

SOCIAL MEDIA IN SPORTS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ATHLETES AND ONLINE
COMMUNICATION

by

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Abstract

This study investigates the intersection where the shared experience of sports meets the shared experience of social media. Empirically quantitative literature and data regarding social media has been well-documented from the perspective of understanding macro-level trends (Duggan & Brenner, 2012; Lenhart, et al., 2010). However, few to no studies have sought to learn the views, feelings, and experiences of unique populations from the micro, individual level. This method of research threatens to silence the voice of the individuals of select populations, and offers no hope of their ever being heard. Specifically, this study seeks to understand how collegiate athletes at a NCAA Division III Midwestern, United States liberal arts institution experience social media. The study at hand employs a qualitative form of data collection entitled phenomenology, and includes nine participants. Results revealed athletes texturally experience social media in dimensions of Visuality, Patronage, Connectedness, and Presentability while the experiential structural motifs were found to be Responsibility, No Difference, and Nescience. The complexity and interrelatedness of the social media experience is undeniable. The specific experiences that are unique to athletes must be studied further to be understood more completely.

Keywords: social media, athletes, sports, phenomenology, experience

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beautiful wife, Amanda, who has displayed such unconditional poise, dignity, support, sacrifice, and love during this research process.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Sports have held a significant place in society since before the first Olympic Games in Ancient Greece (Woods, 2011). Some writers suggest there is an innate human desire to compete, to strive, and to succeed. Sports allow a generally safe, controlled, and sanitary environment that acts as an outlet for these desires. Furthermore, sports allow for a communal experience. Since the athletic arena provides for a place of testing one's ability of skill, athleticism, tactics, and passion against another's, most sports require at least two individuals to experience the thrills of victory or the agonies of defeat. Thus, for participants and spectators, sports become a shared experience. The highs and lows of last night's game become the water-cooler topics of today. The great achievements of yesteryear's finest athletes and the greatest blunders of fate's unfortunate victims live on for generations as participants and spectators alike share their experiences with others. People remember significant events in their life and how they personally are related to them. For example, when Roger Maris broke Babe Ruth's home run record, fans could recall where they were, what they were doing, and how they reacted. Likewise, similar shared experiences can be recounted for other significant world events, such as when the World Trade Center towers fell in 2001. As Steffen (1997) concluded about illness narratives in medical anthropology, when stories and anecdotes are shared "the reality manifests itself as experience" in the hearers (p. 99). In a similar manner, how these sports events are communicated to peers, subordinates, family members, and others allow

not only the events themselves, but the feelings to live on. The crux of these major life events is their ability to be shared.

In recent years, the use of social media has also multiplied throughout the world. Men and women, boys and girls, are often using social media outlets such as blogging, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Tumblr, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Instagram, Vine, etc., to express their individuality, frustrations, beliefs, dreams, and general feelings or moods as well as network and maintain contact with friends and 'Friends.' In 2010, 82% of all 14-17 year olds used social networking sites (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr, 2010). This age group possessed the highest percentage of social media usage, compared to 73% of 18-24 year olds and 71% of 25-29 year olds (Lenhart, et al., 2010). By 2012, 83% of all 18-29 year olds used social media compared to 77% of all 30-49 year olds, 52% of all 50-64 year olds, and 32% of all those older than 65 years of age (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). These statistics will be elaborated on in Chapter 2.

Daily events, from eating breakfast to passing a mid-term, are broadcasted to the world from a micro-level to a macro audience. Individuals gather information about world events almost instantaneously, and are remaining informed constantly. Now, if baseball fans want to know the score of their favorite team's playoff game, they follow their team with a live Twitter feed rather than checking the newspaper the next morning. If someone wants to see pictures of their best friend's engagement, they check Facebook for photo posts rather than meeting to go over prints. Rarely do individuals gain updates from face-to-face interactions with peers and friends, but rather maintain a constant digital connection. Whiting and Williams (2013), in fact, found through in-depth interviews that the top ten "uses and gratifications" of social media are: "social

interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others” (p. 362).

Social media have simultaneously become construction sites, broadcast stations, newspapers, and catwalks. Anyone from Johnny on the corner to Michael Jordan can build their desired image, project that image for their personal profit (or loss), gain information about an endless stream of other necessary individuals or groups, and then entice viewers to Like, re-Tweet, comment, Tag, post, Pin, Star, etc. Individuals who hold prominent positions in their respective societies and social circles, or at least project that appearance, are bombarded with Friend requests, followers, and Likes from fans, admirers, and haters who value the individual’s status. In return, social media participants use the same sources that gave them their information as an outlet to express the same feelings, words, and actions towards their admirers or haters.

1.2 INTERSECTION OF SPORT AND SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCES

Traditionally, sports have been an avenue for people of all ages and ability levels to exercise their bodies, minds, and emotions in a way that is socially acceptable and positive. Sports even allowed for a socially acceptable way to let out pent-up emotions and remove one’s self from the monotony or pressures of everyday life (Woods, 2011). Sports offer a level playing field, no pun intended, for individuals of all races, genders, socioeconomic statuses, and life experiences in that sports offer an outlet to or from personal experiences. Through sports, the child in the inner city of New York can find hope for a bright future. Through sports, the adolescent farmer can escape the daily grind of working the earth. Through sports, the middle-aged business woman can entice her

male peers to a lucrative deal. Through sports, aging men can recount their better years. Among many other positives and negatives, sports offer something that many other pastimes cannot: the celebration of shared experience and achievement for both participants and spectators (Woods, 2011).

Recently, social media allowed a celebration of shared experience and achievement by making the insignificant seem critical and the ethereal seem procurable. With social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, minute-by-minute updates are possible. Now the world can know when your best friend is brushing her teeth, using the bathroom, cooking dinner, going to the local concert, and sleeping. With Pinterest, Instagram, and Tumblr, pictures of the man waiting to cross the street, wedding arrangements, skateboard tricks, and the latest fashions offer laughs, inspiration, hope, ideas, affirmation, and more. MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn allow users to construct, govern, and enterprise their personal and professional lives through digital and virtual billboards, resumes, and connections. Yesterday's pictures and videos posted on Instagram, Pinterest, and Tumblr become today's topics for new posts and threads on Twitter and Facebook that are managed and interconnected with or through MySpace and LinkedIn. The web of interconnectivity grows thicker and thicker with every passing Tweet, post, Pin, and connection.

The intersection where the shared experience of sports meets the shared experience of social media creates a unique and intriguing scenario. The world-famous athlete who is idolized by children and adults alike can become more personally accessible to fans or critics by allowing them to catch a glimpse of their internal struggles, personal pictures, or future aspirations through personal information that is

placed on social media sites. Simple pictures of athletes at the pool with their family suggest that at their core they are just like any other mother or father who loves their children. When an athlete comments on their frustration with local traffic, followers relate to feeling the same emotions and a bridge of shared humanity is formed.

Admittedly, some athletes could decide to put on a social media image that does not reflect who they are as a normal person. This would cause fans and followers to ‘buy into’ the respective athlete’s brand, which provides a different, distinct avenue of research that is not the highlight of this study, but is worth describing for clerical purposes.

As athletes grow in their use of social media, their personal and professional image can be altered. Although athletes may be typical humans at their core, they are also deified by some (Williams, 1994). This means that greater responsibility to constantly project a public image that is consistent with the expectations of fans, team management, and personal aspirations must be taken. Any errant picture or careless post can be instantaneously made public to the world, and thus could be cause for intense backlash and unneeded negative press. On the flip side of this theoretical coin, athletes have the opportunity to use their social media as a platform to both build their personal brand through posting pictures of community service events, providing intuitive comments about both world and local events, and professionally hinting towards signs of personal well-roundedness. The larger the platform on which the athlete performs, the greater the consequences of both positive and negative social media use. Nevertheless, since athletes of all levels are often viewed as an entitled notch above the rest, the social media use of

every athlete can be studied to learn more about the digital communicable experiences that are commonly shared (Boxill, 2003; Schiller, 2003; Stovitz & Satin, 2004).

The common experiences of athletes' social media usage are the main theme in this study. Overall, how athletes view themselves as individual athletes, as team members, as a coach's player, and as members of local or global society may be reflective in how they manage their use of social media as well as the interactions that occur through social media avenues.

1.3 THE PHENOMENON OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SPORTS

A phenomenon, according to the New Oxford American Dictionary, is defined as “a fact or situation that is observed to exist or happen” (McKean, 2005, p. 1276). More specifically, as it pertains to this study, the philosophical definition of ‘phenomenon’ is more descriptive and apropos: “the object of a person’s perception” (McKean, 2005, p. 1276). Wojnar and Swanson (2007) suggest that “phenomenology as a philosophical perspective has thrown light on previously ignored phenomena of human experience At the core of phenomenology lies the attempt to describe and understand phenomena” (p. 173). In this philosophical light, phenomenology is defined as “the science of phenomena as distinct from that of the nature of being” (McKean, 2005, p. 1276). It is a scientific “approach that concentrates on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience” (McKean, 2005, p. 1276). For this study, the ‘conscious’ and ‘direct experiences’ that collegiate athletes have with social media is of inquisition.

As it is, the phenomenology of athletes on a college campus could be a source of quality research. Phenomenology considers the pre-contemplative state of experience within participants, and thus values the experiential immediacy of a given situation or

interaction above the deconstructed analyses. The unique environment the athletes find themselves in, as both parallel to their academic peers yet ambassadors for their institution's brand (as public displays of the school's excellence in potential financially profitable departments), affords a study of how the athlete views him or herself. By studying the specific use of social media, a common and popular choice of self-expression and peer-to-peer communication among young people currently, an unbridled look into the *experience* of a collegiate athlete is realized (Duggan & Brenner, 2013; Lenhart, et al., 2010).

The non-athlete can use social media to display a desired public image, give information that is deemed valuable by the individual, and remain 'in the know' for both macro-level knowledge (such as what the scores of athletic games are, highlights of recent games, major trades, etc.) and micro-level knowledge (such as play-by-play updates from friends attending a local game, updates from recent parties, updates from posted pictures taken from various locations, and other social items). The social media are simply neutral vessels on which the entity of desire travels or that bring the desired entity; usually, information, connectedness, or communication in the case of social media. For all purposes related to this study, social media can be seen as analogous to money or buildings or cars: neutral entities that can be used for both good and evil purposes.

However, for athletes, who are already in the public light, separate from non-athletes, and thus '*the know*' of athletic circles, their social media usage is a phenomenon because it brings with it the potential for others to grasp their personal workings. Interestingly, the athlete (or any other individual) can use this knowledge to their

advantage by displaying an image that is untruthful or plays to the expectations of others (Sloan, 2013). In other words those who desire to be ‘in the know’ become a digital voyeur of sorts to an alien world, or as Dina Gachman says, “another species,” that is not their own: ‘*the know*’ (Sloan, 2013). Ironically, those who are viewing the social media for a glimpse of what is foreign to them do not know if the author of the viewed social media is truthfully representing themselves or simply playing to the crowd. See Figure 1 (p. 19) for an illustration of this phenomenon. The point of interest and focus in this current study will be the micro-level, individual social media usage across several teams as opposed to social media updates that are performed by entire teams or organizations.

1.4 PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe how an athlete’s personal use of social media affects an individual’s identity and image of themselves, their teammates, and their coaches. Currently, the use of social media among the subjects will be generally defined as their interaction with, consumption of, and authorship of any material that filters through a social media website. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, Instagram, LinkedIn, blogs, etc. For purposes of this study, email will not be included as a form of social media, since email has grown from the “original online social network” (Thurston, 2013, p. 74) to become the choice of professional communication for both personal and occupational endeavors (Hempel, 2013).

Recent culture shifts and literature (McQuire, 2006; Perez & Gomez, 2011; Tatum, 2009) suggest that there has been an increased use of electronics, and subsequent proficiency, among adolescents and young adults. With adolescents and young adults becoming more proficient with their use of electronic devices, they can tend to keep to

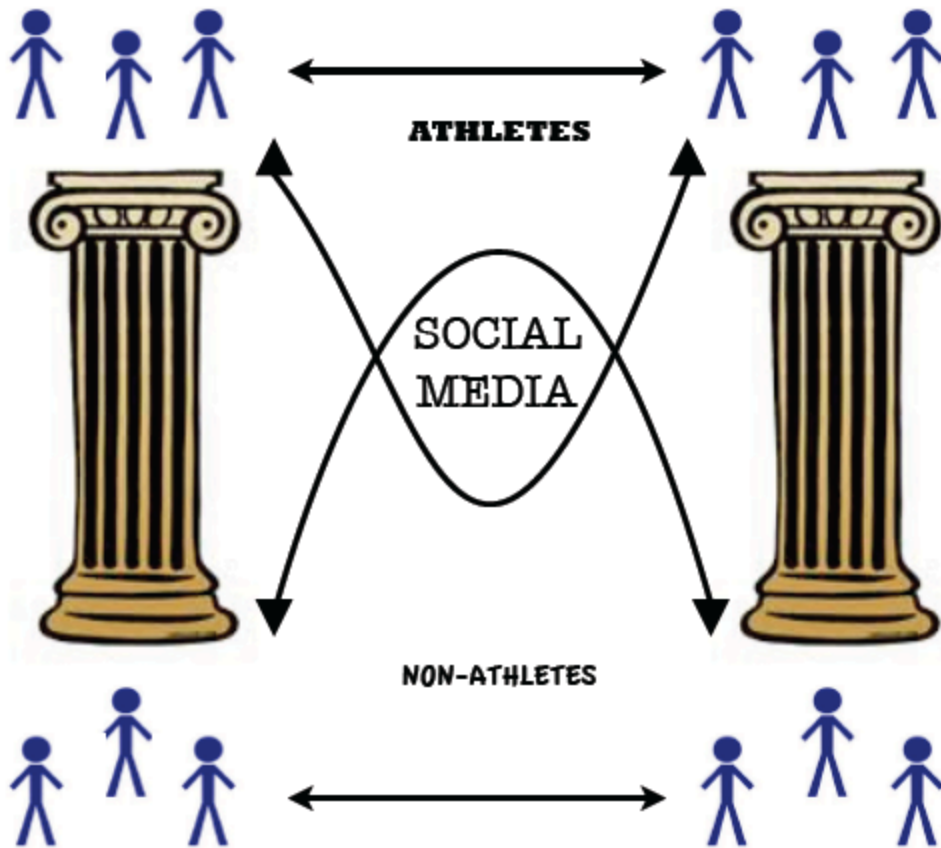


Figure 1. Social Media Relative to Sports

themselves and manifest atypical individualism for their age. Although individualism may positively alter self-perception and self-confidence of what young people are capable of learning and achieving when left to their own means, this shift away from the proximity of physically present friends has been replaced with a large volume of virtual and online interactions with peers, strangers, and sometimes friends (Vorauer, 2002). Put differently, the depth of a few friendships may have been replaced by the breadth of connectedness among a number of acquaintances.

