoor season. I had the same goal of 4.90m my senior year and attempted at the indoor season last chance meet but didn't make it. Then COVID hit, so... I guess that leads me where I am now. A few abrupt endings to sport - that must be preparing me for something.

Overall, participating in collegiate sport was pretty awesome. My team and the coaching staff were very supportive. The athletic department really valued and put time into their athletes, and you can see that by how successful most of the teams were. I had pretty good relationships with most people and teammates. My coach was probably one of the best coaches I have ever had. You could tell he took the time throughout his years of coaching to develop his coaching style and what he calls his "path." I always wanted to be a coach, but I thought I'd coach wrestling until I learned from him. That led me to want to be a pole vault coach, which I was supposed to start this year at my old high school.

So, college sport was a pretty good experience. I mean there were still microaggressions from teammates. For example, teammates thinking it's okay to say the N word even if it's in a meme or something. We had a group chat, and the captain of the team used a meme with the N word in it. I approached him about it and was like, "Look, do you know the history behind this is and whatnot?" And, he was just like, "No, I never knew that you couldn't say that word." Like, "Really?" He didn't receive it very well. He was really, really defensive about it. And, like I said, I don't really enjoy conflict. So, for me to actually step up and say that in person was a lot. I started to get upset, and he was just playing dumb. It was something I was really passionate about, and something I cared about a lot. Then, for the dude to just kind of write it off like "whatever" ... it's like, "What? How long have you been on this earth?" That was really the only thing from college sport, though, other than when my coach left at the end of the indoor season my senior year. I was pretty hurt by that, initially. The first thing I thought was that it was about

me, thinking that he didn't care because he had been there with me and basically was my first true pole vault coach, you know? And a great one at that, told great stories, really had a vision and a plan for his whole coaching philosophy. So, I guess it kind of... I had goals that I hadn't accomplished yet that he'd been rooting for me, and I wanted to make sure that he was there. It'd be a different feeling if he was there when I actually... damn it, I'm starting to tear up. Anyways, we all have reasons for the decisions we make, and I realize it wasn't about me.

“Emotionally Wrecked”

Now, this doesn't really actually have to do with sport... Well, it did impact sports, but my junior year I was an RA. So, I had residents and one of them was kind of struggling. I invited him over to talk things over one night. It was probably like 2 or 3 in the morning when he left my room. As he was leaving my room, he looked at my whiteboard that I had on my door, and someone had written the N word with the hard “er.” I immediately took a picture of it and sent a bias incident report. I met with the director of Multicultural Affairs, talked with other people around campus, and, basically, we didn't know who did it. It was kind of a situation where the college really didn't respond to it well. They didn't start an investigation until my mom started talking to the president. Then, a week later, they started one.

During that time, I actually got a text from someone that I went to high school with who said he knew who wrote it. Apparently, he knew someone that lived on my floor, and he told him and then he told me. The school started this whole investigation process right in the middle of track season. Funny enough, the night after it happened, we had a track meet, and I jumped really well. Every meet after that, though, was tough because I was emotionally just a wreck, probably one of the harder situations in my life. The investigation process was over a span of like six months. I was in meetings, classes, and conversations all day. Balancing the investigation,

schoolwork, track, and RA work... was a lot. Oh, and I didn't mention social life for a reason. I was barely there. I was emotionally just stretched and I'm pretty sure I had headphones on for a majority of the year... I didn't have the energy to talk to anybody unless I had to.

We ended up having a hearing for the incident and they did not find him responsible for it because there wasn't enough evidence... I guess. Luckily, they had another process that we could go through which was restorative justice. So, we ended up doing that and just kind of talking about the situation from both our perspectives. His mom was there. My mom was there. We had mediators. It was actually one of my residents and he had been my resident the year before, too. So, we had a pretty good relationship, or at least I thought so, but we ended up mending, and, you know, there was like a certain set of agreements that we came to. He had to attend like a Black Student Association (BSA) meeting. I was actually the president of BSA then, too. He went to one; I hope he learned something from it.

Honestly, though... when it happened, I wasn't really that phased. I really didn't take it that way. I was literally just calm, just like took a picture of it, moved on with my day, had a track meet the next day, like everything was fine. It wasn't until... and this is hard because it's like I was fine up until I had to start having these meetings for it. People started coming up to me saying, "I'm so sorry blah, blah, blah. Why is the world like this blah, blah, blah?" Like I mean it was supportive, yes. "Thank you for coming up and saying something to me, I appreciate it." But I didn't feel as if I was affected until people started expecting me to be affected by it. Even when I told my mom, I think she had the biggest impact on that because she's the type of person to obviously fight for me and do whatever to try and make things better. So, she went off and was mad, which I get, but at the same time, I didn't feel that. It wasn't until all that stuff started

happening, and then it was just like various meetings that I had, and just on top of everything else that I was dealing with.

It's like that social pressure to feel a certain way about something which is so weird because people would expect you to be down in the dumps. And, at least initially, I wasn't like that - I was fine. In a way, I think I kind of had to adopt that kind of feeling to start the change on campus; because, eventually, I would have to tell people the story or people would tell the story and I'd have to say how it impacted me in this way. In the hearing, I had to come up with how it impacted me and my daily life. It was almost like the feelings were fed to me... which is really weird because normally I would just be like, "You know what? Someone did it. It happened; I don't know who it was. Maybe I'm a little more paranoid, because I don't know if someone is...;" but, at the same time, I'm like, "That's whatever."

The feelings felt normal, though. They felt real because I just adopted them. I'd already been fed so much that I was just living in it. And, I have proof because the track meet that next day - I vaulted pretty well and I barely thought about what happened the night before. The track meets after that, though... oof, they were a struggle. A real struggle. We went back to the same facility of that meet that was the day after and I was sad at the meet. That shit was in my head at the track meet, which sucked cause track allows me to get away from that stuff. I couldn't, though. It's just interesting how fast it happened, like me taking on those feelings, those expected feelings from others, and then it becoming my reality... It's funny (not) how fast that happened.

Creating Change. The incident started some good movements on campus, though. After it blew over, BSA had a meeting and we're like, "We got to do something, we got to respond to this." So, we just started planning as much as we could. We made a flyer, T-shirts, and scheduled meetings with administration. We held this huge forum and over 100 people showed up

including students, parents, staff, and faculty. Everyone just talked about their experiences on sports teams, in the classroom, and kind of the things that they were going through. It was just so organic and very tense. It was wild. I don't like to give him credit because it was performative, but the president of the college created a diversity, equity, and inclusion task force and asked me to be a student representative on the force.

What's crazy is the week before this, I was down in Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee learning about Black history and such, like we went to the Legacy Museum. So, we dove into some deep sad history, and I was like, "Alright ancestors. I gotta do something about it." So, I went down south to learn the history of racism, just to come back to it written on my door. It's perfect actually, perfect. That's what drove everything that happened after that whiteboard incident then. I feel like for myself, I'll have these hopes and dreams of doing something and then something else comes up, and then I forget about it, and kind of lose the motivation for it. So, it won't be as strong, but at this point, I had all this emotional crap going on from all the stuff that I learned on that trip, the people that I talked to, and things that I read. I just carried throughout that whole experience and the motivation was really, really high at that point. So, I was like "Let's go for it." I literally felt like we were SNCC, which was a group of college students that planned and organized non-violent sit-ins and protests in the 60's.

So, it's crazy that I took on the impact people expected me to have... which propelled the more inclusive changes on campus. I wasn't aware of adopting the feelings at the time; but I did way after the situation passed. Now, all I can say is if it ever comes up where people are expecting me to feel some type of way about a situation or expecting me to respond in some way, I will respond with my stoic face and act like nothing's going on. I mean, things are definitely going on in my head. I'm thinking about it. I'm not just brushing it off. I've always

dealt with stuff in my head and never really felt like I needed to talk to others to figure things out. Partly because I felt as though my feelings were a burden to others. I know that's not the case, but if I could avoid that, that's fine.

Another reason I want to avoid telling others is because I know people want to be helpful in situations like that, they want to show their support, but that's not always what that person needs at that moment. I couldn't tell you what I needed in that moment for sure, but I think it was just to be alone. And because I'm an empath, I need to learn how to distinguish my feelings from the feelings that I take on from others. Then, I can remove myself from those feelings and not have them impact me in a negative way. Just seeing how it was so easy for me to adopt these expectations of what I should be feeling... I don't want to say that what I was feeling wasn't real because obviously it was real at the time; but, like I can see where the influences were, and I can see the difference between how I would have been affected by it alone versus other people having their expectations of all that.

The End of College and Sport

So, since March 2020 when I was a senior in college and COVID struck and put us all in our houses, I've kind of put sports on the back burner just because I don't think I've fully adjusted to not being an athlete and not being able to finish my senior year. I think there might be some stuff underlying that I haven't really gone through yet. Yeah, I don't know, it's just like... it's nothing that I can just get back. I didn't get any closure. There were so many hopes and visions that I had for myself, and I didn't even get the chance to accomplish. My mom always says, "The best is yet to come." So, I'm sure it'll transfer somewhere else in my life. Now, I work with incarcerated youth.

Learning and Growing from the Negative

The emotional abuse did influence my life, which comes back to this recurring theme of me taking in “negative experiences” and flipping them. I don’t wish these things upon anyone else. At the same time, though, even though the things that I’ve learned have come from negative situations, you have a choice in how you look at it.

The “negative experience” from coach has really pushed me to think about the kind of coach I want to be. I have spent a lot of time just with planning to make sure I deliver things successfully. I know the decisions I make are going to affect how these athletes grow up and process similar situations. I want to make sure that I’m giving them an environment that promotes individual growth while learning how to pole vault. I printed a bunch of stuff out from the coaching training I took. I plan on making my athletes binders, like training packets. It’d have preseason conditioning, max out sheets, nutrition guides, rules, expectations for the team, warm-up and stretch routines, motivational pictures, quotes, smart goal-setting, workshops, exercise toolbox, competition schedule, and a safety checklist for vaulting. All this stuff so they can access it while I’m not there because I’d be in school. Also, that coach training really dove into what makes a coach good and how athletes suffer from coaches. So, I want to minimize that as much as possible and I’m also a perfectionist and do the most sometimes.

Conclusion: Xavier’s Story

My story is one of relaxing in the midst of chaos.

Xavier’s Landscape: Sociality, Place, and Temporality

Xavier’s narrative landscape and experiences were formed by many intersecting social relationships. At home, his family life was nuanced as his dad exited his life when he was young; so, for a while, it was just him and his mom. He then gained half-three sisters and a stepfather for

some time. He referenced that although there was a lot going on at school and in sports, family always took precedence. In fact, because of the “drama” in his home life, other incidents such as the coach abuse seemed insignificant. He even explained that he believes he downplays the coach abuse because of those family relationships. His relationship with his mom always stood out to him as she made sure to protect him; in fact, anytime somebody wronged Xavier, she spoke up. Xavier acknowledged that without her, less action likely would have been taken in many of his life situations. It’s because of her that the coaches of his younger sisters have also been “on their P’s and Q’s.”

Moreover, Xavier experienced a lot of hardships with his teammates and friends. For one, outside of sport he didn’t have much of a social life. His teammates were the only social life he had outside of his family. He was expected to come home from sports and study for school, go to work, etc. His relationships with his teammates, though, were not always fruitful, and, in fact, put him and his psyche in danger multiple times.