However, other scholars tend to disagree. According to the social penetration theory offered by Irwin Altman and Dalmás Taylor in 1973 (Griffin, 2011), similar norms for face-to-face, self-disclosure are often followed in virtual settings. Altman and

Taylor's 1973 social penetration theory suggests as relationships progress, interpersonal communication moves from shallow, non-intimate levels to deeper, more intimate ones (Griffin, 2011). In fact, many individuals who use social media often find themselves disclosing information about their selves at a rate that is congruent with the social penetration theory and in a manner that allows them to grow in self-confidence which could lead to a deeper friendship or relationship (Olsen, 2012). This is not unlike how individuals would potentially grow in a friendship or relationship that consists of face-to-face interactions only. Whitty (2008) found that relative to online dating sites, individuals disclose personal information in a manner that is more strategic; often, those individuals rely on the perception that can be afforded from non face-to-face interactions. The lack of face-to-face interactions seemingly allows individuals to casually exaggerate their most positive elements without being blatantly dishonest (Whitty, 2008). As will be discussed later in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, the outcomes of social media relationships are often relative to the existential goals of the individual who uses social media.

This research study will seek to add to the body of knowledge involving social media by focusing specifically on NCAA Division III male and female collegiate athletes. Little to no focused research has been conducted to see how social media have influenced the perspective of young adults who are simultaneously striving towards scholarly ends while pursuing their highest level of physical giftedness. This study will be socially constructive by seeking to understand how a unique population interprets society through their interactions with social media. Furthermore, this study will be transformative because as individual perspectives are understood; common themes will

emerge and allow for reform in the relational engagement of athletes by themselves, their peers, and their authorities (Crewsell, 2013).

Fundamentally, little to no research has been conducted on *how* the use of social media shapes individuals' perspectives, those of athletes and/or non-athletes, of their society. The only scholarly study that remotely pertains to this suggested research topic was performed by Vlahovic, Roberts, and Dunbar (2012). Vlahovic, et al. (2012) sought to understand how virtual and social media as compared to face-to-face interactions influenced individuals' levels of perceived happiness. O'Reilly, Berger, Hernandez, Parent, and Seguin (2012) offered a study that directly related to sport and social media. However, this study sought to see how often the topic of sport came up in the social media threads of adolescents in an effort to conclude how participants viewed their sport participation. O'Reilly, et al.'s (2012) study does not seek to understand how the athletes interpreted their own selves, their peers, or their superiors in sport through their social media involvement, as the proposed research study will.

1.4.1 Research Objectives

Although indirectly suggested above, the research objectives of this study that seek to guide all interviews, data collection, and thematically common responses are as follows:

- 1) *To gain understanding on how athletes use social media to describe themselves, their athletic peers, and their coaches.*
- 2) *To use the textural and structural themes from athlete interviews to gather how athletes subconsciously communicate their unique position in their respective societies (that is an athlete in a collegiate environment).*

Allowing the athlete the opportunity to respond within the format of an open-ended interview will provide unprecedented insight into the cognitive, communicative, and potentially physical lives of athletes in a small, collegiate atmosphere in which all students are commonly known to their peers and local community. The findings of this study provide potential for deeper understanding of the communicative choices of collegiate athletes, which in turn could lead to further studies of other athletes in other environments including but not limited to: other collegiate levels, amateur sports, and various professional sports. Furthermore, with the rapid rate at which information is exchanged on a micro and macro-level, this study could yield perspicacious considerations on how men and women in positions of leadership can best communicate with their athletes.

1.4.2 Guiding Question

The goal of this study is to allow the integrity of the athletes' interviews to drive the textural and structural descriptions of how each athlete interacts with his or her social media. The central, guiding question in this study is simply:

What does it mean to be an athlete who uses social media?

By using a question that is open-ended, the athletes unknowingly drive the data collection process and thus provide the answers to the thesis. There will certainly be different answers to all interview questions at a micro-vernacular level. However, at a macro-conceptual level common themes will emerge. These themes become the communally shared experiences that athletes have with their social media which suggest latent, macro-level experiences. These latent experiences offer insight into what it means to be an athlete who uses social media.

1.5 PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

Personal information from participants that can affect the outcomes of the study are often noted and removed for the purposes of scholarly integrity. The same should be considered from the standpoint of the researcher since it is through the researcher's eyes, ears, mind, and intellect that the study with its comprehensible, hopefully advantageous, results are derived. It is from this perspective that I seek to give my personal experiences and perspectives on social media. My goal is to provide a complete personal history of past or current experiences or involvement with social media from the standpoint of an athlete and a non-athlete. In an effort to maintain the utmost scholastic integrity, I must be personally forthright in that my practical and philosophical perspectives that are found in this section are influenced from a worldview that is evangelically Christian and thus influence my interpretations of the data that will be explicated later on in this document.

My first experience with what has been coined 'social media' occurred in middle school. MySpace was beginning to take off and was widely being used by many of my friends who were both athletes and non-athletes. As my pre-collegiate years progressed into high school, and my friends continued to stay current with the latest and greatest forms of digital friendship, I remained on the outside looking in: not unlike a child watching his or her peers attempt to ride skateboards up and down the street but lacking the desire to 'follow the crowd' simply for prideful contrarian tendencies to hold fast to the known rather than dabble in the communally popular but privately unknown.

Nevertheless, in my senior year of high school, I felt at peace enough with myself and my willingness to follow the majority and became 'Facebook official.' My new experience with digital, online social media became quickly unfulfilling while I was left

asking, “Is this really what people are so excited about?” Then, Facebook seemed to me a grand popularity contest on a virtual platform. Granted, at this point I had achieved a moderate level of academic and athletic success that yielded the opportunity to continue both at the collegiate level. It seemed reasonable to obtain a Facebook page to become Friends with my friends from high school so that I could keep in touch as we parted ways for our respective college adventures.

In college, I found a lack of connection with my Facebook Friends and dropped my Facebook profile in the second semester of my freshman year. Not surprisingly, this led to me lose touch with my high school friends, but allowed me to continue to pour myself into my, then, physically present tasks of collegiate athletics and academics. Although my teammates and friends in college were active on Facebook, I still lacked the desire to maintain a digital profile when I could put little to no effort into maintaining a more accurate physical profile: my actual body complete with its daily cognitive rabbit trails and somatic pursuits.

Post-college, Twitter began to rise in usage among my peers but I continued my antithetical attitude towards social media even though I knew full well that it could provide a wealth of useful knowledge about events or information that I considered advantageous personally and professionally. Lately, I acquired a LinkedIn profile solely because a friend was hired by LinkedIn and shared that this social media website is changing the way businesses are hiring and growing their brands. Me being the astute, contemplative (not to be confused with stubborn; sarcasm intended) college graduate, thought this was worthy of my time and effort. Of course, I really just wanted to make

sure I did not miss an opportunity that may or may not present itself. Currently, my LinkedIn profile is half-baked and I am working to make it more complete.

Since I am a college soccer coach who works daily with young male athletes as well as directs summer camps for youth, I have a unique perspective on who is using social media and for what reasons. I am often baffled by the extent of knowledge displayed by young children who are active on Pinterest and Instagram. While those I interact with regularly, college students, are socially and professionally active on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest; peers of mine who are recent college graduates are active on Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Pinterest, Instagram, and LinkedIn for similar reasons. The trend seems to be initial social media interaction is driven by common experiences with those in close physical proximity, i.e., posting pictures with friends for fun. As individuals grow and mature, social media evolves into an opportunity to stay socially active with friends over distance, stay current with local occurrences, and connect professionally with constituents who may offer an opportunity to advance on the career ladder.

It is through this lens that I am considering the current study. All interviews, data analyses, and subsequent interpretations are subject to the perspectives and experiences I have or not had with social media. My aim is to remove personal biases and partisanship from this study , although that is impossible (and thus I should at the very least acknowledge my biases), to provide the most accurate portrayal of how college athletes use and interact with social media, therefore yielding an understanding of what it means to be an athlete who uses social media. My hope is that the data that are recovered from this study can be used to bring a deeper understanding of a population that is often seen

from a distance. Potentially, the understanding of many who have not, do not, or will not participate in collegiate athletics will be bolstered with the candid information that is being shared by participants.

1.6 LOOKING AHEAD

With a quality base of assimilation into the intentions, perspectives, and background of this research study, the next chapters will look to build upon the foundational information provided in Chapter 1.

Specifically, Chapter 2 will examine the literature that circumscribes, intersects, and transcends the topic of social media within the context of athletics. Chapter 2 will focus on the effect that social media has communicatively had on society, the relativity between athletics and society, and the subsequent bridge that athlete social media use offers to scholarly study.

Chapter 3 moves on to describe how the methodology of phenomenology drives the research process. This chapter is more than lists to delineate the processes of collecting data. Although this chapter sufficiently recounts the necessary techniques of data collection, it also suggests that the phenomenological approach stimulates me, as the researcher, to position myself in a unique way while relinquishing irrevocable control of the outcomes of the data. Instead, that privilege is given to the participants who, through their answers, offer underlying communal themes regarding what their use of social media communicates about themselves.

Chapter 4 offers the textural findings of the data collection process highlighted in Chapter 3. These findings build in Chapter 5 to reveal how the communal underlying themes of the interviews yield structural motifs about the collegiate athletic community

as a whole. Both Chapter 4 and 5 offer a great deal of narrative excerpts from the interviews to offer pragmatic authenticity and verification as well as idiosyncratic perspectives that bring the subject matter to life.

Finally, Chapter 6 focuses on how the findings of this study can be interpreted for academia, professionals, and dilettantes. Through Chapter 6, suggestions for further research methodologies, participants groups, and foci are offered; as well as interpretative delineations of athlete-specific communication with commensurate reticent counsel for coaches and sport management officials. The limitations of this study are discussed along with other avenues for research that spawned from this research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are three main themes that emerge within the research articles that inform this thesis. In spite of a rigorous search and consultation with others, I could find no research that seeks to understanding exactly how social media affects individual athletes' view of themselves, teammates, and coaches; although, there are other avenues integrated within and throughout the activity of social media usage that have been well traveled. The related research focuses primarily on the effect that social media has had on society as a whole, within the context of media's general societal influence. The various interrelations between athletes and the society they find themselves in are also deconstructed. The resulting conjunction of the authority of social media alongside competitive collegiate sports is then surmised. These themes (media as society's information lens, interrelations of sport and society, and the implications of collegiate athletes using social media) provide quality information that can aid in understanding how collegiate athletes' use, including production and consumption, of social media influences their individual perspectives relative to their individual environment while also evincing broader suppositions about the general collegiate athletic population: all of which can engender new avenues of focused study about the developing communications of collegiate athletes through social media.

2.1 SOCIETY'S INFORMATIONAL LENS: MEDIA

Since the invention of the radio, the telephone, the television, computers, laptops, the Internet, cell phones, tablets, and more the speed at which technology changes

dramatically affects the rate at which media is enabled to evolve. Technology allows media the opportunity to forge ahead and give information at a faster, more efficient rate. Now, individuals can send and receive new information, even elaborate on such information, faster than ever before with nearly no limitations due to geography, location, or range. With this increased technological onslaught of information, there can be the increased acquisition of knowledge and cognitive growth (Hastings & Tracey, 2005). This increase of information must be processed and appropriately applied to be of any use.

Increased technology mobility and media usage is not always a good thing. Tandon, Zhou, Sallis, Cain, Frank, and Saelens (2012) noted that media that is used in the bedroom, “especially the TV” (p. 94), may be the single most likely factor to promote obesity and sedentary lifestyle because such media increases total “screen time, interference with sleep, and increased exposure to advertising for unhealthy foods” (p. 94). Furthermore, media affects how most individuals define body image and thus view themselves. As individuals see themselves compared to pictures that popular media provide, they begin to view themselves and interpret others’ evaluations of their body in a unique, potentially harmful or unnatural, way (Borzekowski & Bayer, 2005). Additionally, popular media outlets such as newspapers, television, and radio can have an impact on how information is received and perceived by those who intake specific media sources (Riffe, 2006).

Borzekowski and Bayer (2005) found that there is a massive dissatisfaction of body image among teenagers that manifest in eating disorders, such as overeating or under-eating. As individuals process these feelings they often need a sounding board, a

close friend or confidant. Furthermore, when close friends are not available immediately, those same social media outlets allow individuals to quickly express themselves through written, video, or photo communications (Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest, Skype, etc.) that replace face-to-face conversations. However, ease of use does not equate to best use. Vlahovic, et al. (2012) found that duration of face-to-face communication substantially suggested a positive relationship in the happiness level of individuals while laughter and visual cues also allowed for increase happiness ratios in participants. Furthermore, Johnson and Cooper (2009) found those non-face-to-face communication modes (instant messaging and telephones) decrease the effectiveness of communication, especially when communication involves negotiations or the need for consensus. Specifically, “the efficacy of affect communicated is significantly reduced by computer mediation” (Johnson & Cooper, 2009, p. 673).

It appears that as newspapers and magazines go digital so do the personal interactions of those who read these sources of media. Children and youth are more capable now of maneuvering virtual, social paths for information than ever. Parente, Swinarski, and Noce (2009) found that children learn most about their society from virtual pathways (such as the Internet), from personal experience, friends, or the Internet itself rather than parents, schools, or other traditionally trusted sources. For example, through online gaming opportunities that allow participants to communicate with headsets, Thilmany (2009) has shown that social interactions with peers and violent games teach participants to be more aggressive while nonviolent games teach participants to be more helpful and act in a socially beneficial manner. Inherently, video games are neutral entities, as they can be used for negative ends, such as subliminally teaching

violence and aggression, or they can be used for positive ends, such as teaching tools and education (Thilmany, 2012). In short, youth are gaining information about the world they live, about their peers, about their superiors, etc., through sources that parents, guardians, or individuals of influence may or may not approve of.

Now, rather than speaking about an article in *The New York Times*, friends use Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, or Pinterest to express their opinions of major (or minor) ideas and themselves. Lenhart, et al. (2010) and Duggan and Brenner (2013) offer an example of the rapid change in media and subsequent individual expression. Lenhart, et al. (2010) found that between 2006 and 2010, blogging fell among teens but rose among older adults. Yet, as Messner and Garrison (2011) found, blogs affect the agenda of “elite traditional news media” and “traditional news media frequently cite blogs in their coverage, but the source attribution to the blogs is often vague” (p. 112).

Furthermore, major trends suggest “macro-blogging” seemed to be substituted for “micro-blogging,” including status updates and moment-to-moment updates, in teens (Lenhart, et al., 2010, p. 2). As of 2012 findings, Duggan and Brenner (2013) found that the majority of social media users have shifted to the 18-29 age range. Specifically, the use of Twitter has doubled since 2010 and those individuals in the 18-29 age range are most likely to use Twitter (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). As previously alluded to, social media interaction may or may not provide a viable alternative to personal, face-to-face interactions and it may or may not be enhancing it.

2.1.1 Social Media

Based upon the above discussion, it is now important to note that a common informational medium for individuals to consume information is social media, but it

could also be a source of dissatisfaction, as mentioned above, in regards to body image, communication that requires a great deal of non-verbal information, aggression, self-efficacy, self-image, among others: quite the double-edged sword (Hastings & Tracey, 2005; Tandon, et al., 2012; Borzekowski & Bayer, 2005; Riffe, 2006; Vlahovic, et al., 2012; Johnson & Cooper, 2009; Thilmany, 2012; Lenhart, et al., 2010).

Social media possesses the unique ability to be used for tremendously positive uses, unfortunate negative uses, and drive users towards both activity and passivity, relative to their consumption of social media. Hempel (2013) suggests that the social media network, LinkedIn, is “becoming an indispensable social-networking tool” (p. 69). While LinkedIn was once a “repository for digital resumes,” (p. 69) it is now critical piece of the hiring process for more than nearly 90% of *Fortune* 100 companies and subsequently changed the recruiting landscape for applicants and companies (Hempel, 2013). LinkedIn founder, Reid Hoffman, envisions his company raising the GDP by becoming a “platform that can digitally represent every opportunity in the world” (p. 72) because it eliminates the need for an intermediary who supplies information: people using LinkedIn want and need their information to be accurate (Hempel, 2013).

However, on the other side of the proverbial fence is Archer (2013) who suggests that technology usage “is one of the most serious threats to humanity” (p. 46). Although Archer (2013) does note that some research adds that, “multitasking with devices may increase the brain’s processing speed and improve multitasking capacity,” (p. 49) she stresses that dopamine is created in the brain when technological alerts register. When dopamine is created by the brain, a pleasure or “award” sensation results and the stimulant can become addictive (Archer, 2013, p. 49). Specifically, Archer (2013) cites

numerous studies that indicate technology usage, and thus social media, increases stress, increases anxiety, reduces the ability to disconnect from work or other activities, creates inabilities to concentrate, can induce depression or arrhythmic sleep, increases automobile accidents related to mobile devices, over engages the brain and thus minimizes learning ability, and decreases efficiency.

Representing the middle-ground is Baratunde Thurston (2013). Thurston has been coined “the world’s most connected man” (Thurston, 2013, p. 71) due to his massive digital interactions for marketing, writing, opining, and speaking about all things digital: including writing a *New York Times* best-selling book; maintain his position as CEO and cofounder of a creative comedic digital agency and production development company, and working for the Obama campaign. In one year, Thurston (2013) amassed 1,518 Facebook posts (4 per day), 3,702 SMS threads (10 per day), 4,845 photos taken from his mobile device (13 per day), 11,541 Tweets (32 per day), and 59,409 Gmail conversations (163 per day). Then, for 25 days, he voluntarily disconnected from all superfluous and extraneous digital connection. He found the level of digital integration of all social networking sites to be unfathomable and extremely difficult to deconstruct: essentially the information given to one social network informed, updated, and transmitted the same information to others. As this happens simultaneously, the level of connectedness becomes exponentially staggering very quickly. He also found that by disengaging from unneeded digital connection (Thurston maintained limited digital connection only through personal emails, texts, and phone calls to re-cultivate lost relationships and other personally important reasons) he gained perspective in his physical present environment, felt less stressed, and realized “I was addicted to myself” (p. 104). Ultimately, Thurston

(2013) found “a restored appreciation for disengagement, silence, and emptiness” realizing, “I don’t need to fill every time slot with an appointment, and I don’t need to fill every mental opening with stimulus” (p. 105). Thurston’s addiction to connectedness, information, and self can indicate the current culture of society as his self-induced rehabilitation findings can shine a light of hope into a dark tunnel of clutter.

2.2 INTERRELATIONS OF SPORTS AND SOCIETY

American society has long been entrenched with athletics and the nobility of athletic achievement. Athletes are often seen as individuals who rise above the standards of the average person to achieve more than is typical of their contemporary peers. Movies, books, television, and history show the dichotomy of athletics: sometimes noble, sometimes self-destructing, and often entertaining. The stereotypical ‘jock’ carries different connotations and judgments than an ‘athlete.’ Miller (2009) noted that the difference between athletes and jocks appeared to manifest in academics, teamwork, and self-aggrandizement. Athletes were seen to have high academic expectations while jocks had low academic standards and motivation (Miller, 2009). Athletes were typically perceived as team players with good sportsmanship while jocks wanted individual accolades and glory (Miller, 2009). Finally, athletes were judged to be modest, respect others, and look out for those who are not treated as they should while jocks represent machismo, aggression, and pride (Miller, 2009). These findings suggest ‘real’ athletes are those who are able to give more for a cause that is greater than their selves. Miller’s (2009) study is consistent with findings from Bryant (2011) which showed that athletes in relays often perform better than they would under individual circumstances. Indeed, an

individual's sacrifice for a cause greater than him or herself appears justified corporately and individually.

There are differences in how society views male and female athletes as well. Male athletes often display the qualities mentioned above, and are even encouraged to, while females traditionally must maintain a level of societal norms for their gender while competing. Daniels, Sincharoen, and Campbell (2005) found that how athletes view themselves as athletes directly affects their involvement in sport and thus their holistic view of their total person. Boys were found to relate more towards goal orientation while girls more towards win orientation (Daniels, et al., 2005). This may be because boys are more self-confident and satisfied in their personal drive to achieve, thus process oriented, while girls find significance in the ultimate result and the opinions of others, thus more outcome oriented.

Interestingly, McDonough and Crocker (2005) found traditional female stereotypes to be more common and unrelated to sport achievement or identity within sport. For example, the quality of friendship among female athletes is poorly related to the female athlete's self-identity and commitment to her sport (McDonough & Crocker, 2005). Therefore, it may seem that as individual athletes, particularly females, identify with themselves within the context of sport they compartmentalize their relationships and feelings about themselves and their peers. This suggestion supports Burns, Jasinski, Dunn, and Fletcher's (2012) findings that college athletes' identities within their sports are exclusive from their identities within society, and potentially "toxic" to their self-identities within society (p. 283).

Tovares (2010) offers a unique view of athletes in their relationship to society by offering an analysis of athlete's internal dialogue. Tovares (2010) noted that athletes often have competing voices that carry on a constant internal narrative. The voices often represent antagonistic views of the athlete, the athlete's performance, and how others view the athlete: fundamentally, strong versus weak, active versus passive, and good versus bad (Tovares, 2010). It could be that as athletes carry on these competing internal narratives, an outlet for the resulting personal or corporate tension becomes their social media.

Additionally, the ways that athletes interact with themselves differ between races and genders. Gano-Overway and Duda (1999) found that African American athletes often find higher value in personal expression through their athletic performance while European American athletes were more self-conscious and aware of "social comparison" (p. 560). In other words, African American athletes intrinsically appear more task oriented and "wish to master sport skills but also exhibit a creative and personal style in doing so" (Gano-Overway & Duda, 1999, p. 560).

Although there is certainly a great deal of information about how sports are viewed by individual athletes, sports participants as a whole, and then the subsequent society; there are lessons that can be learned from biological processes that apply to the interrelations of sports and society. These themes are as follows: symbiotic, mutualistic, parasitic, and, allegedly, commensal.

2.2.1 Symbiotic

Symbiosis is the "interaction between two different organisms living in close physical association, typically to the advantage of both" or plainly: "a mutually beneficial

relationship between different people or groups” (McKean, 2005, p. 1711). Applied to sports, symbiotic relationships occur frequently: players, coaches, managers, etc., maintain symbiosis by striving together towards a common goal. On an educational level, Bartrom-Olsen (2010) contends that sports can be a part of the holistic learning environment as “an extended family of every learner” (p. 14). This ‘extended family’ can also include others disciplines that surround sports such as media coverage, organizations, and schools, amongst others (Bartrom-Olsen, 2010).

As related to the spectator, sports studies have differed in findings regarding symbiosis. Particularly when compared to consumption of sports through media outlets versus physical attendance ambiguity summates the findings (Pritchard & Funk, 2006). Pritchard and Funk (2006) suggest that some researchers find a well-integrated symbiosis between spectators and sports: “each behavior fueling the other” (p. 299). However, others have found no connection and even advocate that, “media use competes with live attendance as a recreational substitute” (Pritchard & Funk, 2006, p. 299). The prior findings are backed by *The Guardian* (1999) which says that, “without television there would be no big money in snooker for the simple reason that 2,000 is about the largest paying audience that can be given any meaningful view of the 12ft x 6ft field of action” (p. 12). Furthermore, regarding other small market sports such as volleyball, table tennis, cycling, and bowling; “the professional circuit is underpinned by television rights fees” (*The Guardian*, 1999, p. 12).

These findings do not hold weight when compared to how sports are used to advertise and promote brands to society. Nicholls, Roslow, and Laskey (1994) found that onsite advertisements are more effective and symbiotic in relationship to society and

traditional media than offsite mediums. Essentially, the sport bolsters the credibility and reliability of the brand to the onsite fan while the brand receives business from both the sport and the spectator simultaneously.

2.2.1.1 Mutualistic

Mutualistic relationships are a form of “symbiosis that is beneficial to both organisms involved” (McKean, 2005, p. 1122). Within sports, there are examples of when sports and society provide their counterpart with a mutually beneficial service. Nevo (2000), in referring to how Israeli sports and politics developed because of each other says:

The inherent relationship between Israeli sport organizations and political movements has been one of the key identifying marks of Israeli sport. This relationship was successful due to the mutual benefits it provides to the political system and the power centers of the sporting establishment alike . . . Parallel to the ideological and cultural shifts in Israeli society, a new balance of power among sporting institutions was created. The combination has reshaped the relations between sports and politics in Israel. (p. 334)

There are times in the life of sports organizations and the societies in which it is found that one entity, either the sport or the society, feels slighted in one some way. Sometimes sports organizations feel above the society and its subsequent rules, therefore separate, because society appears to bow to the whims of the sports and thrives because of the sports. Meanwhile, the society feels that it is responsible for the success of the sport which seemingly justifies the inverse of the previous statement (Agergaard & Michelsen la Cour, 2012). Agergaard and Michelsen la Cour (2012) say, “The

relationship between the state and civil actors in sports policy as a relationship of mutual dependence characterized by a high degree of trust and interdependence, but no autonomy” (p. 27). Land, Davis, and Blau (1994) cite Warren Goldstein wonderfully to express this concept. Goldstein is quoted:

While baseball clubs (in the late 1800s) were competitors in the search for players and on the ballfield, they also had a mutual interest in making the game as a whole into a stable, profitable enterprise . . . After all, they were in the business of selling first-rate competition. If the competitors disappeared, so did the business. (Land, Davis, & Blau, 1994, p. 781)

So there is a clear tension that is commonly balanced between sports and societal norms. On one end, the sports need freedom to thrive and do business as needed, which requires great trust from the society because if the sports business folds then so does the opportunity for the society to be entertained and bettered by the sport. On the other end, the society desires to be a part of the sports’ business operations so as to know how to best receive and allow the sports industry to move within the rules and regulations of the particular society. Essentially, both entities, sports and society, want to know that the expectations of the other are and where each stands. Beacom (2007) notes with great insight:

Tension between the principle of reciprocity and the pursuit of self-interest continues to challenge notions of mutualism. The effective management of this tension through open and transparent dialogue between donors and recipients predicates successful development assistance. (p. 81)

2.2.2 Parasitic

In contrast, a parasitic relationship is defined by “habitually relying on or exploiting others” (McKean, 2005, p. 1235). Parasitism can be the antithesis of symbiosis; and this relationship truly exists between sports and society. More specifically, the individuals of sports and the individuals of society can exhibit two-way parasitic tendencies. When referring to long-time pitcher Terry Leach of the New York Mets minor-league baseball system, Marcus (1987) says, “The Mets always had a parasitic relationship with Leach. They cling to him in time of need and this season the need has been great” (p. 164). At this time, Leach had long been a minor-league staple for the Mets organization and would only be called up to the Major Leagues when the team needed a bailout. Leach never had the financial or fan compensation that accompanied playing consistently in the Major Leagues, but yet was expected to move up to ‘the show’ and back down to ‘the minors’ at the whim of the organization. This is an example of how a team or organization can have a parasitic effect, and, for lack of a better term, ‘leach’ off their players. Teams, especially those in high profile amateur or professional positions, know that their stature permits them the opportunity and ability to be shrewd with players because for every one player who does not want to be a part of that system, there are countless others ready to take his or her place.

However, organizations and teams do not just hound players, but players can have parasitic effects on other players or organizations too. English soccer side, Geelong’s manager Mario Jurjevic says, “A few players have an almost parasitic effect on the rest of the team with their body language, and this compounds when the results don’t come” (Jukic, 2013, p. 28). By the nature of sports, there are winners and losers. At some levels

of sports, losing games means that players, coaches, and administrators lose jobs as well. Jurjevic is saying that when teams are not performing well enough to get a winning result, then little aspects of team chemistry and player relations becomes a huge dilemma. Nonverbal language says a great deal about how an individual is feeling and thus can be communicated in a way that infects, affects, and has effects on others or on the team. When the common goal of success is splintered, the results can be life-changing since at Geelong's level players, coaches, and administrations are compensated based upon results.