For example, during his freshmen year of wrestling, his teammates choked him and made horrible comments referencing that he should be killed like his Black ancestors were. In addition, his college teammate sent a meme with the “N” word in it. Thus, although it was not his coaches who abused him, his teammates created an environment that wasn’t safe or enjoyable for him. It also served as a reference point for how bad things could be; so, when his coach let him down in the future, it didn’t affect him as much (i.e., he downplayed it). Therefore, Xavier sought good, functional coach relationships in the hopes of mitigating the devastating relationships he had with his teammates.

Similarly, as he got older and went through the experience with the “N” word written on his door, he compared those past events in sport to the events outside of sport. Although that

racist incident from a student living on his dorm room floor wasn't in sport, it affected his sport performance and how he made sense of other events. He considered that person a friend prior to the attack, just like he loved his coach prior to being let down. Interestingly, Xavier always sought to resolve these conflicts and could forgive. Regardless, it still influenced his sense-making. A paradox is clear as Xavier chose to summarize his story as "relaxing in the midst of chaos." Although he spoke with a lot of emotion and hurt, he wanted to focus on "flipping the negative" which appears to be a coping mechanism for all that is occurring.

For Xavier, the places the abuse happened occurred on the bus, in the locker room, the wrestling mat, and the football field, all of which are associated with the public high school he attended. Outside of the actual places the abuse happened, he made sense of it in his home with his mom, in conversation with teammates on the wrestling mats, and during film with his wrestling coach. Unfortunately, the only place that Xavier was able to have a social life - on athletic fields - was less than comfortable. Once again, the people and spaces that were supposed to be protecting Xavier were not.

Lastly, as has already been demonstrated, Xavier used his past to make sense of the events that were currently occurring, leading to his downplaying of the events. Of all the things he discussed, he spent the least amount of time on the actual emotional abuse from coaches in sport and discussed more about other life events that occurred (e.g., teammates on the bus, "N" word on his door, end of his collegiate sport career). Moreover, he was seemingly always focused on the future and his goals and ambitions. He did not want to dwell on the past, and, instead, sought to make a difference. Every decision he made along the way was for a larger purpose, such as not partaking in the wrestling championships so he could heal for his collegiate

pole-vaulting career and creating binders for future athletes he coaches so they don't experience the same harm that he did.

Chapter 7: Conclusions, Connections, Positionality, and Implications

The purpose of the current study was to explore the reflective experiences of previous non-elite youth male athletes who were emotionally abused between the ages of 14-18 years (e.g., high school sport). Narrative inquiry was used as the methodology and method and is defined “as an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 17). That is, we make sense of and interpret things through stories, living, telling, reliving, and retelling them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Additionally, narrative does not serve just as a representational device or tool but thinking narratively is how we come to understand and make sense of experience. As such, narrative representations of experience are the starting and ending point of interpretation (Clandinin, 2013).

Following Clandinin (2013), the narrative representations in Chapter 5, 6 and 7 constitute my primary engagement with narrative as inquiry. Although the foundational sense-making has already been done through and with the participants in the preceding chapters, I briefly make some additional analytical points in the form of connections to the literature—both the places where participants’ narratives converged with and diverged from previous literature. However, I am not aiming for distant particulars such as conceptualization or theorizing. Narrative inquiry is focused on the context and particulars of each story, not factors that might be extracted from context and thematized (Clandinin, 2013). Subsequently, I take one narrative at a time, sequentially, and highlight only one to two particularly salient connections between the narrative and empirical research. Moreover, in the sections that follow, I emphasize what was an always unfolding process of meaning-making for Bruce, Chris, and Xavier and for us in our respective dyads.

There were clear moments where the power of narrative as the methodology and phenomena was clearly evident (Clandinin, 2013). In the third phase of the conversational process, Xavier read me his journal entries, Chris shared his daily devotional, and Bruce illustrated the extent to which he was bullied in middle school. These moments made me aware that they were feeling “at ease... in the co-composed world that we were creating” (Lessard et al., 2015, p. 206). It was those intimate moments—detailed in chapters 5, 6, and 7, and elaborated on below—that kept me excited and motivated throughout the dissertation process.

Bruce Wayne

As I finalized Bruce’s story for a representation in this dissertation, his story is layered and complex, as to be expected. It is filled with mismanaged injuries that put his physical and mental well-being in grave danger. His story is also filled with psychological injury of being singled out, treated differently, yelled at, ignored, and being removed from his team that he put everything into. More than that, his story is one of resilience, work ethic, making conscious decisions, and taking responsibility in an attempt to control his future. He talked to administration after being bullied, asked his coach to play him when his family was in town, put in hours and hours of additional practice, and showed up for his senior year of tryouts among many other instances. Time and time again, Bruce illustrated the ways in which despite all odds against him, he fought for himself and rose up. He shared the ways in which he was anxious, frustrated, sad, and annoyed. Then, he shared the resilience, grit, and character-building that came along with it, choosing to highlight the positives over the negatives.

Bruce shared nearly the same ideas about his story. However, he added that the metaphor for his story is when he got knocked out in football practice, but still got up and continued

playing. To him, that event is the epitome of how resilient he is. During our meeting where we talked about analysis, Bruce shared,

As I was reading it, I was like, “Yep she captured this perfectly. You did a perfect job summarizing what my [Bruce’s] story is about. And all the titles were great. They immediately reminded me of what we talked about.”

Beyond accuracy and the kind comments, Bruce had a few changes for me. For example, he asked me to remove one story in order to maintain confidentiality for the individual he was talking about. He pointed out also that I had referred to his concussions as singular when he certainly had multiple. Moreover, originally, I had not included the choking incident of his Black teammate; however, he asked me to add that because it clearly demonstrated the differential treatment of Black and white players. In making the changes, he was continuing to engage in his own process of sense-making of the events themselves and co-constructing the representation of his narrative with me. Interestingly, as I was writing his narrative, I reflected on how his mom was portrayed knowing that it could bother him. And he indeed brought this to light, stating:

I’m worried my mom doesn’t sound great in here, like her parenting styles, because she’s embracing the coaches doing this and taking their sides throughout. It’s still valuable to the story though. It’s honestly fine to leave it in, because that’s how she was in sports. She’s phenomenal outside of sports, but like she also grew up in an era where she watched sports and sporting environments like this, and it was normalized. She just thought it was building character which it did, but my nose still hurt. And when I was talking about the boosters and that she wouldn’t do it, I honestly think that was a good thing that she didn’t embrace that aspect of the culture. In hindsight, I’m very happy she didn’t do that.

Connections to the Literature

Bruce reminded me, abuse is “normalized in sport” and we “repress” it. Within the first three minutes of our first conversation he stated, “At the time, I loved sport and I was wanting to play. So, I didn’t think anything of it, but it was draining to say the least.” He was willing to suffer because of his extreme love for and dedication to basketball. These statements align with previous literature that emotional abuse is certainly normalized prior to the elite level (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2007). Moreover, much of what Bruce discussed was a complete denial of attention from his basketball coach which he explicitly stated was worse than the verbal abuse of his baseball coach. Similar findings were expressed in Stirling and Kerr’s (2008) work that denial of attention and support affected athletes more than other forms of emotional abuse. Bruce may have experienced emotional invalidation defined as “when a person’s thoughts and feelings are rejected, ignored, or judged... [which] is particularly hurtful for someone who is emotionally sensitive” (Hall, 2012, para 29). However, in contrast to previous literature (Stirling & Kerr, 2013), Bruce did not express a decrease in motivation or impaired focus from the emotional abuse; in fact, he actually increased his total training time and efforts in order to get better, and he put his health at risk in order to prove himself to his coaches.

With the increased effort, putting himself on the line, and a continued lack of recognition from the coach, he was left feeling there was nothing else he could do besides pay a large amount of money to the boosters’ club, essentially “buying” his spot on the team. Undoubtedly, Bruce adopted and adhered to the sport ethic (Coakley, 2017); he was “dedicated to ‘the game’ above all other things” (Coakley 2017, p. 110) including his own health. He strove for distinction and put in endless hours of additional practice with minimal time for fun as was demonstrated by his not joining his teammates in the locker room most of the time. He accepted risks and played

through pain, including multiple concussions, a broken nose, and an Achilles injury. After each injury—and under the advisement of the athletic trainer and expectation of the coach—he returned sooner than he now knows he should have. Lastly, he accepted no obstacles (Coakley, 2017). He refused to stop playing basketball for his high school team and, instead, gave it every last bit he had until the coach himself told him he was not on the team. He refused to accept that fate without a definitive answer from the coach. In the end, he reflected on the damaging aspect of each of these but still highlighted the immense benefits of adhering to these norms and being on the team.

Throughout our conversations, Bruce consistently negotiated the benefits of being on the basketball team and the harm and injuries he suffered, psychologically and physically. For example, despite the lack of playing time and emotional abuse from the coach, he would have preferred to stay on his high school's basketball team his senior year over transferring to the other team where he was respected and valued by the coach and his teammates. At that time, the social benefits of being on the team outweighed the harm. This was his desire despite also being bullied by his teammates and peers, which was seemingly influenced by traditional notions of masculinity. For example, Bruce illustrated how the locker room was filled with “toxic masculinity” in the form of “every stereotypical jock male thing you see in movies and TV shows.” He described further how his teammates drank and partied, but he never partook in that culture. Moreover, they were the school bullies, used the slights “gay” and “fag,” and dated all of the “popular girls” in school. In contrast, Bruce described himself as “quiet” but getting along with everyone. He also shared that when he started to date junior year, they stopped teasing him about being gay, and when he lost weight, they stopped making fun of him for his weight. In essence, his teammates appeared to demonstrate more orthodox masculinity (Anderson, 2005,

2009) while Bruce performed a moderated version of masculinity (Crocket, 2012). Interestingly, although Bruce did not adhere to orthodox masculinity in terms of homophobia and misogyny, he still adhered to taking risks and demonstrating strength throughout his sport career. In fact, he even joined the football team thinking, “Football is the most masculine sport. If I play, they’re not going to bully me.” Subsequently, Bruce and his teammates certainly demonstrated the notion that sport is a gendered space (Messner, 1990a; Sappington, 2020).

As Bruce worked through his narrative, he shared that of all things which influenced the coach’s abuse towards him and the other players “...just comes down to the whole booster thing with my mom not paying.” In response, I stated, “So, it seems like that was a clear divide. If you weren’t a super booster then you got this different treatment.” He shared:

Yeah. Right, and the black kids weren’t subject to that because like- this is very stereotypical which bothers me that I’m going to say it, but they were all more athletic. So, you could just tell that they were better athletes, so the coach couldn’t like—he actually treated them differently, but he couldn’t sacrifice their playing time because they were just so much better... they were dunking freshman year, and super crazy athletic. That overrides everything else

Ultimately, although Bruce thought race played a large role in the coach’s abuse of his Black teammates, more than race, he believed money was the largest factor.

Learning from his experience, what’s most important to Bruce now is that he would never risk himself, his health, or success to “prove” himself. Many years later, he is able to look back and recognize the harm that he suffered for doing so. After he left sport, he decided he didn’t want others to go through the same situation. Although he didn’t necessarily recognize his experience as emotional abuse until watching the documentaries, he knew something was not

right. He opted to go into a field where he could focus on changing emotional abuse in sport. He is now more conscious of similar situations that both he and others experience and takes responsibility for mitigating those to the best of his ability. Since then, he has put time and energy into reflecting more on his experience and is now standing up for others.

In conclusion, Bruce is trying to make the world better in any way, even by opting to participate in this study. He shared, “I’m thankful you’re doing this study and bringing it to light.” And despite doing the study for others, he also found healing for himself. He briefly reflected on what it was like to revisit these past experiences and go through this research process. He shared:

I feel relieved to finally just talk about this. I see a lot of like the healing process of actually talking about it, not repressing these feelings that I repressed for 10 years. So, it’s good to actually like, get out there, actually talk about and think about these things.