In some instances, the sport-societal relationship is virtually parasitic. As mentioned above by *The Guardian* (1999), television, radio, Internet, and other forms of media are arguably as parasitic as they are symbiotic. Understandably, some spectator-to-sports relationships are indeed parasitic. Examples would be many Olympic sports. The ethos of the Olympics drives the competitions, but the business of the Olympics allows relatively obscure sports to become massively popular for one month and those sports with their star athletes are used to bring television networks, brands, and endorsers huge financial payoffs while leaving those sports and athletes in relative obscurity for another four years.

2.2.3 Commensal

Commensalism is defined as “an association between two organisms in which one benefits and the other derives neither benefit nor harm” (McKean, 2005, p. 341).

Regarding sports and society, it is difficult to find examples and sources of relationships that are commensal. On a societal level nearly each person is affected by sports directly or indirectly. Although the artist on the corner has no interest in sports, her favorite spot

on the local cafe is always occupied on Friday night because of the city's hockey game. Those same crowds of hockey fans that appear to inconvenience her normal Friday night hangout provide the cafe with a massive influx of business and revenue. This revenue allows the cafe to buy and import high-end espresso beans from India, Ethiopia, and Brazil to feature each month. The cafe's monthly espresso bean feature happens to be the highlight of the artist's month. The same cycle can be spun for any number of other situations that appear to show how sports and society are commensal. It is likely that individuals may choose to not let the inconveniences of sports or societal rules on sports to frustrate them, but that does not mean neither entity does not indeed affect them.

2.3 IMPLICATIONS OF COLLEGIATE ATHLETES USING SOCIAL MEDIA

The allusion to athletes' use of social media opens a new realm of scholarly study. Social media undoubtedly has an impact on sport as a whole. In 2009, three of the top 10 most-discussed individuals on Twitter were athletes, five of the top 10 most-discussed sports topics were teams, the New York Yankees has over 1 million Facebook fans, Shaquille O'Neal is the most-followed athlete on Twitter with more than 2.6 million followers, and the list can continue (Kishner & Crescenti, 2010). Furthermore, the NBA, NFL, NHL, MLB, MLS, and more offer live updates, scores, and player information through social media ventures (Kishner & Crescenti, 2010). Particularly, the recent ascent of Twitter and Facebook in the realm of social media allows teams to maintain a personal, ongoing relationship with consumers (fans) by offering mass updates and news in a significantly shorter time than traditional media sources (Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012; Williams, 2011). Rothschild (2011) found that venue managers for large sport and entertainment facilities with a defined strategy for using social media

yield better revenue results while those without defined strategies do not. Interestingly, these venue managers believe that non-traditional marketing efforts, such as using social media to drive sales, will become the norm as traditional marketing efforts bow to the advances in technology and media (Rothschild, 2011).

Although social media is a significant outlet for many professional athletes and sport organizations, O'Reilly, et al. (2012) found that for adolescents, discussing sport interactions is not of high importance as shown by the “relatively small number and depth of discussion threads” (p. 75). However, this does not mean that young athletes do not use social media as an outlet to express themselves. Self-identity and compartmentalization, as previously discussed, may attribute to this lack of suggestive research. While high-profile athletes and sports teams may use social media to drive their personal brands, athletes of all ages and levels may use social media as an outlet for emotions, thoughts, and feelings that may or may not be masked as apparently random, indirect comments, posts, Tweets, or other social media inputs.

The benefits of social media for athletes, and all individuals for that matter, are massive. Individuals have the opportunity to “meet new people, stay connected with friends, and express their views and opinions” (Han & Dodds, 2013, p. 11). Businesses and athletic companies can “use social media for public relations and advertising purposes” (Han & Dodds, 2013, p. 11). All of these are critical to the success and well-being of individual athletes as well as the organizations that they are a part of.

However, social media also can represent a “nightmare for high schools, colleges, and professional sport organizations” because there is limited control over these sites (Han & Dodds, 2013, p. 11). Thus, these sites can be a “breeding ground for

inappropriate behavior and relationships” (Han & Dodds, 2013, p. 11). Athletic administrations at the collegiate level have tried to stem this potential problem by forcing student-athletes to renounce all social media use or use software that act as cyber alerts so coaches can maintain a level of authority: both of which need to be compliant with the First Amendment (Han & Dodds, 2013; Bemiller & Trendafilova, 2012). In professional athletic environments, the organizations are often responsible for the actions of their players; and thus their social media use (Han & Dodds, 2013). Due to the potential volatility of social media, all four major professional leagues in the United States have policies to regulate their athletes’ use of social media (Han & Dodds, 2013). To manage athletes, schools and sports organizations must “develop, distribute, and implement a transparent and clear social-media policy” (Han & Dodds, 2013, p. 12) to have the best possible reaction within the law (Bemiller & Trendafilova, 2012).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 EXPLANATION OF METHODOLOGY

While it is clear from the title of this thesis that the methodology of choice is phenomenology, it is now important to explain why. Phenomenology has been suggested to have a “long, controversial, and often confusing history within the social sciences” (Goulding, 2005, p. 301), and differs markedly from other qualitative methodologies, such as ethnography and grounded theory, in “the goal of phenomenology is to enlarge and deepen understanding of the range of immediate experiences” (Creswell, 2013; Goulding, 2005, p. 302; Spiegelberg, 1982). Fundamental elements of phenomenology include “a direct description of our experiences” without “subconscious motivation” (Merleau-Ponty, 2004 [1962], p.vii) that yield indispensable invariant properties of the experience of interest (Creswell, 2013; Goulding, 2005; Jopling, 1996).

The direct application of phenomenology is determined by the researcher’s view of phenomenology as a philosophy or methodology (Goulding, 2005). For purposes of this thesis, Husserlian and Goethe’s (Husserl, 1970) phenomenological processes as a philosophy and Schutz’s (1967) phenomenological processes as a methodology are employed concerning Goulding’s (2005) summary of how phenomenological research is typically conducted (Bentz, 1995). Though Goethe’s phenomenology is more associated with the study of nature as a discipline, his inherent understanding of science falls within the phenomenological historical convention since:

He shared Husserl's deep distrust of the mathematization of nature; he understood that the phenomenologist must free him/herself from sedimented cultural prejudice; and he experienced that in the patient, participatory presence in phenomena the fullness of the world reveals itself in new and surprising ways. (Simms, 2005, p. 163)

Therefore, it is important to note the underlying communion that Goethe's ideas have on this thesis. Nevertheless, transcendental Husserlian phenomenology is the phenomenological philosophy of highest importance since Husserl's epoche technique is employed to aid in the textural and structural thematic deconstruction intended to identify "the basic structure of a phenomenon based upon the convergence of account" (Bentz, 1995; Budd, Hill, & Shannon, 2010; Chin-Yi, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Giorgi, 1985, 2009; Goulding, 2005; Husserl, 1970; Heinemann, 1934; Moustakas, 1994; Willig, 2008, p. 693). Epoche is a bracketing technique that is used to exclude existential assumptions from sciences as well as those about the phenomenon relating to the "lifeworld" (Bentz, 1995, p. 47) so that the information is "perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Still, it is important to note that complete abstraction of the researcher from the study is impossible just as it is impossible to find universal meaning from the existential experiences of a few (Calabro, 2002). Since the most critical avenue of emergent truth in phenomenology is the participant, establishing a legitimate and quality *a priori*, or epoche, to seek understanding from the perspective of the participant is essential (Chin-Yi, 2008). Fish and Dorris (1975) say it well:

Through his own experiences man helps shape his culture which in turn affects his experiences . . . Therefore, the methodology for studying man from the

phenomenological approach differs from that of other approaches. Man is simultaneously subject and object . . . By allowing the phenomenon to develop its own criteria for examination, by recognizing the intentionality of every act including those of the researcher, and by eliminating the subject-object dichotomy as a preconception, phenomenology has no need to be concerned with the confusion of perspective and the so-called 'bias' of the researcher. (p. 9-11)

3.2 RESEARCH METHODS

In the vein of Schutz's phenomenological methodology, Goulding (2005) says, "language is the central medium for transmitting meaning" applied to "a methodological orientation . . . that is concerned with the relation between language use and the objects of experience" (p. 302) (cf. Schutz, 1967; Creswell, 2013). For the foundations of phenomenological methods, language is needed to "convey information and describe 'reality'" along with the assumption that with shared experiences come shared meanings (Goulding, 2005, p. 302). Therefore the phenomenologist relies on one data source: the participant, and view the participants' additions as fact (Goulding, 2005, Husserl, 1970; Schutz, 1967). Implications concede "sampling is therefore purposive and prescribed from the start and the main instrument of data collection is the interview" (Goulding, 2005, p. 302).

Creswell (2013), Goulding (2005), and Thompson (1997; 1998) maintain the researcher interactively works with participants to dynamically collect language from interviews as transcribed text and then interpret those texts. Bracketing, as previously alluded to, allows the transcribed texts to be viewed and analyzed from a clean slate (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The analysis yields common units of meaning, or

themes, which are then used to texturally and structurally describe the participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985, 2009; Goulding, 2005; Moustakas, 1994; Thompson, 1997; Van Kaam, 1966). Textural descriptions center on *what* the participants experienced while structural descriptions tell *how* the participants experienced the phenomenon contextually (Creswell, 2013; Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985, 2009; Goulding, 2005; Moustakas, 1994; Thompson, 1997; Van Kaam, 1966). The collective textural and structural descriptions impart the “essence of the experience” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80).

Relative to Giorgi's (1985; 2009) and Moustaka's (1994) transcendental phenomenology with Husserlian perspectives, Goulding (2005) highlights Colaizzi's (1978) and van Kaam's (1966) seven steps of using phenomenological methods for researchers: read participants' narratives; find significant quotes, phrases, or words; formulate units of meaning for each significant collection through horizontalization; cluster all participants' significant verbiage into themes; describe themes texturally and structurally; offer the essence of the experience or phenomenon; if needed, cross check essence with participants for clarification and interpretation.

3.2.1 Site and Participants

The proposed and approved location for this study was on the campus of a Midwestern NCAA Division III liberal arts college. It is important to candidly clarify that the institution of note in this research study is unashamedly religiously affiliated in its institutional application across all departments and practices. Each participant was interviewed in the same location: an office in the athletic department of the noted college. Within the office, participants were encouraged to become comfortable and specific

locations within the office varied depending on the comfort and convenience of the participant (i.e., different desk, high chair, low chair, no desk, etc.). Research participants were selected from the convenient, local sample and asked to participate. Each participant was explained the nature of the study as well as their expected role and time commitment. No participant was contacted through email (see Appendix B for Email/Written Introduction Script). All participants were approached in person to inquire about their participation (see Appendix A for Verbal Introduction Script). No potential participant who was approached declined to participate. Participants were approached on various days and at various times in early to mid-August of 2013. All participants were quite willing to speak at length about themselves. I believe this can be in part attributed to my involvement and presence within the athletic department. Although I was not known by many of the participants, I was also not an unfamiliar face. This may have aided in gaining participants' confidence quickly as well as the participants' willingness to carry an open dialogue. Although unintentional, participants represented each of the collegiate sports seasons: fall, winter, and spring. The vast majority of the participants were fall-sport athletes (see Table 1, p. 50). This can be attributed to the fact that early and mid-August is often pre-season training camp for fall sports athletes. Naturally, those athletes were more present in the athletic department and more likely to participate. Regarding the total number of participants, it certainly appears that nine participants is a small sample that could bring question to the validity of the produced results. However, according to Creswell (2013), nine participants fall well within the confines of phenomenology as an empirically scientific methodological process. Specifically, Creswell (2013) says, "a

heterogeneous group is identified that may vary in size from 3 to 4 participants to 10 to 15” (p. 78).

Table 1

Participant Breakdown per Sport Season

Sport Season	Number of Athletes
Fall	7
Winter	1
Spring	1
TOTAL	9

3.2.2 Empirical Data Collection

Phenomenological methods necessitate an inquisitive mode of data collection that appropriately yields control to the individual from which the data springs. Plainly, interviews are the key component to data collection when a researcher elects phenomenology as the framework for a research project, thesis, or dissertation (Creswell, 2013; Goulding, 2005; Thompson, 1997; 1998). Holstein and Gubrium (1995) reflect this:

We live in what has been called an ‘interview society.’ Not only the media but human service professionals and social researchers increasingly get their information via interviews. Some estimate that 90% of all social science investigations exploit interview data. Interviewing seems to be the universal mode of systematic inquiry. (p. 1)

Furthermore, Qu and Dumay (2011) hold that the researcher interview is simply “one of the most important qualitative data collection methods” separate from “casual everyday conversations” (p. 238-239). Interviews allow an unparalleled view into the existential world of the interviewee which demands the interviewer possess “not only the use of various skills, such as intensive listening and note taking, but also careful planning and sufficient preparation” (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 239). With this in mind, I will now proceed to explain how the bricolage for this research paper draws heavily from a romanticist view of interactive interviewing coupled with frame analysis.

3.2.2.1 Interactive Interviewing and Frame Analysis

Before the interview begins, it is essential that the researcher come prepared with a methodology of interview tactics since they act as a governor for the interview framework (Fernqvist, 2010; Qu & Dumay, 2011). Without a framework that guides the researcher, there is potential for the interview, a proverbial vessel of untapped knowledge, to be lost to the chasm of casual conversation (Kvale, 1983; Qu & Dumay, 2011). This research study relies heavily on romanticist interview techniques to shift the focus from the essential facts of the language exchange to the meaning of the unstructured interview (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The lack of structure, in that structure demands the interview to strictly move from Question 1 to Question 2 to Question 3 and so on, allows the interview to flow in an appropriate manner so that the interviewee feels comfortable. When qualitative researchers seek information that gives life to the feelings and perceptions of individuals, it is essential for the researcher to foster trust and comfort for the individual of interest (Hathaway & Atkinson, 2003). Holstein and Gubrium (1995) call this process a “semi-formal guided interview” (p. 2).