Chris

There is no doubt that Chris experienced emotional abuse causing him hurt and pain. This was evident throughout the many times he explicitly said something “hurt” or was “rough.” The harm was also expressed through his tone of voice, slowed speech, and occasional head shakes as he recalled specific experiences. More important to him than the emotional abuse itself, though, was who he is now in spite of it. Chris’ story reflected pain from being consistently let down despite giving his all while also finding purpose and meaning in those moments. He shared similar notions for his own perceptions of his story significantly leaning on his Christianity and belief in God to make sense of everything that happened. He viewed his story as one of “perseverance.” He explained how he preserved through hard times formed by coaches during his prime development years and did not let it define him. When he didn’t like feeling sad, he

sought friendship. When he felt the coach's treatment wasn't fair, he challenged him. When he had the opportunity to speak on his experience in hopes of it helping others, he did so vehemently. Now, he is reconciling with his past so he can do better for the future. Given his experiences, he continuously chooses to do better himself.

He started right in on the first interview sharing some of the depths of his emotionally abusive experiences and the impact they had, positively and negatively. It set the tone for the rest of our conversations. Each time I left our conversation, I was amazed by the many ways Chris had intentionally chosen to interpret and make meaning out of his experiences. Again, this was largely faith-driven. In reflecting on the research process, he shared:

I chose to participate because I do feel like my story was kind of sheltered a little bit, just because I didn't want to talk about it, but to hear that somebody is actually trying to make a change like that makes me feel willing to, to show who I am as a person, as I may have been ashamed a few years ago to talk about it. I didn't even realize how much I grew. I don't really talk to anybody about this stuff. It's kind of the first time it's really coming out. So, I'm seeing how far I've really come from a lot of stuff. It's helping me understand that I have grown a lot. You know, I did go through a lot of stuff, and you know I realized why people say you should tell other people stuff that goes on in your life. Even if you're just talking to yourself, vocalizing it and hearing it with your own two ears, you're literally teaching yourself and learning. If I was to never talk about this, I probably would still to this day feel like I don't understand how life is working, but because I'm vocalizing it, I'm hearing it, and I'm thinking about it every week when we meet, it's just an eye-opener. It's literally showing me that I've grown. I really do thank you for giving me the opportunity to be here.

Then, Chris shared the following after reading his narrative for the first time:

I read through the document, and I loved it. I cannot lie, there were no changes that I felt needed to be made. Not even trying to look like I am being lazy about it, but I truly mean that. I think the format, and everything was perfect. I'm really telling you it was stellar. Throughout the paper, I was like, 'She's listening. It doesn't seem like she's assuming too much. She's hearing what I have to say and grasping it.' This is exactly how I wanted to tell my story.

Connections to the Literature

Chris was explicit in the ways race and gender influenced his emotional abuse experiences from coaches and bullying from peers. For example, Chris didn't believe that racism or gender played a role in the coaches' abuse - he shared that anything which was racist or "homophobic" came from his peers and not his coaches. His soccer teammates made racist slights against him and Black people and there was "insensitive racism"⁴ from his peers in the football locker room. Chris also experienced higher athletic expectations in soccer due to being Black; however, those expectations came from parents on the team as opposed to his coach – they attributed his success to the color of his skin (Ferber, 2007).

Chris' stories of his head football coach's treatment, however, may demonstrate the negative stereotypes the coach held. For example, the coach called him "incompetent" and said he "couldn't learn." Previous researchers have found that Black athletes may be only valued athletically and are otherwise perceived as being incapable (e.g., being a good student; Bimper, 2015; Hawkins, 2010; Springer, 2009). Chris was not valued as a person, and he was not valued

⁴ Chris defined "insensitive racism" as "I know you're not racist but like what you're saying, if I didn't know you, like this type of person would beat you up for that... these people are being racist towards me and just like disguising it as a joke."

as an athlete despite being a part of a small population of Black kids in his community and football team (e.g., about 20% of the kids on his team were Black) where we might otherwise expect this harmful expectation from a coach. Moreover, the lack of invalidation Chris received from both his soccer coach and football coach may have played a role in the self-invalidation he experienced as he consistently internalized what they said and even self-monitored himself and his physical abilities for most of his sport career (Foucault, 1995; Hall, 2012).

Both the expectations of him being athletically “gifted” from parents and the expectation that he would never amount to anything outside of sport from coaches were incredibly hurtful and had long-lasting impacts on him. As Chris stated, he was “tired of the criticism, tired of being different, and just wanted to go to college and move on and forget everything.”

I think it’s important to note that while Chris experienced emotional abuse and discussed the ways in which his coach held power over him and he suffered emotionally, he also talked extensively about times he resisted that power by questioning his coach and choosing to give (or not give) his all. Potrac and Jones (2011) noted some “athletes can influence coaches and the coaching environment as much as coaches are commonly understood to influence athletes” (p. 143). However, Chris’ small acts of power did not result in the change he desired or deserved; in fact, to the contrary, his coach continued to serve as a gatekeeper in terms of his playing time and future playing opportunities (Potrac & Jones, 2011). His questioning of the coach—such as the incident when he was forced to choose between continuing practice despite not feeling well or giving up playing time (he already did not have)—most certainly acted against him. Subsequently, although Chris used the power he had, the influence the coach had was significantly greater. In contrast to previous literature which suggest some athletes’ agency eventually withers away (Anderson & White, 2018), Chris did not express that feeling; he sought

other sources of support such as friends, family, and faith, and found meaning and power in those sources. In the end, Chris reminds us to not mistake “Coach” for “God.”

Xavier Grey

Xavier’s stories were certainly laden with emotion throughout the conversations we had. However, this emotion was typically not the result of illustrating the emotional abuse experiences. He did share two separate abusive incidents in which he felt harmed from two individual coaches. These included when his football coach sarcastically responded to his text and spread false rumors thereafter and when his wrestling coach didn’t give him the opportunity to wrestle-off and participate in the championship season of wrestling. These stories demonstrated moments of betrayal by his coaches. He also shared two incidents when the school administration let him down. However, he focused very minimally on those events and any negative impact they had on him. In relation to other life events, these experiences seemed “small” to Xavier, and he admittedly downplayed them. Although he didn’t understand at first why he downplayed those moments, he came to realize why throughout the conversations. In this light, he spoke with the most emotion when he talked about his family, the end of his collegiate sport career, and the negative experiences he had with teammates and non-teammates throughout his life, including a few incidents of racism. He always focused on his relentless pursuit of his goals in sport and life. Ultimately, Xavier’s story is one of making intentional decisions and taking responsibility to find the light and peace in the dark moments and to not let them define him. Xavier viewed his story as “relaxing in the midst of chaos.” That relaxation in chaos occurred in many contexts including with coaches, teammates, and family.

At every turn on his path, he has made intentional decisions that would help him in his pursuit of his goals, like when he opted to stop playing football and when he ended wrestling to

heal for pole vaulting. He also showed courage. Despite stating he didn't like conflict multiple times, he still engaged in it when he had to fight for his safety, security, and survival as a young Black man. For example, he stood up to his teammates on the bus his freshmen year of high school when they told him he should be lynched. He went in front of the schoolboard to speak out against his wrestling coach getting fired. He also confronted the captain of the track team in college for using the "N" word in a meme. He started an entire campaign on his college campus to initiate change and make campus a better and safer place for Black students. He, intentionally or not, has taken on the mediator or "glue" role countless times. Ultimately, Xavier seemed to always stand up for what he believed in - justice and peace for himself and others.

It is evident he sought to always make peace with others as he referenced multiple times throughout. He also filters out the negative from others and returns the positive. However, he also has made peace with himself. He discusses the darkness and perceived negativity he has experienced and his decision to make peace with that darkness and walk with it towards the light. He has chosen to see all the "negative" situations in life as his most influential growing moments. He will not allow situations or people's expectations of him and his feelings to define him. He is in control, and he has chosen to learn and not dwell.

When reviewing his narrative together, Xavier reminded me of the heart and foundation of this study—that it's co-created. When I drafted his narrative, I was unsure of what to title the section about his family. During our conversation about his family, he kept referring to his "mediator" role and being a "middle" person. In that moment, I shared that we call that person in my family, notably my mom, the "glue." He expressed how much he related to that word, but I still felt that in the title I should only use his words; so, I chose "The Middle Person" in his drafted account. However, when we met for analysis he stated he wanted it changed to "The

Glue.” He shared how he’d been using that phrase ever since we last talked. I then explained my thought processes in not using that phrase originally in the title of that section to which he replied, “Hey, it’s co-creation! We need to use your words.” I stood corrected and felt humbled.

Another interesting co-creation moment in our conversations occurred during our third interview after Xavier had reiterated how much he dislikes conflict. We had the following dialogue:

Lindsey: I find that so interesting because I had actually written a reflection about you in that you say numerous times, throughout our conversations, “I’m not a confrontational person, I don’t like conflict,” but then you give all these incidents where you stand up for yourself and you stand up for others. So, it’s interesting because I don’t know if that’s- I don’t want to say it’s a conflict, but what I wrote down is you’re really action-oriented; so, it’s, maybe you don’t like conflict but you’re willing to take it on if you see something better on the other side of it.

Xavier: As you said that, I confirmed that in my head. Yeah cause I was like ‘Wait, I guess that is conflict, but I do well- maybe it’s just certain types of conflict, I don’t know.

Lindsey: Yeah, conflict, right, like it doesn’t- it’s not necessarily bad, inherently bad.

Xavier: Yeah, yeah, I mean you gotta use it constructively. Maybe that was the thing.

In reflecting on the process Xavier shared:

I think that’s what’s been really hard about this like, retrospectively, I can at least look at the moving parts, but putting myself back in that time and trying to figure out what I was thinking, it’s different. I’m not the same person at all. And although I’m not able to recall everything specifically and regurgitate it, my brain is doing a lot of the work behind the scenes, like without me really knowing. I needed this talk. I want to say thank you for this

because even though I was saying I figure out a lot of things on my own, a lot of things have come full circle while trying to trace back all these memories and feelings, and kind of see the source of some of my thought processes. So, I really appreciate you taking the time to do the study because this stuff is important. And it can easily get swept under the rug or downplayed. When, in fact, it is, and it does have an impact on athletes.

During our time together, Xavier teared up multiple times, read parts of his journal to me, showed me pictures from different moments in his life, and even shared different music playlists that he created and listens to, dependent on his mood. Most notably, Xavier took many long pauses as he reflected on and thought through things while also laughing a lot and keeping things lighthearted. It was seemingly a balance of feeling his emotions, expressing them, and also not dwelling on them while he filtered out the negative.

It is important to mention that Xavier discussed general life just as much if not more than he did sport. His narrative clearly demonstrated the effect that current events, worldly or personally, have on the telling of our story. For example, each conversation we had started with at least ten minutes of discussing current political events. Additionally, despite the topic of interest being emotional abuse from coaches, he told a lot of stories of events that occurred in college, some in sport and others outside of sport. Notably, his most recent stories did not involve negative coach experiences. Although I was surprised initially, it may make sense given the abrupt and emotional ending to his college and sport careers.