'Semi-formal guided interviews' are interactive in that the researcher often prompts narratives from the interviewee which yield "lived experiences" that are then to be deconstructed for understanding: "romanticist sensibilities . . . the core of human experience" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 5-6, 9; Fernqvist, 2010). Here it may be sufficient to note that although Frey and Fontana (1991) find that group interviews can be quite beneficial in social research, they also provide caution that "lessons from group dynamics tell us that the characteristics of the group (e.g. size) and background of members (e.g. leadership style) can impact the interaction and response patterns within the group" (p. 175). In an effort to eliminate the potential for a select participant's voice to be suppressed by a dominant personality, this research employed only individual interviews.

To understand 'the core of human experience,' more than words are needed since body language is also a significant contributor to communication, at times more so than verbiage. Thus, body language that accompanies themes of questions should be noted (Collier, 1993; Fernqvist, 2010; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Yet beyond Fernqvist's (2010) interview process of interactive interviewing around themes, "innovative approaches are especially needed to account for varying roles and their narratives" (Hathaway & Atkinson, 2003, p. 161). Enter Goffman's (1974/1986) *frame* concept.

Goffman (1974/1986) suggests that in order to understand social interactions according to existential structure and formal etiquette requirements, framing allows the individual or social participant to lend meaning to the given situation and thus conduct appropriate social engagements. In other words, Goffman (1974/1986) contends that individuals essentially enter all situations seeking to know "what is it that is going on

here?” (p. 8) and then frame those situations to answer their broad-spectrum question. “Framing is both a matter of interpretation and doing, and also of having tacit knowledge about the very existence of frames within human interaction” (Fernqvist, 2010, p. 1313). Thus the interview *framework* can be seen as a frame in which both the interviewee is seeking to understand the context of the interview questions, while the interviewer finds the interview frame as a lens into the lived experiences of the interviewee. Understanding that frame from both perspectives is necessary for the researcher to gain a holistic understanding of the participant and his or her narratives, answers, body language, and views, amongst potential others, which ultimately yield meaning of the phenomenon. This is why collective rapport between interviewee and interviewer is critical. Collective rapport allows the backstage or back regions of self, experiences, or perspectives to be divulged and understood: much preferred over the shallow, although still important, front stage or front regions (Hathaway & Atkinson, 2003; Goffman, 1974/1986). Through Fernqvist’s (2010) romanticist interactive interviewing guidelines this rapport can be provided and encouraged. Goffman’s (1974/1986) frame concepts provide structure to the dynamism of Fernqvist’s (2010) romanticist interactive interview (Craib, 1978).

3.2.2.2 Interview Process

After obtaining verbal and written consent (see Appendix C), each participant was interviewed one-on-one and face-to-face in a private office. The interviews were anticipated to last no more than 45 minutes, including paperwork and introductions. This was the case in all but one interview. The interviewee was willing to finish and the interview lasted just over 48 minutes. Depending on the openness of the interviewees and their ability to verbalize their experiences the interviews lasted on average of about 28

minutes. The Interview Guide (see Appendix D) was used to direct the interview process through three main themes: Social Media Experiences, Social Media as an Outlet, and Ramifications of Social Media. The interview guide was created with the expectation to deconstruct the athletes' lived experience existentially while also providing an avenue on which relaxed, open conversation could be had. Therefore, the interview was not just a survey of questions. Nevertheless, each athlete was asked each question from the guide even if he/she had already offered a quality experience from a particular question.

Each interview began with the question, "Can you share a story or memorable experience you have had with social media?" and was usually followed with a reminder about what social media fell within the confines of the study. Many participants were surprised by the indirectness of the question, but few needed prompting guidance to answer the lead-in question. Largely, the majority of participants felt comfortable to openly share engaging, funny, or touching stories as well as communicate their strong feelings about such events. As mentioned previously, all questions from the interview guide were asked to ensure that each theme was thoroughly covered. If the interviewee had already answered a question, I would suggest, "You have already touched on this but . . . (the subsequent question). Do you have anything else you would like to share or clarify?" At the conclusion of each interview, I utilized snowball sampling by asking each participant if they knew anyone who they felt was active on social media and who might offer some insight into this research study. Each participant freely offered at least one name. I felt by asking each participant who they knew and believed would be a good candidate for an interview that the process of interviewing athletes was more organic,

removed myself and my biases from the research study, and yielded to the social media culture among athletes at the noted institution.

All interviews were digitally recorded and a corresponding journal of notes was taken to ensure that important information such as body language, facial expressions, and distractions were noted, since these would not show up on a digital recorder. During transcriptions, these notes helped to clarify situations and provide a more thoroughly rich, holistic, and accurate audio transcription of the lived experience as highlighted by Husserl (1970) and Holstein & Gubrium (1995) in conjunction with Thompson's (1997) interactive interviewing techniques.

Following each interview, in compliance to the consent form, each participant was offered a copy of his/her audio recording, transcription, and/or a summary of the study's findings. All participants were cordial and affable in response, and declined audio and transcription copies. One said they would like to see a copy of the results if available, although unnecessary. I gratefully thanked each participant as best possible. Most seemed quite happy to be a part and most expressed the interview as "no problem" or "a pleasure."

3.2.3 Ethical Considerations

The legal and ethical issues presented in this research study are relatively low, but nevertheless, critically important. Since participants were of legal age, there was no concern regarding the treatment of minors or the need for parental consent. However, before the interviews were conducted participants were informed of the general purpose of the study as well as offered a consent form for participation. No participants declined to sign the consent form and thus all participated. Please see Appendix A, B, and C for a

copy of the Verbal Introduction Script, Email/Written Introduction Script, and Consent Form, respectively. Specific and unique differences of participants were noted in the case that respectful accommodations were needed.

Through the process of conducting the interviews, the purpose of the study and explanation of how participant responses were to be used was reiterated and clarified. All comments from the researcher or the participant clarified as ‘off the record’ were omitted from the study. The researcher always conducted interviews in the same location for all participants and avoided asking leading questions. Furthermore, to preserve the integrity of the study, an *epoche* (bracketing) was performed by the researcher, as previously mentioned, allowing the study to focus completely on the experiences, responses, and comments of the participants.

Participants, as previously mentioned, were spread across of number of sports including both male and females. Each participant was never referred to by name in the study or transcriptions. Instead, as participants completed interviews, their name corresponded with their interview (i.e., Interview #1 was conducted with Interviewee #1 who provided data that was described as originating from Interview #1).

Data were reported with integrity and honesty, regardless of the results found. Copies of the final study will be provided to participants upon request. These steps will ensure that each participant remains anonymous and feels confident about their confidentiality. If published, the identical copies of the study will not be used for more than one publication (Creswell, 2013).

3.2.4 Clarification of Empirical Data Collection Materials

Empirical explanation and elucidation of every research aspiration is indispensable. Yet for the purposes of a phenomenological study, remaining centered on seeking the lived experience of the participants without deviating to the deconstruction of data is critical within the methodology that was previously outlined. Therefore working with unique methods of phenomenology to find the essence of the participants' experience naturally is strained through the singularly subjective lens of the researcher. The same holds true for how the participants respond in interviews. These suggestions are congruent with Goethe, Husserl (1970), Merleau-Ponty (2004 [1962]), and Schutz's (1967) in that when a participant is prompted to explain and describe their perspective on a desired phenomenon, the researcher does so knowing full-well that the participant will respond from their unique standpoint and therefore numerous participants provide numerous vantage points of the same phenomena that yield overlapping points of intersubjectivity and thus a shared meaning that provide a holistic understanding of the phenomena. Again, the researcher must understand that this newfound intersubjective, holistic understanding is still within his/her own existential perspective which becomes another layer to account for and peel away. Undoubtedly, this must be understood and explained by the researcher when suggesting that a 'holistic' *essence* of a phenomenon has been explicated through the phenomenological processes. All this is to say that the bracketing of the researcher's perspective on the phenomena is short-sided and incomplete, at best; yet still a necessary and intrinsically important aspect of phenomenology.

Based upon, Gearing's (2004) expansive evaluation of bracketing, *epoche*, through historical phenomenological processes, I have decided to follow a descriptive (eidetic) elemental approach to bracketing and participant response elucidation. Thus the ensuing relative approach of moving from the whole of the data to explicated parts of the data to the newly understood whole is greatly influenced by Husserl (1970) and Giorgi (1985) with undertones of Schutz (1967) and Goethe. The phenomenological elucidation process comprises of five stages: Translational Writing, Personal Musing, Seek Initial Meaning Units, Conglomeration of Intersubjective Points, and Develop Perspectival Confines of the Phenomena. See Figure 2 (p. 59) for a visual explanation of how Husserl's (1970) primary phenomenology is mapped out in this study, with consideration to my unique labeling of these five stages as guided by Zealand (2007).

3.2.4.1 Translational Writing

Naturally, the elucidation of the empirical data begins with the translating of the digital interviews into written text. This transcription allows for the verbal data of the participants to become a workable aspect of the research study: physical rather than metaphysical. Translational writing was done by myself and allowed me time to gather a deep understanding of the details of each interview. I listened to each interview audio and typed the conversation as I heard it through the headphones with the help of my written notes for clarification on difficult passages. It was not uncommon for me to listen to parts of an interview five or more times to make sure I completely understood and appropriately conveyed the audio in the transcription. This allowed me to gain a thorough understanding of each interview and its contents of potential data. The total translation process yielded over 100 pages of text from participants that remained within the

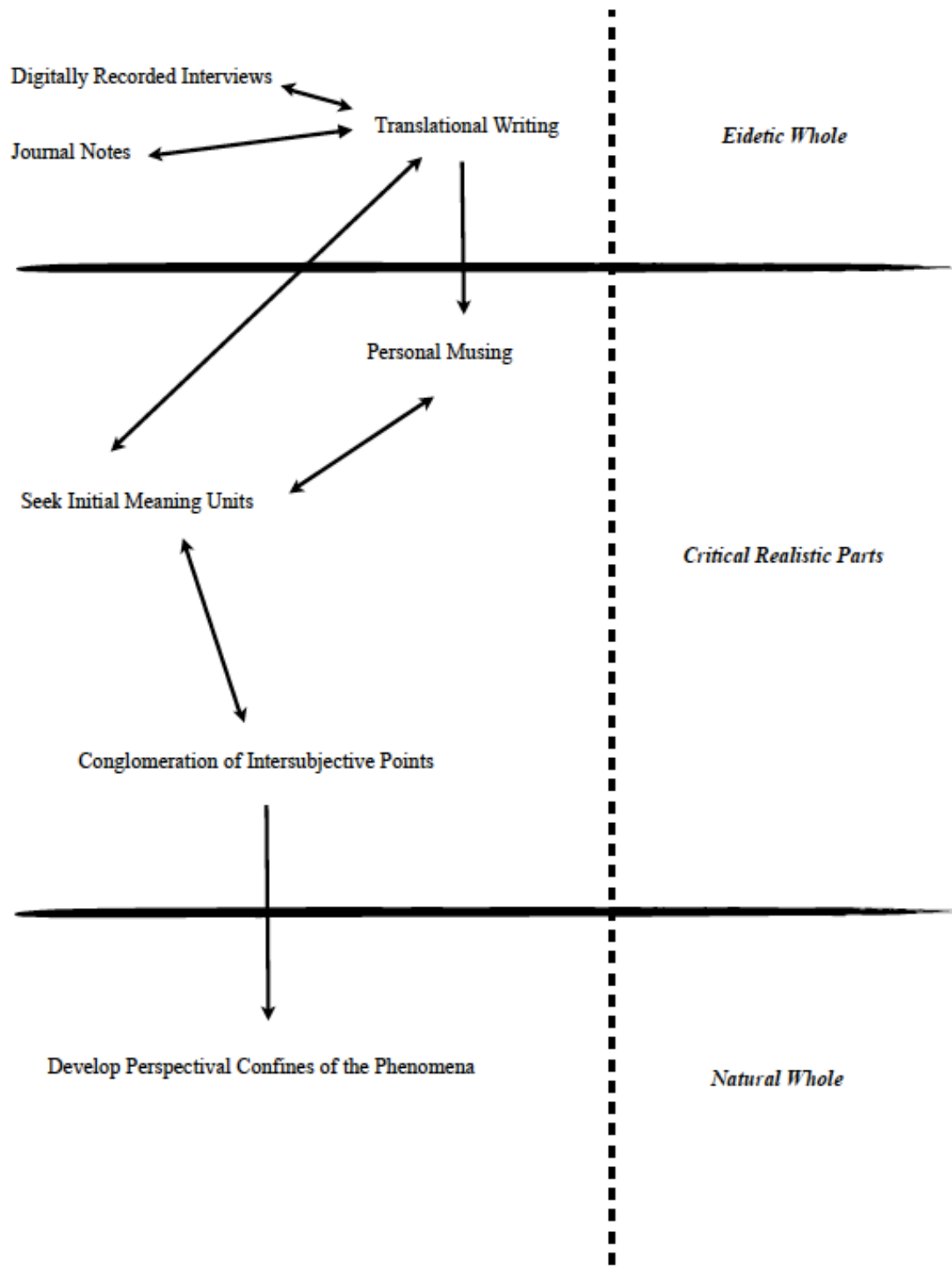


Figure 2. Empirical Elucidation Method (Zealand, 2007)

confines of the study. (*Note: One participant was within the confines of the study during the interview, but post-interview fell outside the boundaries due to extraneous circumstances: he was cut from the team. This interview is not included in any data sources.)

3.2.4.2 Personal Musing

Although empirically separate, my personal musing and considerations of the transcribed text were almost synonymous with the transcription process. As I transcribed each interview, the repetition of seeing similar questions and seemingly shared answers, commonality between interviews became more lucid. After each interview transcription was complete, I reread the transcription for clerical errors and grammatical checks. As this was taking place I was able to consider each interview separately, yet with each passing transcription I was able to see each interview in light of where it fit within the whole of the study. My existential reflections post-transcription were fascinating and exciting in that the whole of the data began to offer unique parts of commonality.