Connections to the Literature

Interestingly, Xavier's mom played an arguably significant role in his experience as she tried to combat his experiences of abuse from the coaches and administration. Unlike Stirling and Kerr (2014) who found that parents did not intervene when they witnessed emotional abuse

in the elite sport context, his mom was front and center. There were many incidents that she was involved in. First, she went with him to the school board meeting after the racist incident with his teammates happened on the bus which resulted in his coach getting fired. Second, after he received the text from the football coach the summer going into junior year, she reached out to the school. When he was left out of two senior athlete recognition events, she reminded him that it was not okay. Third, when the “N” word was written on his door in college, she contacted the school to initiate a more thorough investigation process. Although Xavier noted that they had different methods and he wouldn’t have handled the situations the same way, he was appreciative of always having her support. This is also quite different than Smits et al.’s (2017) research in which elite athletes and parents made sense of the coach’s behaviors through interactions with other parents, athletes, and the coaches, eventually adopting a code of silence. Xavier and his mom made sense of the events together, never adopting a code of silence.

Additionally, Xavier never seemed to lose focus on his goals and who he was as a person. However, at times, this seemed to create a dissonance in him. For example, he once stopped in the middle of a wrestling practice to ask his partner why they were even wrestling, considering how violent it was. He clearly recognized the deviance that was allowed in sport compared to what would otherwise be prohibited and illegal in non-sport worlds (Coakley, 2017). Moreover, when he could have continued to wrestle with a broken thumb for the opportunity to go to the state meet his senior year, he kept his pole vault goals at the forefront and opted not to. This was despite his coaches ensuring that this was his last opportunity. Thus, although his coaches may have adhered to the sport ethic of being dedicated to “the game” above all else (Coakley, 2017), and likely wanted Xavier to adhere to it as well, he made the decision to adhere to his own ethics and not sacrifice his health and ultimate goal.

Xavier's story was filled with acts of racism committed against him and how he rose up during those times. However, he never related these to the emotionally abusive coach incidents. In fact, he shared, "Any racial things that happened came from teammates and other teams, nothing really came from coaches, at least nothing memorable." In contrast, he did describe the influence of gender and gendered language at his "two hours of hell" wrestling practices. He stated, "Toxic masculinity traits were thrown into that like mental toughness with wrestling. More specifically, injuries, and the go-to words that people use like 'pussy' or 'Oh, just wrestle through it' and all that stuff. That was very much there." This discourse represents the gendered discourse Adams et al. (2010) discussed that coaches use to develop "warriors." Such a discourse can be an attempt to get athletes to adhere to orthodox masculinity, take risks, engage in violence, etc. (Anderson, 2005, 2009). These are traits which certainly may make a player more valuable to a coach as an athlete specifically, but ones that Xavier himself questioned—as was demonstrated when he stopped wrestling in practice to ask his teammate why they were engaging in such violent acts.

Positionality and Methodological, Research, and Practical Implications

The current project was a beautiful and incredibly complex and challenging undertaking. Choosing a topic so close to my own sport experiences in which I was harmed, and which still clearly shape who I am and how I move about this world, made this an emotionally and intellectually challenging undertaking. Moreover, as the participants and I continuously developed deeper relationships, I never felt more of a push to ensure I was doing this work with integrity and for justice. In this light, I experienced an immense amount of growth throughout the project, both intellectually and personally. It would be a disservice to my participants, myself, and the narrative inquiry methodology if I did not explore my positionality further.

With the Participants

I was in awe with each participant and how they made sense of their experiences. Each one contributed in a different way to my understanding of my own personal sport narrative and worldview. Moreover, in each one, I wrestled with different feelings and emotions. The entire process while rewarding was also draining. On each call, I felt such a focus and “in-the-zone” feeling that I rarely thought about anything from the outside world. I was in a bubble and that bubble sustained me throughout the dissertation. As the calls grew longer and longer, though, I left each feeling energized but also drained. Typically, after a conversation, my day was shot. I quickly learned to leave miniscule and more administrative-like “mindless” work for those days, such as grading.

Whenever I met with Bruce, I was amazed by his ability to recall and communicate his story, especially after he discussed the complications he still faces from all of his concussions. Our conversations were filled with his sarcasm which admittedly made me laugh while re-listening and reading the transcriptions. I could always feel his frustration and annoyance come to the surface in those sarcastic moments. I also felt his pain. More than anything, though, I could sense the immense passion he has for making sport a better place. In the end, I was naively surprised to find that his story was eerily similar to my own story of being bullied. It was an experience of pain and trauma and being targeted by coaches, the very people who are supposed to protect us in the spaces that are supposed to be “safe” and a “stress relief.” Both of us recognized and discussed how we normalized and repressed those memories for years to protect ourselves before finally letting them re-emerge in graduate school in sport psychology. Thus, I suppose I should not be surprised that this topic never came up or was broached before. Now, we are both working to protect others, so they don’t have to experience something similar. In fact,

all four of us are either working towards or have completed a master's degree in sport psychology. I wonder, what leads sport psychology students to obtain a graduate level degree in the field? How does this influence how we view our sport narrative, including the emotional abuse we experienced?

I also related to Chris and his experience on many levels. At one point, while reading our conversation I commented, "I felt this in the moment and still feel this hard." That was in response to his statement, "I was tired of the criticism. I was tired of being different. I just kind of wanted to go to college and just move on and forget everything that I had, and that I had lived here." I, too, wanted to get out and far away. We both went to schools out-of-state, and I think that helped both of us and our reconciliation with everything.

I greatly admired how his steadfast faith was central to understanding each and every experience and helped him to see the larger picture. He was able to look beyond the abuse and forgive his coach. I left each conversation feeling like I had a new perspective on life and my own experiences. In fact, our conversations still have me reflecting on how I use my faith to make sense of everything in the world. Chris pushed me to forgive my coaches and centralize a faith-based perspective on my experiences.

I believe Chris embraced humility and forgiveness as he reconciled with his past. Alongside every story of the exact events that took place, he was building a larger narrative of the lessons he learned and how they have shaped who he is today. Such lessons were focused on placing himself in the shoes of his abusers and recognizing that he, too, is a villain in someone's story. As he seeks forgiveness, he attempts to forgive. He doesn't want anyone to pray ill intent on them. Instead, he prays his abusers have learned and grown. Chris reminded me that we cannot "excuse their behavior, but you have to be more understanding." Thus, I would like to

further understand the role religion has in helping one to process and make sense of the emotional abuse and forgiving the abuser. All three participants alluded to a belief in the meaning of suffering—enduring pain for a greater purpose beyond oneself. For Chris, his Christianity and belief in God seemingly played a critical role in his immediate processing of the events and being able to keep at the forefront a larger meaning and purpose.

Xavier had me holding back tears by our third interview when he asked to read me parts of his journal. He disproved all my notions that men may not be open, introspective, or shed light on their emotions. Beyond relating to him when he described himself as an “empath,” I connected most to him as he described how he downplays the things that have occurred to him in sport. I, too, downplay those moments with coaches. He reminded me how those incidents with coaches can actually be quite miniscule compared to other life events. Although that does not make it okay, it is a reminder of how much our larger life story influences our perceptions of these events.

Xavier debated if he should even participate in the research because the events felt “small” compared to everything else. For example, he had a lot of family struggles throughout life, he had multiple abrupt endings to sport, and he was bullied by teammates more than coaches. Those things all left a greater impact on him compared to the emotional abuse. Similarly, for me, when I tell people about events from my childhood, I rarely share what my coaches did to me. The bullying from peers that I experienced in school and in sport always take the forefront.

With the Methodology

Reflecting on my use of narrative inquiry, I feel quite biased with how much I now love the qualitative research methodology which also serves as the phenomena (Clandinin, 2013).

Doing three separate interviews with each participant led to such great depths in our relationship that I certainly did not and could not have reached in a single interview. It was the third interview in which they shared the most intimate details of their experiences and lives. The relationships we were able to develop, and the continuing working relationship was unmatched. At one point, I wrote in my journal, “How could we ever do just one single interview?!” I am incredibly grateful that I chose narrative inquiry.

However, that does not mean that this methodology did not come without its troubles. I am trained in qualitative research methodologies and my entire research experience until this point has been engaging in a data analysis process centered on coding and finding central themes (Braun & Clark, 2006, 2019). Thus, despite explicitly stating I would come to each experience and narrative as its own, I inevitably started to make connections across participants. In fact, I even started a separate document titled “data analysis connections.” I then made a bulleted list of “similar things” where I wrote a topic and then noted which of the three participants experienced that thing. I also added anything where Dr. Fisher commented that I could connect literature or where we discussed potential future research/directions (see Appendix H for these notes). A few examples include, (a) both Bruce and Chris made connections to the influence media had on their sense-making of the events in their sport experiences; (b) All three of them described their personalities as “quiet,” “shy,” and/or “emotional;” (c) They each discussed their social relationships/life either not being present or they described themselves as being a “floater;” (d) Each experienced divorce and/or were raised in single-parent homes. Across these similar themes, I immediately started to think of literature I could connect with/to. I thought, “Surely, I need to discuss each of these since they were present in each story.”

Quite frankly, originally, I believed that if I didn't call them themes and just acknowledged them as similarities, then it aligned with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry. However, as I started to write these similarities in more depth, I realized how wrong this approach was. I was suddenly decontextualizing everything that they told me, and I could no longer relate the topics if I wanted to keep their individual context and experience.

Therefore, I reviewed the literature on narrative inquiry which confirmed exactly what I thought I was doing; I was decontextualizing and making distant particulars (Duran, 1993). I was focusing more on grand themes and theories than I was on their personal stories. In a frenzy, I emailed Dr. Anders to meet and discuss if my thoughts were accurate. After our meeting and a class with her students on that very topic that same night, she reminded me the next day:

Last night in Narrative Inquiry we talked about all the things you and I talked about Tuesday. Some had trouble just letting go of thematic ideas in their heads. Their peers helped remind them that if they really believed that narratives were knowledge then there wasn't a need to generate another form of knowledge (in themes). Of course, the option is always there for another iteration of the work.

Intellectually, this was hard for me to let go, but mentally and emotionally, I knew she was right. I also knew this was the only way to do any justice to the participants' stories. My thoughts and analysis do not and should not be front and center. One, they experienced it and have been processing it for years. Two, they sat with me for over six hours in conversations to discuss and continue reflecting on it. Three, in their own time, they read through their interim and final drafted narratives and made revisions. In the end, I realized, "Who am I to ask them to do all this work just for me to override their analysis with mine?" It felt wrong and with this conclusion, I understood the importance of not thematizing their stories.

With the Research Process

Throughout the process, as I continued to engage in each conversation, I felt more and more of an uneasy feeling. I started to fear, “Am I doing more harm than good?” In fact, that quote itself is in my researcher’s journal a number of times. I expected those emotionally abusive experiences to play a much larger negative role in their lives. My focus on the negative impact certainly served to bias my reactions and questions. In fact, it was partway through listening to Chris’s second conversation when I felt a complete turn in the mood and tone of our conversation. I felt him “sink” in a sense. He shared that he didn’t like dwelling, and, yet there we were as I continually pressed him with questions to talk more about the abuse. After listening to that conversation, I felt the weight of the potential that I was doing more harm than good. I started questioning if I was re-victimizing participants and just reminding them of the trauma they experienced. To some extent, each participant discussed how they did not like to “dwell” on their experiences and/or they shared how they had already moved on and were now ensuring to do better for others in their lives. The climax of these thoughts and feelings, and what started to shed light on my very evident deficit-views (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), were a couple of simultaneous things.

First, Xavier shared the immense implications of others’ thoughts and comments on how much they perceived the “N” word being written on his door affected him. He was not affected by the incident to the extent others believed he should or would be. Although he admitted the situation was not good, he did what he needed to do for himself. He took a picture of it, submitted a bias incident report, and continued on with his life, even performing well the next day in his track and field meet. After word spread of the situation, however, people started to tell him they were “so sorry” it happened, wrestling with “how horrible this world is.” He started to

“adopt” those feelings. And the more people asked him and told him how much it must have affected him, the more it actually did. Admittedly, he was unsure of what he needed in those moments; but, looking back, he felt he just needed to process it on his own first. Then, how others thought he should feel wouldn’t be “fed” to him. At this point in the interview, my mind was going a mile a minute. I thought, “Was I perpetuating these same notions in regard to the effects of coaches’ emotional abuse?”

Second, Chris mentioned a number of times how he made an active choice to participate in the study, as did Xavier and Bruce. In some sense, I felt completely ignorant that I would ever question if they would actually open up to me during our conversations. I realized that I certainly approached them with a deficit view. My own stereotypes—that men are less emotional and less willing to engage in deep conversations regarding difficult times—were evident. In all honesty, in coming to this realization, I felt shameful. I was not acknowledging their personal choice and agency. They each chose to participate in the study and each one of them was incredibly open, honest, and reflexive. All of them debunked my thought that it would take time for us to build a relationship where they felt comfortable enough to talk about their experiences. Chris started on the first conversation with the depths of the emotional abuse, and Xavier cried in the first few minutes of our first conversation. The current project, more specifically these experiences with the participants, reminded me of the beauty in human connection and listening to and trying to understand someone’s story. This was never truer for me during a world-wide pandemic when we were quarantined, and I had less of an ability to engage in social relationships for over a year.

It was through my third conversation with each participant that I reconciled my fear that I was harming them further. Towards the end—especially as each person, unprovoked, thanked me for the space to vocalize and understand their experience and growth—I came to realize that I

was likely not doing further harm. Although I expected those emotionally abusive experiences to play a much larger negative role in participants' lives, that simply was not the case. More important to each of them was how they grew, who they are now in spite of it, and how they are already doing better for others and will continue to do so. Although the lack of emphasis of the negative impact could speak to how the participants have normalized violence in sport and other spaces, I still believe it's important to come to each person without expectations and instead ask if/how the experience affected them. Then, believe them. At least for narrative inquiry, they are making sense of and producing knowledge in those conversations (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Looking back, I have always believed, but not always lived, that we should come to relationships and conversations with people unexpectantly. Admittedly, I thought I was good at that. I even claimed that my theoretical framework of Dewey's theory of experience and feminism would allow/force me to avoid doing so (see Chapter 3). Clearly, that was not the case and was not an easy task for me. It was a lesson I had to quickly learn not just for my own current and future research but more generally for my life. I am sure I will continue to learn this lesson again and again throughout my life.

Lastly, after reading the narratives of Bruce, Chris, and Xavier and reflecting on my own story, I am left wondering why we do not vocalize and share these experiences until somebody explicitly asks us to. How can we work together to start more conversations and ignite a change in sport? With this question in mind, I would like to do participatory action research (PAR; Lawson et al., 2015) with multiple others in the sport system, including athletes who were emotionally abused as well as coaches, administrators, and parents. Doing PAR calls for the involvement of participants from the beginning, including the creation of the research project. As

I discovered throughout this research, it's important to follow the participants where they want to go, especially if I am to avoid coming expectantly to research and participants. Thus, I would like to do a project that would bring together multiple individuals in the system to discuss a single phenomenon, emotional abuse or coach mistreatment, and start the research with what they believe the most important problem needing to be solved is. Then, we can develop the research questions, collect and analyze data together, and work towards creating a solution (Lawson et al., 2015). Doing a project like this would help ensure the applicability of the results—and subsequent changes that need to be made—as those actually in the sport system would be guiding the project from start to finish.

Moreover, considering how all three participants and myself were four or more years removed from our high school experiences of being emotionally abused, I began to consider the implications of talking with individuals about less retrospective incidents. For example, hearing from survivors who are a year or less removed from their experience would likely yield significantly different results on how they understand their experience. All four of us had repressed, resurfaced, processed, and had already begun reflecting before our conversations began. The conversations seemed to serve as an acceleration to the reflection part; however, I am leery of the implications of interviewing someone soon after the event happened. To some extent, it could help them process; however, I also wonder if we “dwell” on the negative consequences too soon after the event, if that would then “feed” them how they are supposed to feel and bias the impact the event had on them, as was the case for Xavier. On the other hand, I also could see how this would help them to process and move on much quicker than the participants and I did. Could providing this space sooner serve as a much-needed validation?

Moreover, Xavier shared how much he has changed since the events happened making it more difficult to recall his thoughts and feelings from that time.

Also, all three participants and I were abused by multiple coaches, with the first incident occurring before high school. Although revictimization has been studied outside of sport (e.g., Jaffe et al., 2019), I am left wondering if there is a process specific to sport that occurs from the first incident of coach abuse to any subsequent incidents. Understanding this may give greater insights into the overall process of emotional abuse in sport starting from a young age.

Practical Implications

Based on the evident abusive coaching practices (e.g., yelling at athletes for a single mistake, not explaining purpose or reasoning behind decisions, ignoring them, etc.), I would be interested in creating programming/coach's education to ensure optimal coaching practices. Based on Bruce, Chris, and Xavier's experiences, I think an interesting approach may be to focus on making coaches more effective through motor learning and skill acquisition concepts, such as when and how to give instruction and feedback (Magill & Anderson, 2021). Another example may include teaching coaches how much failure is appropriate for learning. Although this does not directly tell coaches, "Don't abuse athletes," or "Don't deny attention and support," they may implicitly learn through concepts being taught on how to coach effectively.

Interestingly, we see emotional abuse accepted (and sometimes expected) in sport more than other adult-child settings such as school, daycare, etc. However, in school and daycare, we also see more educational requirements. For example, K-12 teachers typically need a bachelor's degree as well as a state license; daycare owners also must be state licensed. Why do we not require this of our high school coaches (Gould, 2013)? An additional coach education program which includes a similar course with segments on effective communication, leadership skills, and

avoiding abusive practices more generally could be created and then evaluated for its effectiveness.

Additionally, utilizing the narratives shared in the current project via workshops with sport stakeholders (e.g., parents, athletes, administrators, mental performance consultants, etc.) could be beneficial. One method of educational delivery which has recently surfaced in the literature is through the use of narrative pedagogy (McMahon & Smith, 2016); through the development of workshops, coaches can hear athletes' experiences and dilemmas and feel their emotions (Douglas & Carless, 2008). This interaction with real-life stories and emotions increases the opportunity for learning and action potential in comparison to traditional, more rigid curriculums; further, this process can initiate self-discovery, increase coaches' consciousness to their current practices (McMahon & Smith, 2016), and create new understandings about an issue (e.g., emotional abuse; McMahon et al., 2018). Ultimately, a goal of using narrative pedagogy is to disrupt the dominant sociocultural narratives (i.e., disrupting the notion that abusive coaching practices are standard and needed for athletic success; Goodson & Gill, 2011). These workshops could also highlight important implications for parents of athletes who are being emotionally abused. However, they must consider all options and consequences of each option; for example, in Bruce's case, the harm of being removed from his team was worse for him than remaining in the abusive environment.

Based on the participants' multiple resources that could be used to make sense of their experiences, an interdisciplinary team approach (Clement & Arvinen-Barrow, 2013) may be best to both serve abused high school athletes. For example, motor control practitioners would be beneficial for working with coaches and teaching effective coaching practices (Magill & Anderson, 2021). Mental performance consultants could help mediate the coach-athlete

relationship and improve communication skills as well as help athletes cope and still perform if desired (Jowett, 2005; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). Sport chaplains could be beneficial for athletes' making sense of and understanding their experiences while also keeping a larger purpose and their worth at the forefront (Waller et al., 2016). Moreover, the role of school officers should be considered; in the case of Bruce who suffered a concussion from another player slamming him on the ground or his teammate who was choked out, physical harm was being done.

Considering all of the participants in the current study were abused in a US public high school sport setting, those involved in the school system also need to be more involved in protecting students who are also athletes. If kids are not safe on the sport field provided by their school, are they safe in the school where the coaches are often teachers, and their teammates are peers? At the conclusion of each narrative, I am left wondering, *where was the school counselor, principal, etc.?* Unfortunately, in the current study, it appears that ADs typically cared more about winning than well-being; so, where were the other adults in the school system? I call to action parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and school boards and ask for setting guidelines such as requiring a certain amount of education for coaches. This is because additional oversight beyond the athletics department should also be considered.

Conclusions

In conclusion, three total participants engaged in a series of in-depth conversations and analysis as they shared their stories and co-created a narrative account of sport emotional abuse. Each participant spoke of their experiences with emotion, hurt, hope, and dreams for a better future for themselves and others related to this issue. The harm that was inflicted could be heard in their tone of voice, the tears they displayed, and, ultimately, also in their complete devotion

and engagement with this project. Their stories intertwined with my own experience of emotional abuse and highlight the need for a change in sport, particularly at the high school level. Although each of us was only one athlete abused on a team of multiple others, all those in sport deserve to be protected and not harmed by adults. This is even more concerning, given that sport is mixed in with the public education systems that our children are being raised in.

While none of us would trade our experiences despite the abuse – and, ultimately, sport played a critical role in who we are - we will always be making sense of and producing knowledge about our emotional abuse experiences in sport. I am forever grateful to Bruce, Chris, and Xavier for helping me to better understand their experiences as well as my own in a different light. We have worked hard to get to the point of redemption. Now it is time to make a change in high school sport and protect our athletes.

For example, no one should have to experience the immense amount of degradation and devaluation of their humanity that we four experienced in a setting that is supposed to be “safe” and a “stress relief.” However, if they do, there should be safeguards in place to protect them. A school system has guidance counselors, teachers, and multiple other adults who are supposed to be helping students grow, develop, and ultimately succeed. If they are not helping the kids who are also in their athletics programs, then are they doing their job to the fullest? We cannot simply choose to not protect athletes.

While each of our narratives end with redemption, taking back control on how our coach and sport affected us, we still deserved to be protected and advocated for. Throughout our time, Bruce, Chris, and Xavier choose to highlight the positives in contrast to the negatives. Now, they are trying to do better for those in the present day and the future. So am I.

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Appendix A: Extended Autobiographic Account

I was 12 years old when the bullying began. It was the summer going into seventh grade. I was sitting on the gray office chair in our white-walled computer room, staring at the desktop. I logged into my social media account, like any other middle schooler would do, and scrolled through the latest posts from my friends. When a message popped up from one of my best friends, I excitedly opened it in hopes she would want to hang out. I was never good at entertaining myself and always wanted to be with others. As I opened the message, however, instead of the joy I anticipated, my heart raced anxiously. I was greeted with a picture I did not understand but looked scary, nonetheless.

Two girls who I considered to be my best friends drew a picture of themselves attacking me in my own front yard. While I maybe should've broken out into tears, been sad, upset, or mad, I sat in my chair just staring at the computer with no emotion other than a racing heart—my first moment of numbness. I was confused, and I was anxious. Those two were always known as the funny ones, the class clowns. *Maybe this is supposed to be a joke.* Although, deep down, I knew something wasn't right. I yelled for my mom. She walked in with a smile on her face, happy as she always was, but as she looked at the computer, she couldn't hide her emotions. Her jaw dropped. She was visibly upset and while she stared at the picture with me, it stared at us right back. My mom looked at me with sadness in her eyes and said, "Lindsey, we need to print this."

It was in that moment I knew the picture was serious, and I started to cry. I had no idea that this incident would lead me down the journey I was about to embark on: the journey of being what felt like a never-ending victim—in school, at work, online, and what hurt the most, in

sport. For the next six years, I certainly did not thrive, but I fought with every last bit I had to survive.