3.2.4.3 Seek Initial Meaning Units

At this point, although my understanding of the transcriptions and the ethereal commonalities within and between each interview were becoming clearer, each interview still remained raw data. The next stage saw this raw data developed to find common themes and then those themes were given units of meaning. I reread each interview transcription and highlighted points of shared similarity and difference. Specific similarities shared a common color as did specific differences. Different colors indicated different themes or ideas and therefore, potentially different meaning units. This ratiocination of the texts revealed the initial meaning units. I reread the texts again to

clarify, assess, and consider the new initial meaning units within the context of the whole and adjusted the meaning units as necessary. Although I did reread my journal notes from each interview, there was little to be gained from these notes that aided in the initial meaning units. During the interviews, I tried to remain as present as possible with each participant, which often meant that I sacrificed a potential note for keeping the interviewee engaged and at ease. I felt this allowed the best opportunity for a true explanation of a lived experience; much like a friend would retell a good story to another. The next step of this stage involved shifting the data's predominately participant voice to the empirical voice of a research study (Giorgi, 2009; Sadala & Adorno, 2002). This involved copy and pasting each excerpt into a new document so each shared theme was together allowing easier understanding and interpretation of the units.

3.2.4.4 Conglomeration of Intersubjective Points

From the individual units of meaning, commonalities became obvious and were clustered as intersubjective. This involved rereading the extracted quotes, thoughts, stories, and experiences of the participants, considering their place within the whole of the study and experience of the phenomena, considering my place within the whole of the study and experience of the phenomena, and aggregating these ideas into veritable descriptive themes (Zealand, 2007). I attempted to offer the best possible descriptive word or phrase for each theme that came from the unique, shared texts. The descriptors chosen were yielded from the conglomeration of the convergent points of intersubjectivity in the highlighted texts.

3.2.4.5 Develop Confines of the Phenomena

From the processes and procedural nature of the above stages, this stage considers the text no longer fragmented but now again whole. The naturally more empirical nature of this final stage obliges the researcher to consider all converging, intersubjective points of the text holistically. The consideration of the text as a new whole enables the elucidated themes to be the experiential dimensions of the phenomena as a summary: the *essence* of the phenomenological lived experience (Groenewald, 2004).

The headings for these dimensions were selected and named according to what best described the thematic whole of the specific dimension of the lived experience. It is critical to note that the heading name is not exclusive in describing the subsequent experience, but rather a summary of the experiences that can be categorized under such a heading. Furthermore, the authentic, unique descriptions of the experiences of the participants are not lost in the heading name but clarified to allow for a greater depth of experiential understanding for secondary and tertiary readers. This comes with the understanding that the headings are not exclusive in description of experience; rather there may be a number of overlaps between experiences within specific heading titles, just as there are commonly shared experiences across commonly shared, lived experiences. The experiential dimensions of the participants in this study emerged as: Visuality, Patronage, Connectedness, and Presentability.

3.2.5 Evaluation of Research

As with any scholarly endeavor, it is necessary from the researcher to take a quality, honest look at the flaws of the methodology of choice in order to fully understanding the filter through which the topic is strained. Therefore, it is appropriate

for me to consider the critique and critics' perspectives of phenomenology and phenomenological methods. Critics of phenomenology, within appropriate historical contexts, have suggested that the methodology is nothing more than unique psychology, idealistic, and too liberal in allowing quality "well-grounded" research to become "not-grounded" (Osborn, 1934, p. 380). Noë (2007), a more recent critic of phenomenology, suggests:

The trouble with pure phenomenology, then, is not that it is reflective, or introspective, or focused on experience and the subjected, or even that it relies on first-person warrant (whatever exactly that is supposed to be). The trouble, rather, is that pure phenomenology conceives of its subject matter as autonomous. It is this epistemic isolation of phenomenology, more than anything else, that threatens to undermine its claim to be a serious kind of intellectual pursuit. At best, it seems, it is the fantasy of such a pursuit. (p. 232)

Others have said that too many researchers begin to use phenomenological methods without having a solid grasp of the various philosophies within phenomenology, and often are left creating their own interpretations of the methodology, which is not empirically scientific (Priest, 2004). Priest (2004) continues to suggest that little guidelines exist for bracketing, *epoche*, techniques so, again, individual interpretations become common and water down the empirical efficacy of phenomenological methods. Crotty (1996) also notes that phenomenology can often suffer from distortion because the subjective, existential experience of the individual can be glorified above the phenomenon itself.

The previous chapters and sections describing my methodological decisions are written to address these critics and justify my decision to use descriptive phenomenological methods. Furthermore, these sections reflect who I am as a person and, therefore, as a researcher. I have explicitly and indirectly expressed my values, beliefs, prejudices, and ethos logic processes thus telling my lens of view as the researcher and what I offer to the research study. As previously noted in numerous places, Mircica (2011) here suggests how the lived experience of the individual, through storytelling, is reflective of the larger human story:

According to this discussion, the term ‘narrative’ refers to the ways in which we humanize time by structuring our temporal experiences into coherent wholes with beginnings, middles, and ends, narration is ‘between’ description and prescription, and human action has a narrative structure. (p. 139)

Furthermore, van Manen (2011 [1990]) says “a good phenomenological text has the effect of making us suddenly ‘see’ something in a manner that enriches our understanding of everyday life experience” (p. 345; cf. Zealand, 2007). Therefore, the phenomenological methods of seeking to find the experiences of individuals in order to reveal the essence of the phenomenon are justified. However, I understand that relying simply on a few ‘stories’ of individuals is not enough to suggest that empirical science is transpiring. Guidelines, rigor, and structural repetition are necessary to ensure a study can be accepted, trusted, and seen as tenable in scholarly communities. Gearing’s (2004) exhaustive summary and expectations of each phenomenological philosophy along with de Witt and Ploeg’s (2006) sweeping look into phenomenological nursing research has helped me to justify my phenomenological methodology. My explanation in defense of

Gearing (2004) can be seen above. De Witt and Ploeg (2006) suggest a phenomenological framework that focuses on bringing more structure and rigor to interpretive research. The framework includes: balanced integration, openness, concreteness, resonance, and actualization (De Witt & Ploeg, 2006). Essentially, de Witt and Ploeg's (2006) research, coupled with Gearing's (2006), help to bring structure to the naturally creative processes of phenomenology.

I am the first to acknowledge that this research study is not perfect. Nevertheless, in each stage of this research study it remained my goal to strive for complete thoroughness in removing myself from the research process to allow the experiences and stories of the participants to emerge as complete and unbridled as possible.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS - THE TEXTURAL DIMENSIONS OF ATHLETES' ONLINE COMMUNICATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will present the textural dimensions from the empirical elucidation process that Chapter 3 introduced. The purpose of Chapter 4 is to clearly reveal *what* athletes phenomenologically experience when using social media based upon the interviews of nine athletes from a Midwestern NCAA Division III institution. The four dimensions highlighted at the end of Chapter 3 provide the commonality, or the *essence*, of the social media experience for athletes; and furthermore sets a clear path to provide explanations of the structural experiences derived from these athlete's narratives which will be elaborated on in Chapter 5.

To start, Table 2 provides a summary of the participants. Please heed the note at the bottom of the table as it clarifies some participant information. I decided to not give each participant an alias, but rather will refer to each as the number in which their interview took place (i.e., Interview #2 corresponds with Interviewee #2, Participant #2, etc. while Interview #7 corresponds with Interviewee #7, Participant #7, etc.) Each participant was selected from the convenient sample mentioned above. I approached each athlete and simply asked if they would mind being interviewed for a research study. An outline of my conversation can be found in Appendix A. Although I never used it, an outline of my email introduction and invitation can be found in Appendix B. No athlete declined an interview.

Table 2

Participant Information

Participant ID	Gender	Year in College	Sport Season
1*	Male	Senior	Fall
2	Male	Senior	Fall
3	Male	Sophomore	Fall
4	Male	Senior	Winter
5	Male	Senior	Fall
6	Male	Senior	Spring
7	Male	Senior	Fall
8	Female	Junior	Fall
9	Female	Senior	Fall
10	Male	Sophomore	Fall

*** Note: During Participant #1's interview he was within the confines of the study as a current participant in NCAA athletics. After his interview, extraneous circumstances removed him from the confines of the study. None of the data gleaned from his interview was included in the study, but I felt it important to include him in this table to confirm that there was an additional athlete.**

Often these athletes were well-known within the athletic department, and were easily accessible since fall classes were in the process of commencing and many athletes arrived early for preseason or simply arrived early to prepare for classes. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I felt that by asking each participant who they knew and believed would be a good candidate for an interview that the process of interviewing athletes was more organic, that I removed myself and my biases from the research study, and this yielded to the social media culture among athletes at this institution. I say this to explain why the

participant information may appear to slant one direction or another. Although it can appear to be a negative at first glance, I believe the participant demographics is a strong positive because it allows the participants to drive the empirical selection process. Admittedly, a potential negative of using snowball sampling yields to participants suggesting other potential participants who they believe are active on social media. This could neglect those individuals who are not active on social media and not allow for their voices to be heard on the matter. For this exploratory study, I would suggest that this is a concession that is willingly undertaken since those who use social media more frequently are more likely to significantly help unearth avenues for future research. Of note, as will be elaborated later on in Chapters 4 and 5, many participants in this study did not consider themselves 'active' on social media and were amused to hear that their peers perceived them to be 'active' users. Chapters 4 and 5 will also reveal how 'active' engagement of social media is relative to the participant's individual perception of the advent of their social media use.

Please see Figure 3 (p. 69) for a diagram of the interconnectivity, intersubjectivity, and convergence of the participants' social media usage. I decided to create a diagram of interrelatedness of the converging points and meaning units because the idea of visually processing information was critical in the experience for the athletes who participated in this study. This concept will be further explicated, but for now I will say that I felt that a diagram, rather than a written statement, would provide readers with an intuitive understanding of how the participants in this study would prefer to receive the meaning units and their convergence (visual over verbiage) and indoctrinate them into

Meaning Units

Intersubjectivity

Dimension

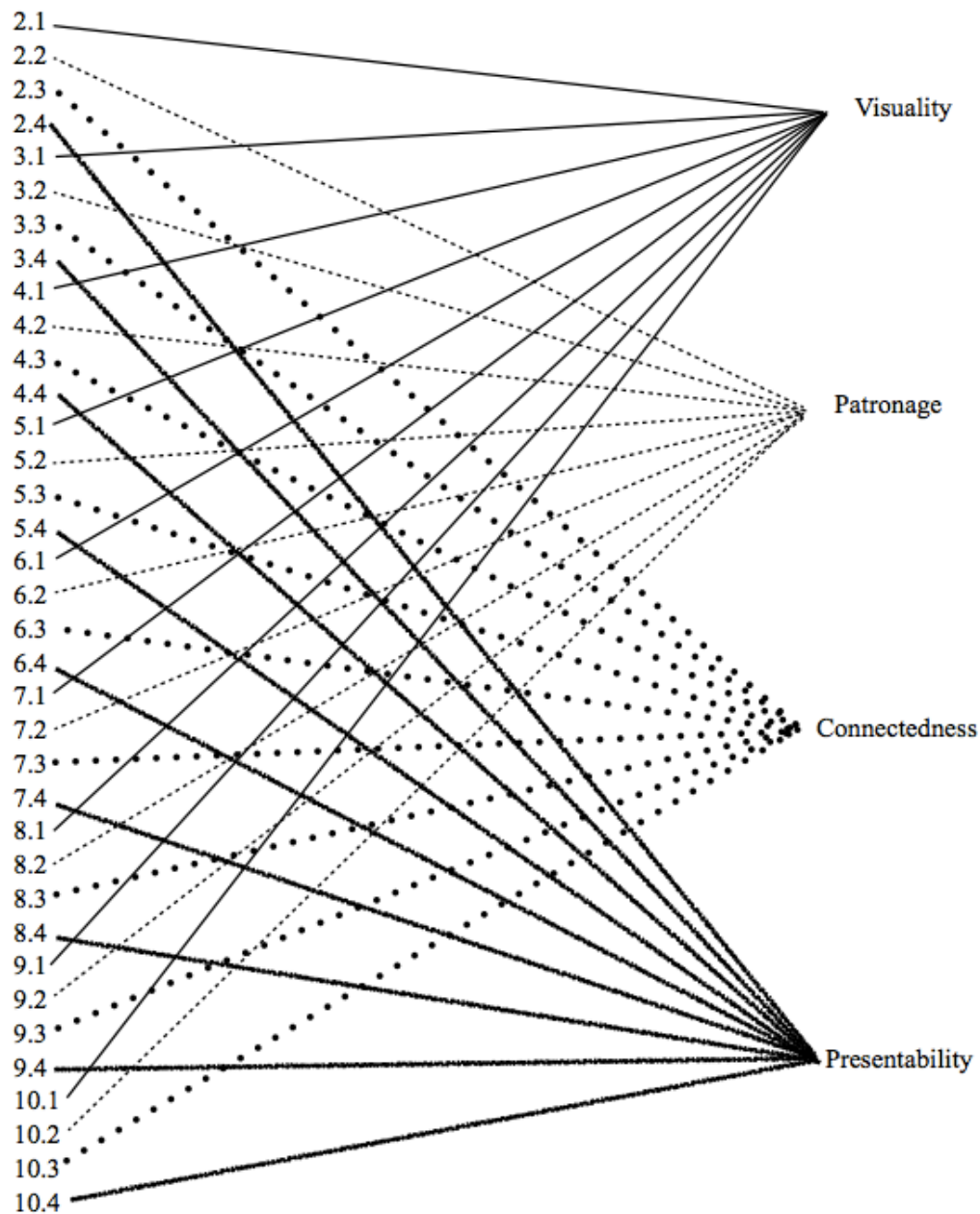


Figure 3. Intersubjectivity with the Phenomenon (Zealand, 2007)

the process of understanding the essence of athletes' and their social media usage. Figure 3 clearly shows how interrelated and intersubjective each dimension is to the essence of

the phenomenon by the nearly countless intersections of suggested meaning units and the dimensions of the lived experience.

4.2 DIMENSIONS OF THE PHENOMENON

The selected quotations and excerpts from the participants are those that best represent a succinct description of the dimension of note. Although some participants held a better conceptual understanding of the ethos of their social media use, and were thus better capable of providing a rich explanation of their social media experiences, I specifically decided to choose excerpts from athletes regardless of their ability to expound upon their experiences. Thus, I feel this provides a more complete picture of the essence of these athletes' social media usage as it allows the authentic feelings and expressions of the participants to be ennobled above the ability of one to wax eloquently.