To say I was excited for high school would be an understatement. I was finally able to leave the space that I experienced so much pain in, and I could start over. I believed the slut-shaming, food-throwing, rumor-spreading attacks against me would end. My smile stretched from ear to ear as I picked out classes and daydreamed of trying out for the high school dance and soccer teams. I thought high school and more specifically, sport, would be my safe haven—my time to escape from the bullying caused by my peers. I thought sport could be a place to let out my emotions and rid myself of the anger filled within me. I loved the aggressiveness of competition and I was excited by my constant growth in strength and skill. More importantly to me, however, I expected high school sport to be fun, a way to socialize and gain friends as most youth do. The bullying followed me to high school, though. I managed to forget that the same people who were in middle school with me, would also attend the only high school in our town. It was not just my classmates now that could target me, but the upperclassmen as well. And the very people in my small high school that relentlessly disrespected me and put me down were now my teammates that continued to display that same hatred but in a new environment. Thus, sport was not a safe haven, but instead a space I felt unsafe yet continued to return too. And, when I turned to the coaches for help, I was laughed in the face and let down as they joined in on the bullying. The coaches who were the authority, the leaders, and the role models used their power to further defeat me and emotionally abuse me. I was crushed and felt helpless. I was being told I was not good enough and at times, I felt the world and the people around me would be better and happier without me.

I reflect on those sport experiences in which I was emotionally abused by the coaches in both soccer and dance frequently. Between my peers and coaches, in school and sport, I was miserable. My high school experience was fraught with many nights of crying myself to sleep, waking up from night terrors, a lot of therapy, some suicide ideation, a new stress-induced diagnosis of IBS, and a whole lot of suppression of my emotions, feelings, and memories (my survival technique). I only revisited my trauma because I was blessed enough to have someone so genuinely take interest and ask me.

I can still vividly remember the cool fall day sitting in Peet's coffee with my mentor, Dr. Tanya Prewitt-White, when she asked me to share my story. Our purpose for meeting that day was certainly not to explore my narrative. Our agenda included developing lesson plans for the week for the courses we co-taught. However, through our initial "hello" and "how are you," the conversation transpired. Tanya had decided to ask me what I was passionate about. Per usual I responded that I was passionate about being an anti-bullying advocate. Tanya quickly responded with curiosity asking, "why?" I quietly responded as I put my head down, "Well, I was bullied." Again, Tanya showed interest and asked me if I would be willing to share my story with her if I felt comfortable. I was taken aback and immediately became anxious. *No one has ever asked me this*, I thought, *how do I respond?*

Usually when I tell someone I was bullied they say, "I'm sorry" and then quickly change the subject. I have learned people have opinions about bullying such as "it's not real" and "kids are way too sensitive these days." Both of which I have heard countless times. Moreover, in most conversations regarding bullying, I hear people blaming the victim and asking what they did to cause the bullying. It is through these very ideologies that I have learned bullying is not to be discussed if I don't want to be re-traumatized and harmed. Bullying is, in fact, a taboo topic.

Tanya and I spent the next two hours sitting in the coffee shop as she listened to me share my story, continually asking me questions pertinent to my experience and at times, sharing her own. She asked questions in a way that was extremely genuine and particular to me, which made me want to continue to share more with her. I felt anxious, excited, sad, and relieved. It was exactly what I did not know I even needed. Until this point, I felt so ashamed and hurt by my experiences that I buried them so far into my subconscious that to this day, I still cannot remember everything. I wince anytime my mom shares an experience of mine that my mind cannot remember. My body though, my body certainly remembers this trauma and is sure to let me know through my irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) episodes (which started around the time the bullying escalated).

Although I could not remember everything, I shared some of my narratives that played a significant role in my life story because someone took interest in them, invited me to share without judgement, and then so caringly valued them. That long and intimate conversation turned a new page in my life book. I started to seek out information and answers about my experiences. I attempted to unveil my suppressed traumatic experiences and am still working towards this emotionally taxing uncovering, today. However, that one conversation and subsequent new page lead me to more conversations regarding my own experiences, the bullying and emotionally abusive world in which we live, in and out of sport, and this research. I remain immensely grateful for and forever indebted to Tanya for giving me her time and energy that day and every day since to sit with me in my pain. However, although, I started to revisit my trauma in 2016 after my conversation with Tanya, I continued to resist the severity of it.

In fact, until a few short months ago I would not even refer to my experience with coaches as emotional abuse. To me, that was too intense of a word. It was simply bullying, just

as harmful but not any worse, than what my peers did. I even went as far as to spend a significant amount of time within my thesis and subsequent manuscripts defending that coaches could bully and it's not always emotional abuse. That belief is false, and I am still working through it. Adults are supposed to protect children, not harm them. They have so much power and can abuse it with minimal, if any, intervention, especially when the abuse doesn't leave any physical markings.

I recognize my distrust for and resistance to authority today is likely directly tied to these experiences. Not only was I harmed by the coaches involved, but I was dismissed by other authority figures who were supposed to be protecting me, or at least, I thought that was their job as adults in the school system. I did not go to administration just once; I went multiple times to multiple people throughout my four years in high school including to the counselor, principal, other teachers and office aids. Some of them even witnessed the behavior and opted out of intervention. "Kids will be kids." "They are always just joking around, don't be so sensitive." My parents also went to the administration multiple times including a few meetings with the superintendent. Through all of the talking and attempts of explaining just how bad it was, they simply did not care. The exception being one teacher, Mr. Hospodarsky, who I broke down in front of after my first ever experience of cyberbullying. He cared and still does. He is the only adult from my entire high school experience that I still have a relationship with, a rarity for a small, rural town in Iowa.

My coaches emotionally abused me. I know this now. They robbed me of my sport experience, inhibited my sport development, and let me down. Though these experiences now fuel my fire in life and academia, that does not mean they were necessary for my success. I am coming to this research with the belief that coaches should be protectors of children, not abusers. I experienced an abuse that was invisible to the human eye, though, the invisible psychological

damage was real. Coaches have the ability to positively influence an athletes' life, and in my belief, that is more important than using psychologically damaging instructional techniques in hopes of winning.

Let me be clear in that there is a reason I have never taken up coaching. Coaching well is a difficult job with little training especially at the youth levels. Coaching at this level is also typically a secondary, part-time job with minimal resources and parents of athletes who make unrealistic demands of their coaches. Yet, I still believe sport administration and coaches can and need to do better, and I want to help them find solutions. Though, I believe we cannot find solutions if we do not actually know what is happening which is why I want to start with the athletes' experiences.

Lastly, a part of me also continues this work to find answers for parents. I did not suffer alone. My mom cried with me and sought out confidants to help both me and her. My dad, unbeknownst to me at the time, went many nights not being able to sleep due to his mind racing as he worried endlessly about me wondering if his daughter would take her own life, and feeling completely helpless. My parents handled the situation the best they could with what they knew, and I wouldn't have changed any of their actions or involvement. It is because of them that I am still alive today. My mom still asks me, though, what she could have done differently. Despite our own experiences and my multiple research projects since, I still do not have an answer for her. I feel sad for the parents who have to go through this with their kids. Someday, I hope to have better answers for them as well as for athletes, administration, and coaches. Just because one cannot physically see abuse, does not mean it is any less real nor damaging. We must work to end this violence, and I believe it starts by hearing about experiences from those at the frontlines of the abuse.

Addition 4/20/21: Personal Growth Through the Dissertation

It would be remiss not to mention the personal growth I experienced throughout the dissertation process. Growing up I was raised Catholic. I certainly was a cultural Catholic as I adhered to the traditions and practices and believed Jesus Christ was the son of the God. However, I never knew Jesus personally, had not read from the Bible, and eventually when I moved to college, I also moved away from Christianity. Eventually, I transitioned to identify as agnostic. I believed in a higher power, but I was not sure what that higher power was. I actually thought calling the higher power, “God,” was colonization and racist at its core since so many other religions are present and oppressed in America. Who was I to say that my “God” was the correct version?

Despite not adhering to a traditional religion, I certainly had one. I put my faith solely in social justice movements. Being racist was the ultimate sin and there was no atonement for that. I would work the rest of my life to ameliorate these sins. I was incredibly motivated to uproot systems of injustice, was quite cynical, and allowed little room for gratitude or peace for anything that came before me. Given the COVID-19 pandemic and the injustices of individuals like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, etc. I was especially high on emotions and distressed when I began this process. These injustices are, no doubt, still omnipresent, absolutely horrific, and need to be fought. However, since I proposed this project, I have turned towards my faith (Christianity), coming to know Jesus in a very personal way, and that is where I put my faith.

This turn towards Christianity and hearing the participants’ unrelenting belief in the meaning behind suffering and living for a larger purpose, softened my view on the world. This is especially true in regard to Chris who used his faith to understand his experience at every point. He used faith to forgive and embraced humility. In fact, he summarized his story as a story

about, “perseverance,” a very biblical concept. James 1:2-3 reads, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”

Let me be clear in that I am still very motivated to seek justice in our society. We are all facing injustices to some extent and should work towards personal responsibility to solve those injustices. I certainly see the ways that I perpetuate harmful notions, and I am simultaneously learning and working towards how to do better. Regardless, we must listen to individuals and their personal experiences. If someone says their experience did not have to do with racism, sexism, etc. then we must believe them, full stop.

These recent ideological shifts led me to be nervous to review my comprehensive exams and proposal document. I made very direct and harsh statements. In one small example, I only illustrated and believed in a single origin of sport. I wrote that it only rose out of a need to socialize boys into men and subsequently, all sport is patriarchal and racist and has little benefit. In fact, I very clearly remember engaging in a debate with a friend at the time that I wrote that statement about whether the positives of sport outweigh the negatives. After reading Anderson and White (2018) and the lack of trans inclusion in sport that was being highlighted in the media at the time, my argument was that the bad more than outweighs the good. In fact, I started to believe rarely any good could come from sport. I have progressed in my thoughts. Even in my own life I believe the good sport brought me outweighs the bad. I am thankful for the good sport can and does bring a majority of individuals, whether they watch, work, or play in it. However, I also recognize the harm it brings and the notions of racism and patriarchy that are built within it.

Appendix B: Recruitment Email to Participants

Hi _____.

I hope you are healthy and well!

My name is Lindsey Miossi and I am a PhD candidate at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. I am reaching out to you today to invite you to participate in my dissertation study that myself and my advisor (Dr. Leslee A. Fisher) are conducting.

In brief, we are interested in understanding male athletes' experiences of emotional abuse from coaches in sport. More specifically, we would like to hear your stories from sport and compose a narrative account.

We are recruiting individuals who meet the following criteria:

- Male at least 18 years of age
- Previously emotionally abused by a coach
- Emotional abuse must have occurred between the ages of 14-18
- Emotional abuse must have occurred in a non-elite sport (e.g., high school or travel team)

If you meet the above criteria, I would like to join you in conversations about your general experiences in sport, the emotional abuse you experienced, and anything else you would like to discuss.

If you are willing to share, you will be asked to participate in 3-4 conversations/interviews via Zoom. The goal of these is to be more like informal conversations rather than interviews. These would be confidential, audio-taped, and last approximately 30-120 minutes. After the interviews are complete, I would like to have 2 more meetings with you to form a more formalized written narrative of your experience. In total, I am asking for at least 5 meetings between 30-120 minutes over the next 3 months.

Your identity and our conversations will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for research purposes. We will work together to compose the final narrative, and therefore, all findings and anything that is published will be approved by you.

If you would be open and willing to be a part of my study, or if you have any questions, please let me know.

Thank you!

Lindsey
PhD Candidate, Sport Psychology and Motor Behavior
Department of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport Studies
University of Tennessee
lmiossi@utk.edu
319-480-6275

Appendix C: IRB-Approved Informed Consent

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: A Narrative Inquiry Exploring Male Athletes' Emotional Abuse Experiences

Researcher(s): Lindsey Miozzi, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Leslee Fisher, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this research study because you have been identified as someone who is a male who was previously emotionally abused by a coach in a non-elite sport between the ages of 14-18 years. Non-elite sport includes a high school sport team or travel team.

Inclusion criteria includes:

- At least 18 years of age
- Previously emotionally abused by a coach
- Must have occurred between the ages of 14-18
- Must have occurred in a non-elite sport (e.g., high school or travel team)
- Male-identifying

What is this research study about?

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of previous non-elite male athletes who were emotionally abused by their coach. More specifically, we would like to listen your stories about your sport experiences, the emotional abuse, the role of your social identities, and the impact of the emotional abuse both in and out of sport.

The goal is to have informal conversations together instead of formal interviews.

Your engagement in this research may help us to further understand the issue of emotional abuse in sport and will hopefully help us to create safer sport spaces.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will include completing a demographic questionnaire and participating in at least 3 interviews and 2 analysis meetings (e.g., co-create your narrative account). A 4th interview may be needed. This will be determined if the 3rd interview lasts the full 120 minutes, if further clarification is needed, or if you request an additional interview to further share/discuss your experience. These will occur via Zoom over a 3-month period. Each meeting will last approximately 30-120 minutes.

What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?

If you agree to be in this study, you will complete the demographic questionnaire and then we will ask you to participate in a minimum of 3 (potentially 4), 30-120-minute interviews. The

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interviews will occur over Zoom at a date and time that is most convenient for you. The interview will be audio-recorded on a laptop, but it will only be used for accuracy and transcription purposes.

After the interviews are completed, you will participate in 2 follow-up meetings to co-create your narrative account. These will also last approximately 30-120 minutes and will occur over Zoom at a date and time that is most convenient for you.

What happens if I say “No, I do not want to be in this research study”?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision won't affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee.

What happens if I say “Yes” but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time.

If you decide to stop before the study is completed, you can contact either of the researchers to withdrawal. We will immediately destroy any data that has been collected (i.e. audio-recording and/or transcript). If you contact us after we have de-identified you and removed your name from the data, we will not be able to withdrawal and destroy the data.

Are there any possible risks to me?

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

Due to the sensitive nature of the interview subject, you may recall negative experiences from the past that may cause discomfort and stress. If you become uncomfortable during the interview, you are free to decline to answer any question or to stop the interview at any time.

If you experience any discomfort or stress and would like emotional support, you can call the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) (1-800-273-8255) or text the [Crisis Text Line](#) (text HOME to 741741).

Additionally, you may find the following self-care strategies useful:

- ⇒ Meditation and mindfulness (check out smartphone apps like Insight Timer, Headspace, Calm)
- ⇒ Deep breathing (inhale for 4, exhale for 4), repeat for a few minutes
- ⇒ Exercise, yoga, stretching
- ⇒ Go for a walk
- ⇒ Gratitude journal
- ⇒ Call a family member, friend, etc.
- ⇒ Listen to music, a podcast, or watch a movie
- ⇒ Self-focused activities: Coloring, reading, crosswords, cooking, etc.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

We do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. Your participation may help us to learn more about how to create safer sport spaces for current and future athletes who suffer from abusive coaching. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by having you choose a pseudonym (e.g., a fake name). All electronic data will be saved on an encrypted and password protected UTK Google Drive account with your pseudonym so it cannot be identified by anyone.

If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will not keep your information to use for future research or other purposes. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from your research data collected as part of the study.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers, Lindsey Miossi, lmiossi@vols.utk.edu, 865-588-1858 or Leslee Fisher, lfisher2@utk.edu, 865-974-9973.

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
1534 White Avenue
Blount Hall, Room 408
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
Phone: 865-974-7697
Email: utkirb@utk.edu

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STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Adult Participant	Signature of Adult Participant	Date

_____	_____	_____
Name of Research Team Member	Signature of Research Team Member	Date

Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire

What pseudonym (i.e., name) would you like to use to protect your identity?

What is your age?

If you self-identify with a gender, please describe that gender(s).

If you self-identify racially, please describe that identity.

If you self-identify with an ethnicity, please describe that identity.

If you self-identify with a sexuality, please describe that orientation/identity.

If you self-identify with a socioeconomic status, please describe that socioeconomic status.

What region of the United States did you live and play sport in?

Is there anything else you think I should know about your background?

Please list all the teams you can remember playing on with type of sport, year, level, and your coaches' identities. Below is an example. Fill out as many tables as needed and feel free to add/delete rows. There should be one table per sport. If you cannot remember all of the details that is perfectly okay.

Appendix E: Conversation Guide

Conversation Phase 1: General Sport Experiences (scene)

1. Review informed consent, gain consent.
2. Do you have anything you would like to discuss from your demographic questionnaire you completed?
3. This project is focused on emotional abuse experiences in sport; however, I want to acknowledge the current social justice movements that are occurring right now in and out of sport. I recognize these may be contributing to your current experiences, views, etc. both in and out of sport. So, I would like to take a moment just to check-in with you. Is there anything you would like to discuss in regard to the current situations in sport or how you are doing more broadly?
4. Tell me about your experiences in sport growing up.
 - a. What sports did you play? For how long? At what level? With who?
 - b. Who was involved in your sport experiences (e.g., family, coaches, friends)?
 - c. Have you always played on single sex teams? What was your experience like on these teams?
 - d. What was the racial makeup of the teams you played on? What was your experience like on these teams?
 - e. What are the things that stand out to you most when you think about your time playing sports?

Conversation Phase 2: Specific Emotional Abuse Experience

Culture/environment/general team information:

1. Please describe the culture of the team you were emotionally abused on.

- a. What about the larger sport system you played within (high school or otherwise)?
2. Describe a typical day in practice you remember from the team you played on that you experienced emotional abuse.
3. Describe a typical competition/game day from the time you experienced emotional abuse.
4. Describe typical language or dynamics between the coach(es) who targeted/abused you and other players.

Context of the environment:

5. Could you discuss the influence, if any, gender had on your experiences of being emotionally abused?
 - a. Describe a time something stood out to you regarding gender, sexism, and/or homophobia on your team.
6. Could you talk about the racial makeup of your team you were abused on?
 - a. Please discuss the influence, if any, race had on your experiences of being emotionally abused?
 - b. Describe a time something stood out to you regarding race/racism and/or ethnicity on your team.

Relationships including emotionally abusive coach:

7. What relationships stand out most to you from your time of being emotionally abused?
8. Please describe your dynamic/interactions with your coach who was emotionally abusive.
 - a. In sport? Out of sport? Length of time on the team?
9. Could you please share your experiences of being emotionally abused by that coach?
 - a. Tell me about one of the most vivid experiences you remember, if you don't mind.

- b. Describe some of the actions, words, etc., from your coach that were directed at you.

Present/Future Influences

10. When you think about your experiences, how do they inform the ways you think about sport now?

- a. About playing?
- b. About coaching?

11. When you think about your experiences, how have they, if at all, influenced your life outside of sport?

- a. At the time of the emotional abuse?
- b. Now?
- c. Future?

12. Is there anything else you feel is important that you would like to share or talk about that we haven't discussed yet?

Conversation 3: Follow-Up Questions

Prior to phase 3 and 4, I will transcribe the first two conversations. These phases will serve the purpose of asking questions directly related to the participant and their experience for further inquiry, clarification, and/or for discussing connections and developing/summarizing their narratives.

Appendix F: Phase III Questions

General (All Interviews)

- Check in... how are you doing throughout this process?
 - What's it been like for you during these last few weeks to reflect on your experiences?
- How do you define emotional abuse?
- When was your starting point of thinking about these experiences and defining it as emotional abuse?
 - What did it take for you to get to this level of understanding?
 - Is it helpful?
- How, if it all, have these experiences affected your relationships with authority figures?

Chris:

Soccer specifically

- Soccer... you said it laid the “foundation” to future experiences...
 - Is there anything you'd like to share further about this since we didn't focus on it much?
- Person you identified as, “could see me for who I am, like as a human being...I couldn't have asked for anything better”
 - Who was this?
 - How much of a role did this play in future experiences?

Football specifically

- You said, “I had a pretty rough sports career, and like it didn't even get good until football.”
 - What was it about football that made it “good” even though you identified that's the bulk of the abuse
- Your senior year, you started to respond to the HC differently compared to other coach experiences, you engaged in conflict and such.
 - What made this year different where you “weren't going to take it anymore”?
 - What led to this change?
- When you didn't get to pick your jersey, you had to go with Sophs for team dinners, and other things like that...
 - How did you teammates respond?
- Week 5 you didn't suit up...
 - Had you suited up for all games leading up to this?
 - Did you suit up for all games after this?
- When was film incident in relation to everything else? What week?
 - Was that standard punishment? You say, “a lot of my peers that happened numerous times to, maybe they didn't get the same type of treatment...”

- After week 5, you started talking to more non-starters/players.
 - Did they receive similar treatment as you did?
- After you “mentally quit” and they “won” in week 5, you started “half-assing it,” eventually you got to play week 7.
 - Why did you suddenly get to play? What changed?
 - How much did you get to play?
- Defensive line coach, “consistently mean... going to hurt your feelings...”
 - What made this coach different than HC?

Close out reflections

- Talked about playing on Co-Ed teams and the positive experiences that resulted...
 - Did your view of male sport experiences change after this, or influence your perspective of male sports after this?
- Overall, it seems like relationships with teammates were in an ebb and flow, maybe not always the best
 - What were your relationships like with these teammates outside of sport?
 - Outside of sports, did you have other friends you hung out with?
 - Identified self as “sad” and “secluded”:
 - What about friendships when you were “sad”?
 - How did this change after you realized and were done “being sad” (e.g., stop secluding self)
- How, if it all, have these experiences affected your relationships with authority figures?
 - Reflecting was “pretty big for me”
 - How beneficial is it to resurface this versus leave it alone since he has come so far in his processing/thinking of it? Does it hurt to bring it to the surface? Is this a good hurt or too much?
- When was your starting point of thinking about these experiences and defining it as emotional abuse?
 - What did it take for you to get to this level of understanding?
 - Is it helpful?
- Talk so much about life lessons (personal growth, self-acceptance, view of others, treating others well...) and all these things you’ve gained from your experiences in sport, even though they were negative...
 - Where are you at now with your experiences? How did he get to this point... of processing and understanding?
 - What happened between sport experiences and now to get to this level of thinking and this self-acceptance?
- How do you define emotional abuse?

Bruce Wayne

Baseball

- In baseball when you missed the groundball and the coach yelled at you for 5 minutes...
 - What was your reaction during that time?

- Did you say anything back?
- What did your teammates do during this time and immediately after?
- At the start of that final year in baseball...
 - What other things were going in your life outside of sport this year?
 - You were friends with a lot of the guys, but by the end you were an “outcast.” Was this primarily because of the coaches?
- How much did this last year of baseball (along with other years of “toxic baseball coaches”) contribute to future sport experiences? How did you approach future coaches? What were your expectations of them?

Between

- You took a full year off of sports in 9th grade, correct?
 - What was it like for you to not be in sports during that year? Were you still friends with peers from sports?