4.2.1 Visuality

The first dimension that was clear throughout nearly every interview was the idea that participants preferred to engage their social media experience visually. Participants regularly suggested that they would often scroll through social media to see what is happening. This often entailed simply looking at pictures or videos. Many participants seemed sheepish in confessing that they did not read the posts of their Friends but rather were more entertained by seeing their Friends pictures instead. Some felt they 'took' from social media more than they 'gave' to the overall environment because of this. When prompted to elaborate on the experiences of taking from social media versus giving to social media, participants alluded that they would generally use social media to see without being seen. However, if they chose to give to the environment of social media, they did so with a picture or video that was worthy of being posted; especially

when it was posted to Instagram as contrasted with Facebook or Pinterest. In the following paragraphs the intersubjectivity of Visuality within athletes' social media usage is explicated with indicative interview excerpts and narratives.

4.2.1.1 The Art of the Post

Throughout the interviews, it seemed that participants gravitated towards describing their social media experiences through pictures or videos. These descriptions often found themselves as stories, both short and long, about how a picture really impacted them or how a video made them laugh. The pictures or videos that they were viewing held significance as primarily entertainment. Oftentimes, the more meaningful the relationship was between two Friends the more likely a shared picture or video would be valued. Furthermore, pictures and videos seemed to be used to describe how the participant is feeling or as a way to share something of significance.

Here Interviewee #2 passionately recalls a time where social media was used to not only retell a memorable event, but used to bolster the experience to something almost ethereal for those involved.

Interviewee #2: Um, (laughter) well we have this, we have two inflatable mooses, moose heads, at our house and, um, I think that that, the moose is definitely, well one it has become the staple of our house. I hated it the first time I came in, I hated it. Cuz I'm from, I come from, like, a very, like, nice, classy house. And so to come in and just see some inflatable piece of junk on the wall is like, "No, I want this house to be nice! And when people come in here, they are gonna think we are a bunch of idiots." Um, but I've grown to love the moose. And the moose shows up a lot. Uh, we recently, one of the guys posted a picture of him holding a gun with the moose. And, uh, don't worry it was a pellet gun, nothing serious. But, he was, like, holding the gun with the moose and he made me take, like, 50 pictures of him with it. And, so, the moose has been stolen. So, I think before, and we had retrieved it. I think there's, like, there's a lot of banter that goes on with the moose. And I think one of the bigger things that happened (laughs) that was a little bit more serious was . . . I don't know. Were you here for the tiger incident?

G: I was not.

Interviewee #2: OK. So the swim team has this tiger. And it's like one of their relics. And, uh, the football team decided they were gonna take the tiger. And so it became, like, an all-out brawl in [name of dining hall]. And some of the soccer guys were there already, I wasn't at this point, and we all ended up sitting there while Public Safety is, like, dealing with everybody. Like, a girl got hit in the face. Like, it was just bad. So, of course [name of former teammate] goes, "OK this is the perfect time to steal the relic. So, [name of former teammate] goes up, and he's friends with some of the swimmers, so he's like, (comforting voice) "Hey, like, what happened?" Like, talking and picks up the tiger and says, "Man this thing is kind of heavy! Like, it'd be hard to steal. See ya!" and just ran with the tiger and chucked it down the hole in [name of dining hall] where we had two guys waiting. They took it outside to a car, and drove it off campus. And, uh, and then, like, an hour later these photos get posted with [former teammate] and [former teammate], do you know them?

G: (shakes head)

Interviewee #2: No, they were the year before you: two seniors, um, who lived off campus who had the tiger gagged and blindfolded and they were holding, like, machetes and, like, all this different stuff and they had him, like, playing chess and they had all these, like, photos and they got posted and it became quite a debacle and the tiger got banned from [name of college] campus, but, because of all the issues it caused, but, um, that was kind of something that was kind of, that caused issues but was fun . . . at the same time. And then [teammate] helped his swimmer buddies, and they broke into the house and stole it back in the middle of the night.

The next example highlights Interviewee #8 simply stating that one of the main draws to social media is pictures (Visuality), and then offers an explanation of why pictures are important along with an example of a picture 'worthy' of a specific social media site.

Interviewee #8: I would say one of the biggest reasons I still even use Facebook is for the pictures.

G: OK.

Interviewee #8: So I think after a long summer of doing so many things, put up pictures of what I did. I'll put a caption for most of the pictures, and I feel that's a way for people that really wanted to . . . like there's been people this summer, I was in Costa Rica, so I came home and I saw people from high school while I was just in [hometown] and I haven't seen them for, like, two years, but they all knew I was in Costa Rica because they saw all my pictures. So I think the one big part of me that is put out there is through pictures and through the albums or whatever it is. Like especially after a long summer, I know what my friends did before even having a conversation, and I've noticed that's also been easier because it's like, "Oh yeah, I saw this picture of you in the Alps. What were you doing?" And the same goes my way, "I saw the pictures of Costa Rica and

Nicaragua. How was your summer?” Um, so it is kind of a more specific kind of thing. Especially for me putting myself out there, it would definitely be through pictures.

G: OK. So . . .

Interviewee #8: And then the Instagram comes in.

G: Yeah. Go ahead.

Interviewee #8: So, I would say that, especially when I’m on vacation or something like I was this summer, um, where, like, a moment comes up where it’s like, “That’s a good Instagram picture.” Put that up. I always link it to Facebook, and then, um, I don’t know those are always . . . Usually if it’s an Instagram, it has to be worthy of being an Instagram picture so it like captures the moment or whatever it is. So like that’s where I use the Instagram; probably, sometimes even more than Facebook.

G: (laughs) OK. OK. Can you give me an example of a picture that would be worthy of Instagram, but not be worthy, or I guess it would be worthy of Facebook, but where a Facebook picture wouldn’t be worthy of Instagram?

Interviewee #8: OK, um, okay so when I was in Costa Rica there was this one day when we were at, um, a beach and I put my hammock up and I was reading my Bible all morning. So I Instagrammed a picture of the hammock with the beach in the background and it told the story of my morning. Um, a picture not worthy of Instagram would be, like, just a casual snapshot of the beach, like midday, people are walking, and it just, like, I happened to be there at that moment hanging out, but there needs to be just a little more to it than that.

Again, here Interviewee #10 offers a more indirect explanation of how Visuality drives the social media experience. In this brief excerpt, Interviewee #10 references ‘pictures’ or ‘see/seeing’ 13 times in five sentences.

Interviewee #10: Um, for the most part just to kind of see what’s going on with other people, check out other peoples pictures and see like what they’re up to, um, just more interested in seeing cool and funny things. Um, and then Facebook, um, I’ll upload, like, I don’t really make statuses but I’ll upload pictures like every once in a while to kind of keep people updated because I know my family members and a bunch of people love seeing it. Um, and so like I know my grandma would love to see a new picture of, like, this year’s soccer pictures, um, I put that up, um, and so . . . and for other people like pictures of other people. I’ll upload those pictures of them just because, um, so . . . so that’s pretty much what I do. I don’t really make statuses, I don’t Tweet very much or anything, just more so if there’s a funny picture or anything or cool picture, I’ll upload it.

Upon reading these narratives, it can be suggested that there is a certain ‘cool’ factor that is implicitly understood by social media users. Naturally, this ‘cool’ factor is subjective as it suggests what each social media user values, but nonetheless there has to

be something significant to the viewer of the picture or video of interest in order to do what the picture or video is intended to do: entertain. Sometimes that entertainment is for the initial individual who posts material and sometimes it is intended for the general audience of the participant's social media profile. See section 4.2.3 regarding Connectedness for more on the notion of posting with the intention of having one's self or another interact with it.

4.2.1.2 See Without Being Seen

By contrast to the previously discussed dimension, in which posting pictures or videos has an implicit art for the poster and the viewer alike; there were also shared themes of using social media to see pictures, read posts, or even upload pictures without significantly interacting with the social media of others. 'Significant interactions' were suggested by the participants to be constant commenting on other peoples' profiles, pictures, or videos. Another way to view this idea, would be to suggest that social media affords the participants of this study the opportunity to reap the benefits of having an inside look at the online lives of others without the conditional or emotional commitment of a relational engagement (i.e., face-to-face interactions or even video-recorded online interactions). Participants could be totally anonymous in viewing the social media profiles of others.

For Interviewee #4, the relationally non-committal opportunities of social media are a positive: they allow the ability to stay updated without the inconvenience of interruptions.

Interviewee #4: Um, yeah, I think usually when I wake up I turn on the TV, watch Sports Center, check on the phone, check all the social media sites, see what's going on, see what's happening in the morning. Um, kinda throughout the day you are just randomly

sitting around not doing anything, just kind of check it. Um, any big things that happen, for me in the sporting world, um, like Twitter is big for me. Get on Twitter, see what's going on. See what the buzz is going on. Um, most of the time, just sitting around, just kind of bored, get on social media, check it out, just kinda something to kill time a little bit . . . Yeah, for the most part. Yeah, just kind of like a time filler . . . Um, I mean just, I'm trying to think, a few days ago, like, I went in for a doctor's appointment, was just sittin' in the office just, like, me by myself. It's just me bringing out my phone, looking at all different social media sites, see what's going on, even if it's nothing really important, even if there's no one I'm, like, really interested in following, just kind of seeing what's on the news feed, see what's kind of going on . . . And just, um, yeah, just kind of wait until something happens, and kill time.

Interviewee #6 suggests that this shade of Visuality is more indicative of the current culture. Interestingly, Interviewee #6 also references pictures towards the end of this excerpt.

Interviewee #6: I think it's totally unnecessary but it's a good time waster. Um, it's good to catch up with people you wouldn't normally hear from if they reach out to you, um, but I just think it's unnecessary for the most part. And I'd say it's a result of the, just kind of, culture we live in. And I don't what it's called but the, ah, just, how our attention spans are a lot shorter. And things like Twitter just go with that perfectly. You know newspaper articles are written so they can catch your attention within the first paragraph and then maybe you'll read the rest of the article. Where all the information that you actually need like the who, what, when, where, why is you know, maybe five sentences long. And social media plays on that really well.

G: So can you give me an example of maybe one time you were on Twitter? And you're like, "I'm really wasting time right now but I don't really care. I just want to get the information."

Interviewee #6: Well, ah, it's mostly the waiting things but I know my generation doesn't, we don't get the newspaper at our doorstep or anything like that and so . . . I can't think of anything specific. But I don't know, recently Miguel Tejada got in trouble for using ADD medicine playing in the pros, and I didn't hear about it from Sports Center, and I didn't hear about it from reading the newspaper, it just caught my eye that somebody re-Tweeted it, maybe somebody I don't even know, and I was like, "OK, I know Miguel Tejada. I recognize that name. I want to see what happened to him. And that was it, you know what I mean? So . . . I did not re-Tweet it . . . I don't really. I just, I don't feel comfortable doing that, I think it's weird because a lot of times I'll go through Facebook or whatever and be like I don't know why anybody cares about this. But, at the same time I am reading it so, you know, I guess that's kind of an oxymoron. Um, I guess the biggest way I would express myself would be pictures, and I don't even take them. It's normally if I'm with other people and they want to take pictures, type of thing. But um . . .

Interviewee #7 and #8 suggest similar experiences of using social media as entertainment because it allows for multiple points of engagement without the inconvenience of disturbing any point of engagement.

Interviewee #7: Ok, yeah. Um, I would say that I, ah, if I have some down time in the morning, um, I'll look at Instagram first and then I'll look at Twitter. Um, I never check Facebook. I'll maybe check it once or twice a week, and it's only if I have a notification. And those pop up on my phone, of course, but, um, I, so, after I wake up in the morning I would look at Instagram, Twitter, I would look if I have a message and then I'd check my email. So it's kind of funny how it works cuz I start with the social media, then I go to the actual messages, then I go to my email. Um, and then probably from like a work day standpoint, because that's what my schedule has most recently been like, I'd like check it in the morning when I'm like grabbing my breakfast, or whatever, then I have like 10 minutes to myself. And then maybe at lunch if I have a few minutes to myself, I check it. And then I always check it before I go to bed at night. I don't know why, I just lay there and look at my phone really quick before I fall asleep. I'm convinced that me looking at my phone screen like tires my eyes out for like five minutes, then I just shut it off and go to bed. But I always look at Instagram, Twitter, before I go to sleep. And sometimes it could be as stupid as like I'm talking to my girlfriend, texting with her and while I'm waiting for her to respond, I'll look at Instagram or Twitter. So it's honestly just more of a time wasting thing than a, "Oh I need to check it." Um, but in terms of the school year, it'll be a similar time frame throughout the day. But I always usually go on Tumblr at night. And I'll usually post, like, one thing a week. So, yeah, I don't, like, post things every single day by any means, but I limit that for sure. But, yeah, I check it frequently but I don't post very frequently. So . . .

Interviewee #8: Um, I would say it's . . . very . . . I wouldn't say it's that social. Um, maybe every once and a while I'll use it to connect with a friend from high school or cousin that doesn't live around, um, but more than that, I'd say it's more entertainment. Um, so, want a good laugh? Watch a video. Bored? Seeing what someone else is doing. Um, yeah, I'd say it's more based on kind of seeing what other people are doing and . . . I don't even really know why I'm that even interested but . . .

Here it is important to note that by seeing the profiles of other people without leaving a trail of engagement allowed the participants to feel as if they could waste a great deal of time on social media. Again, this can be related back to the idea that social media use affords users the opportunity for unsolicited, unlimited, anonymous use or engagement of another's profile. By constantly checking their own social media profiles

and the profiles of others, participants are seeking to maintain a constant flow of information and entertainment that can be viewed as shallow or as deep as desired. It would seem natural for individuals with unlimited access to the information and virtual lives of others to become discontent with the time and effort it takes to read updates constantly. This could explain why participants were inclined to prefer the visual aspect of social media over the verbal aspect of social media: it allows the user to maintain a more constant state of activity and involvement without the need for structured processing, which lends the user to waste time on social media since he or she can be noncommittal in the time occupied in each engagement. This is completely unlike what people relationally experience in face-to-face, physically present engagements. Time is often accounted for in physical relationships because people have other places to be or other engagements to be physically present at. Social media allows users to operate on a level completely separate from physical engagement, thus explaining why Visuality is a highly-shared experience. This could also explain why participants favored visual aspects of social media (pictures or video) over verbal aspects (text or updates). Pictures and video are the closest to physically experiencing something. Yet text implies writing, which implies time, which implicitly moves closer to a more physical engagement. Thus pictures and video (Visuality) allows social media users to experience what others experience without the pressures of physically present relationships.