Basketball

- You mentioned you took 7th-9th grade off from basketball. You shared why you took 9th grade off, but did anything specific cause you to stop playing basketball during 7th/8th?
- What was it like to try out sophomore year after freshmen year incidents?
- You mentioned a number of times your dedication to basketball such as putting in extra practice time before and after practice, did any of your teammates also put in this same time with you?
- You discussed a few times the differences in treatment from Black athletes and white athletes, were there other White athletes throughout your time with this coach that received the same treatment? For example, maybe the one you all believed could’ve gone onto the NBA and then quit because he couldn’t handle the culture?
 - Also did he quit midseason or just stop after the season ended?
- The basketball athletes who were White, who you also referenced as more of the bullies, received better treatment from the coach.
 - Were there any incidents where one would get called out, was injured, etc.? If so, how did they respond to the coach when that happened?
- Several Black athletes quit, and potentially returned, over the years... did any White athletes quit over the years?
- The time when your teammate had 3 turnovers and had to run sprints, you and a few other teammates joined in to run with him...
 - How did your other teammates react to you guys running with him?
- You mentioned the time when your family came, and you were winning by over 30 points and the coach still didn’t put you in.
 - When you were winning by this much in the past, would the coach sub in people?
- Your assistant coach was key in you staying in basketball, and encouraging you...
 - Did you two ever have direct/explicit conversations about the abuse you were experiencing?
- You tried out again your senior year despite all the incidents and your coach telling you that you wouldn’t play, what went into that decision?

- How'd it feel to return after being neglected from the team during playoffs?
- Also, were other injured players removed from the team/bench during games?
- Could you talk more about the experience at the private school you played at?
- How many athletes on the basketball team would you say were “super boosters”?

After experiences

- You talk numerous times about the injuries you suffered (concussion with color inversion, other concussions, broken nose, achilles tear, etc.).
 - When you suffered those injuries did you ever say anything to the coaches directly? If they told you to keep playing, did you push back/question?
 - What happened when other players got injured on your various teams?
- How, if it all, have these experiences affected your relationships with authority figures?
- You mentioned that you changed your senior year... more confrontational and aggressive.
 - Did this cause a change in the way others were treating you? Coaches, old teammates, peers?
- You mentioned that you got more positives than negatives out of your sport experiences, but that you “would choose different things now.”
 - Could you tell me more about what you mean by this? What would you choose?
 - You identify a lot of long-lasting positive consequences, such as life lessons you learned, could you talk more about the long-term negative consequences, if any? I certainly know the concussions...
- You mentioned that it was various documentaries that led you to recognize your own experiences in sport as something to be questioned. Until that point you hadn't thought about them.
 - When you started thinking about your experiences in that way, did you talk with anyone else about it or process it with anyone else?
 - What was it like for you to come to the realization? Was it helpful to process it?
 - Between the documentaries and now, have you talked with anyone?
- What do you think of your coaches now?
- How do you define emotional abuse?

Xavier Grey

General:

- Is there any place you'd like to start off today? Have you had any reflections you'd like to discuss?
- You mentioned quite a bit last time that you hadn't fully digested things, were coming to realize something, and so on... so, I am just wondering how has this process been for you to recall these sport experiences over the last month?
 - How are you doing?
- You mention quite a bit that you're downplaying these situations and “what they did” or the impact they had

- What about them do you feel your downplaying them? Despite being able to pull back now, what was the impact that it had on you at the time?
- What are some reasons you feel you are downplaying them?
- You also say in comparison to “other events in your life” – what else was going on that makes these seem small?
- You bring up your mom a lot and the ways she came to your defense, the conversations you’ve had with her, etc. I would love to just hear more about your relationship with her

Personality:

- You describe yourself as emotional and sensitive, would you say that’s always been how you are? Or is that something that evolved?
- How does being an empath relate to your sport experience? How, if at all, did it influence it?
- You identified yourself as an athlete for most of your life, did you identify yourself any other way?
- We briefly talked about how you have changed since that time and you had acknowledged it was a huge question without a lot of time to think so I just want to revisit and see if you had anything you wanted to add that you’ve reflected on?
- What’s really influenced the way you think about these events? The way you’re able to pull out, see the larger picture, understand there’s more to a decision than what their appears to be, that you’re “being prepared for something”?
 - I know you mention your mom helps a lot, but is there anything else that contributes to these philosophies and understandings?
 - How have you grown that skill and maturity level?
 - Religion?
 - Graduate school program? How has that influenced, if at all, how you view your sport experiences?

Bullying:

- You talked about peers “poking fun” or “making fun” of you, like in track for your running form, wrestling for the farting... You also say that your middle school days weren’t “all that pleasant”
 - Was anything else going during that time in your life? Family? Friends?
 - Peer relationships in school?
 - You even change from “bullying” to less severe phrasing so I guess I’m curious as to what you’re downplaying? What impact did that have on you?
 - To you, what is the difference between bullying and poking fun?
- Along similar lines, you mention you were always “cordial with people” and “didn’t have bad relationships” during MS and HS – do you have any really great relationships that stand out apart from mom? Teachers? Others outside of school and sport?

- You said you “didn’t feel like you had a group to go to and it seemed like everyone else did.” You were a “floater”
 - How was that for you?

Administration type stuff

- There were a couple times where things happened with teammates or others and the situation really took fire, without you necessarily leading it, even getting to the news on those two occasions with racism
 - What was that like for you?
- Wrestling and racism incident on the bus...
 - Did the administration talk to you at all about the situation and the coach?
 - What was it like to stand up in front of the school board and talk?

Football:

- When the football coach texted you...
 - How did that affect you? How hurt were you?
 - I know you weren’t close with that head coach, but what were the reactions of the other coaches, like your freshmen year coach you loved?
 - Did you maintain those relationships?

Wrestling:

- You mention the 3-4 “assholes” on the team...
 - You mention the incident with you waiting to get weighed in, were incidents like that pretty normal across the team? Like did that happen to your other non-asshole teammates?
 - What were the coaches behavior/reactions like to those athletes? How, if at all, did they handle them?
- You talked about wrestling and building “mental toughness”
 - What does that mean to you?
 - What do you think it meant to the coaches?
- You talked about the time you and your wrestling coach were reviewing film and had a “heart to heart” you where he said he saw your potential
 - Was sitting down and watching film together something he did with all athletes or was that a pretty specific thing to you?

High school:

- You mentioned the time the AD forgot to mention you at the senior banquet, but you said that wasn’t the first time he forgot you for an important recognition, what was the other time?

Track and field:

- When you broke your back, how were your teammates and coaches during that time for you?

General ending:

- When was your starting point of thinking about these experiences and defining it as emotional abuse?
 - What did it take for you to get to this level of understanding?
 - Is it helpful?
- When you described yourself as a filter of negative energy, you said you “take that stuff on, take care of yourself, and then it dissipates”
 - What do you do to take care of yourself? How did you take care of yourself at the time of the bullying and emotional abuse?
- When you saw the email from Dr. J to participate in this study, what were some of the thoughts that ran through your head?
 - What were some reasons you decided to participate?
- How, if it all, have these experiences affected your relationships with authority figures?
- When you think of emotional abuse, how would you define it? What comes to mind?

Appendix G: Example Email to Participant with First Draft Narrative

Hi Chris,

I hope you are well!! I apologize for the long email but attached is the first iteration of your narrative! I have a few notes with two questions at the end for you to respond to.

The process... So, I took all of our conversations, sorted them out, and reordered them based on chronological order (e.g., soccer —> basketball —> football —> present/thoughts/etc). I condensed some things down, cut some things out, added some filler words, etc. Right now, it's a somewhat fluid narrative of, basically, you telling your story. I added some of my own words into the mix to make things flow better in some places/give context, but I didn't separate them out as "my words." Not sure if that makes sense?

The most important thing here: you are the author of your story. So, as you read through, **you can make any and all changes that you want** or deem necessary. Literally, you can edit the document as much as you want (or not at all, if you don't want to). For example, if something is out of context, change it. If I left something really important out, add it. If you want to reorder things, go for it! I want you to contribute to this as much (or as little) as you want. I did leave a few comments embedded in the document for you about specific things.

Of course, this is just a working draft. So, we will meet to discuss this before finalizing anything.

Now, if you have ideas of how to better represent your story other than a written narrative of you telling your story like it is now, then we can certainly do that. For example, if you think it's best to just put whole parts of our conversation, pictures, poems, etc. we can. Really anything goes, and I am open to all suggestions!

One question before you read. If you had to sum up your story into a word, phrase, or sentence, what would it be? For example, how would you fill in the blank: "Chris' story is about _____"

Please know, it's long and may take some time to review. I think yours is about 30 pages.

Finally, what's your schedule look like next week?

Appendix H: Thematic Analysis Connections/Future Research Questions

Similar concepts/experiences across participants:

- Coach's influence on teammates treatment of them – Bruce and Xavier
- Impact of family being present during abuse – Bruce and Chris
- Media – Bruce and Chris
- Gives credit to sport for who they are – Bruce and Xavier
- Not allowing others control over them or their lives – Bruce and Xavier
- Chris w/ excuses (p. 14) and Xavier w/ impact of event
- Standing up for self – Bruce and grad school; Xavier and racial justice
- Making changes for the better of others – Bruce and SP and counseling
- Singling out in front of entire team for single mistake – Bruce and Chris
- One person makes the difference – Chris' soccer friend
- More important any of the abuse was being seen by that one person (Chris' soccer friend; Xavier's heart-to-heart and collegiate coach; Bruce's grad school prof)
- Not very social – Chris and Xavier
- "Getting tired" of how they are feeling – Chris (sad), Bruce (abused)
- Doing things in spite of the coach – Chris and Bruce
- Abuse was NOT race-based – Chris and Xavier
 - Bruce said it was race-based for the Black players that were abused on his team, but he was white
- Someone tells you something enough or expects something of you and you believe it – Chris and Xavier (self-fulfilling prophecy)
- The need to be upset to change – Chris and Xavier
- Acknowledgement of to those who have been "sucked into darkness" from similar events – all 3 of them
- In the end, they were all quite removed from the experience and able to look at the larger picture of it and utilize these experiences for life lessons
 - None of them would take back the experiences
- All of them had teammates who bullied or "poked fun" at them.
- We see downplaying or minimizing of the violence they experienced
- Finding purpose/meaning in suffering
 - Enduring pain for a greater purpose
 - Growth through adversity mean

Future Research Questions/Directions:

- How was toxic masculinity present in their experiences? What influence did it have on their understanding of their emotionally abusive experiences?
- What is the process of adopting a code of silence around abuse in sport, especially as it relates to disclosing abuse to parents?
- Is there a revictimization process that occurs after an emotionally-abusive experience with a coach?

- Does implicit learning of coach-athlete relationships occur through motor control and learning concepts? How does this compare to education focused on “don’t abuse or harm?”
- What role does divorce play in emotional abuse experiences?
- What influence does being educated in sport psychology have in their understanding and sense-making of their emotional abuse experience?
- What does it mean that redemption was a common trope? Would this be a trope in more recent emotional abuse experiences?
 - When is the appropriate time to interview abuse survivors?

Vita

Although originally from the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois, Lindsey was raised in Monticello, Iowa. While growing up, she participated in an array of sports, where she experienced emotional abuse from two separate coaches which triggered her passion for creating safer sport spaces. After high school, Lindsey attended the University of Illinois, Chicago (UIC) where she first earned her Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology with a specialization of exercise science and health promotion as well as a minor in psychology. After, she continued at UIC obtaining her Master of Science in Kinesiology with a specialization in psychology and promotion of exercise, health, and sport behavior. Under the advisement of Dr. Tanya Prewitt-White, she completed her thesis titled, *A Phenomenological Study of Female Athletes' Experiences of Coaches' Bullying*. Lindsey has taught several undergraduate lecture courses and is also a mental performance consultant having worked with several teams and individual athletes.