4.2.2 Patronage

Undoubtedly, it can be anticipated that Patronage is an implicit experience that comes with using social media. Naturally, users will sponsor themselves, other people, and/or entities by explicitly creating their profile in such a way that points everything

back to their selves or by visiting any number of different social media profiles and thus empowering those other profiles to clarify their lives, or at least their social media experience. However, aside from the personalization aspect of social media, it also offers a potentially substantial platform from which the user can support other people or groups. This is where the concept of team patronage comes into action. Many athletes, aside from backing themselves, back their teams. Many understood that there is a direct relationship between the number of Likes a picture or comment receives, the number of people who see those pictures or comments, and the number of people who regularly attend their athletic competitions. This could be viewed as another shade of personal patronage, but I would disagree. Since social media is naturally personalized, it provides personal patronage without effort from the individual user. However, if the user seeks to go out of his or her way to explicitly and tangibly promote his or her team, then this seems different and worthy of a different clarification. This nuance of Patronage again suggests the experientially interrelated, intra-connected, and overlapping nature of social media for athletes.

4.2.2.1 Personal Patronage

Interestingly, many of the participants used pictures to support themselves, but this was not the sole mode of personal patronage. Also of note, athletes who appeared from the interviews to be more well-rounded individuals (as deemed by their willingness to discuss and elaborate on pursuits that did not relate to sports in interviews) seemed more apt to support their own non-athletic interests. This well-roundedness was suggested in the controversial aspects of the interviews where athletes would elaborate more on their non-athletic experiences than their athletic experiences. I took this

willingness to elaborate on non-athletic experiences, with little or no prompting from myself, as a sign of self-examination and depth on the part of the athlete.

Interviewee #3 confesses an athletic identity complex . . .

Interviewee #3: Yeah, I think, um, I think I've found my identity in soccer a little bit . . .

. . . then continues by affectionately elaborating on how a coach separates his personal life from his coaching, professional life, but how that differs from Interviewee #3's personal social media usage.

Interviewee #3: . . . much more so a couple years ago, or last year even, than this year, but, um, his is definitely separate. I haven't seen him really do anything. He might . . . like, I haven't seen him at all. So I wouldn't know, um, he seems too separate his coaching job, which he doesn't really boast about or anything like that, whereas I'm a little bit more, like, putting pictures up so people know I'm on the team, you know? Like, "Oh, he's got a jersey, he's . . ." You know, "Here's a picture of him with the team after they won the conference." So it's more of kinda like updating and, "Hey, like, this is cool."

Interviewee #4 concedes that for many athletes social media is a Patronage machine and alludes that the higher one goes in sports (Division III to Division I to professional) the more acceptable and expected social media Patronage becomes.

Interviewee #4: Yeah, yeah. I think so, I think that's what most, I think that's what it all comes down to really is just, um, a lot of athletes use it as just a way to endorse themselves. Professional athletes, obviously, I think that's exactly what social media's for. Um, when you get down to college athletes, not like D1, yeah, still I think a lot and D3, um, even though it's not as big, I still think that athletes use it as ways to get themselves out there. I mean I find myself, I think it's stupid, but I find myself a lot of times worrying about, you know, getting more followers or getting my name out there, um, putting up photos that a lot of people are going to Like, like, pictures of me playing basketball, whatever.

This excerpt from Interviewee #7 offers a glimpse of how personal patronage moves past the realm of sports and competition.

Interviewee #7: Tumblr for me is my own, ah, my own blog. Where I, um, blog certain things I may be trending, or into, in the fashion world. And it allows me to collaborate all

kinds of different pieces. So like maybe articles, maybe looks, like clothing looks, um maybe certain styles, maybe um just different things that really attract me. And I kind of put it all together on a blog, and the engine that I use is called Tumblr. But people use Tumblr for many, many different reasons. But I use mine solely for fashion purposes.

G: OK. What is the goal when you're using Tumblr?

Interviewee #7: The goal for me when using Tumblr, um, is just a place for me, I guess, to express my interests in fashion. So there are not many places I share that, I'm not very well connected on Tumblr. Um, you can connect with people on Tumblr just like you can on Twitter or Instagram. You can follow people. They'll follow you back, that type of thing. It's more just a place for me to kind of collaborate things that I'm into at certain times of the year or seasons, and then look back at them as time goes by, and see what I was really into let's say fall of 2012, and what I'm really into in fall of 2013, and see how my interests change in certain ways. So yeah, I'm not altogether connected on it, but it's cool, it's fun for me.

Interviewee #9 here suggests that social media is not a personal billboard.

However, this is the case verbally but not visually. Pictures and videos afford Interviewee #9 the opportunity for personal patronage.

Interviewee #9: Um, (laughter) I don't really like talking about myself so, I'm not a person that's going to Tweet or post statuses about, like, "I'm so frustrated today," or something like that. I'm sure I have done that before, actually I'm positive; I know I've done that before. But, I'm not...it's not about me. I don't like doing that. (Laughter) So I stay away from Tweeting necessarily about myself or statuses about myself.

G: Ok. Um, how do you update your profile then? Do you mostly do pictures or if it's not status changes or something like that, what information do you input to social media about yourself?

Interviewee #9: Um, I would say I . . . it's mostly pictures. Mostly pictures of what I did this summer or if it was different weekends, I went home for a wedding on the 4th of July. It's mostly photos so people can see what I did or what I'm doing. Same with Instagram, like, kind of a day to day thing with what you're doing. Like, I would send that to Twitter or Facebook so people can see that, as well. Um, I mean also, like, on Facebook, I'll change, like, I got an internship, like, I said I was working for them blah, blah, blah, or LinkedIn, same thing, you change that to say Jobs, but other than . . . or I'll say like, "Soccer's starting! Come out to the game" or something like that, but not, that's kind of what I'll say about myself. Nothing like really too personal.

I specifically chose to offer this excerpt from Interviewee #9 under the section of Patronage, to be exact personal patronage, because I believe it is more appropriately indicative of Patronage as opposed to Visuality while also providing a quality example of

the intersubjectivity of social media for athletes. So much of social media is visual, pictures, videos, texts, etc., all that imply the need for sight, that separate the Visuality from the experiences of the other dimensions of the social media experience may be impossible. This is simply one example of how Visuality appears in a dimension that is not intended to be visual, but certainly holds Visuality within its confines. Interestingly, Interviewee #9 suggests that personal patronage is not a priority. However, personal patronage still occurs when pictures are posted and statuses are updated. Furthermore, Interviewee #9 hints at team patronage while maintaining that personal patronage is the focus.

4.2.2.2 Team Patronage

Thus Interviewee #9's previous excerpt provides a quite natural transition into the next shade of the dimension of Patronage within the experience of athletes using social media: team patronage. Obviously, personal patronage is about the individual while team patronage pertains to the group that the participant finds him or herself, but what is interesting is that many of the participants felt it necessary to engage others about their athletic competitions as a means of advertisement. Others felt compelled to promote the accolades of other individual athletes who did not do so themselves. There was an intense sense of community within the athletes interviewed. Although I inquired about the communal sense of the athletic department as a whole, the typical response was that it came naturally out of the institutional environment but was not something that was unequivocally discussed or agreed upon.

Here is Interviewee #5's narrative about how posts on social media caused teammates, alumni, and other athletes to be more aware of the team.

Interviewee #5: Um, I think the past couple weeks, like, people have been Tweeting about, like, being excited for preseason and excited to be back with the guys. So I will ‘favorite’ those, or whatever. Like, yesterday I posted a picture on Instagram of me and my roommate that we took at [teammate’s house]. Um, and I posted that on there and a lot of the guys on the team Liked the photo. Um, [teammate] posted a picture of us in the ice bath the other day. So I don’t know, I know, like, guys like a [former teammate] and [a former teammate] saw those and texted us saying they really missed it and that we were, like, killing them by posting all that stuff. So I guess it’s cool to see, like, I guess before preseason started the guys, like, were excited about it and now it’s just, like, goofy stuff going on during it.

G: OK. So, would you say that . . . can you go into a little bit of how . . . the goofy stuff you’re talking about that goes on between you and your teammates, can you describe that a little bit or share a story?

Interviewee #5: Well, I don’t know. I guess well, yeah, like, I guess it’s, like, also peers, two days ago a girl on the girls soccer team posted a picture of like five of them in the ice bath. So, like, me, [a teammate], [a teammate], like, we took a picture of, like, five of us in the ice bath and tried to mimic the exact same one and we all posted it and tagged them in it. And we got a bunch of Likes and we talked about it a lot at church on Sunday . . . so this was Saturday, I guess, so we talked about it at church yesterday morning, so I thought that was, like, lighthearted.

Again, Interviewee #8 offers insight into team patronage but from the perspective of differing between publicly intended social media posts and privately (team only) intended social media posts.

Interviewee #8: Um, with a teammate I know, um, especially at the beginning of the season people put up, like, “First game of the season, Friday, [name of stadium], 4:30.” Um, like, “Let’s roll” whatever. Always Like those. You’ve got to get the Likes up there so everyone sees them. Um, that’s, like, an easy one, right away. Something that [former teammate] always did, she’s the other goal keeper who graduated, um, she would always, she was kind of infamous for her random statuses that would be like, “50% chance of rain. 100% chance of thunder.” Like she would always put up things like that. So, everyone would kind of know, check out [former teammate’s] before the game or whatever. Um, I would say that, um, within the team just recently, actually this summer, um, [teammate] started this Google+ page, um, that’s private for just the team. And so throughout the summer people have posted random things that they’ve been doing or, like, funny videos or encouragement for training, and that’s, like, the first time I’ve ever used that, but it’s been kind of fun. There’s probably been, like, 10 of us that consistently really look at it, but everyone gets the notification or whatever, um, so that’s kind of been a new thing that’s, like . . . because it’s more private, it’s only private. So, you can put up whatever on it and it’s just within the team.

Interviewee #8 goes on here to explicitly discuss the rationale behind team patronage but then quickly returns to the camaraderie that can be had on social media through team patronage.

Interviewee #8: Um, and then I guess just on Facebook it would be, um, if someone happens to put up, like, a picture of the game or, I know my mom will put up a picture of the scoreboard after the game, usually a teammate will always look at those and see those kind of Like them. And I would definitely say, I've kind of said this before, for looking at other people's game statuses my, like, thought process is I Like it, so that more people will see it, so that they will Like it, so that more people will come to our game. (Laughter) That's, like, kind of the motivation behind that. And it's always, like, I remember last year, um, I just had a bad game, maybe it was just, like, one goal or something, but [former teammate] put up a picture that was of her that she just looked so awkward and dumb and the ball was, like, hitting her in the face or something, and she's like, "We all have our moments." So, like, kind of Like little things like that cheer up a teammate, um, would be something that I would do or has happened, I guess.

As the interviews were in process, the participants' body language often became brighter and more engaged when talking about supporting their team. I found this interesting since any number of reasons could explain their excitement: their teammates are genuinely liked and thus enjoy the team, they enjoy competition and conversations about the team relay them to the competitions with their team, they communally experiential events as seemingly more meaningful, etc. Nevertheless, the conscious effort to support the team is certainly of note. Furthermore, there were pieces of information from narratives that suggested participants used social media as a means of professional endorsement. In that, they endorsed their own personal ability to perform in a professional job, postgraduate, setting. The explanation for this could be that since a number of the participants were older (seniors) they are anticipating a job search post-college, and preparing accordingly. To me, this seems a part of personal endorsement, which is why I did not add a 'professional endorsement' section to this dimension.

Furthermore, there was not enough empirical data to suggest that this was an explicitly different theme that needed to be elucidated.

4.2.3 Connectedness

As much as social media may be visual in nature or supports natural affirmation, at its foundation it is communal. After all, the first word of ‘social media’ is ‘social.’ To be social one must have at least one point of connectivity outside of their selves. Enter Connectedness: the third dimension of the athlete’s social media experience.

Connectedness for the participants in this study seemed to very much be an extension of their physical relationships in that being virtually relational through social media enhanced their physical and cognitive relationships and vice versa. There were two separate manifestations of Connectedness in the participants of this study: relational connectedness and connectedness to the ‘outside world.’ These separate sub-dimensions are elaborated on and discussed here.

4.2.3.1 Relational Connectedness

Relational connectedness was the more commonly shared theme throughout the interviews. This comes as no surprise since social media is by nature *social*. However, the idiosyncrasies of this connectedness are fascinating. Some participants valued the ability to maintain contact with friends from high school or other avenues of life that they are not physically close to. Some valued the ability to use social media to look back and remember the ‘good times’ that were had in the past through records of previous conversations or pictures. Other enjoyed how social media was a springboard to initiate face-to-face interactions or more personalized forms of media communication such as text messaging or phone calls.

Interviewee #3 offers an explanation of how being in contact with a deceased friend's family is easily maintained through social media while social media also provides reminders to engage in more non-virtual relationship building.

Interviewee #3: Yeah, I can definitely, like, stay in contact with his family. I think, um, that's kind of our medium now because, of course, he isn't here. So it's a medium to talk to families that I've kind of lost track of and friends I don't see any more . . . Yeah, uh, I usually would get up every morning, log onto Facebook, and check birthdays and if there are any important people that I'd see or close friends I'd shoot them a text. Usually, I wouldn't ever do it over Facebook that was for me just to, like, see it.

Again, Interviewee #5 highlights the importance of social media in developing deeper, more meaningful friendships with others.

Interviewee #5: Ah, I like to be able to see when my friends' birthdays are and normally I wouldn't know that, so it's nice. Like, today is one of my friends' birthdays and I texted him. I wouldn't have known that if it weren't for social media. I don't know if that's a memorable event . . . Ah, well on my birthday, like, on Facebook, most of my friends probably wouldn't know it is my birthday, but because of Facebook a couple hundred of them drop me a note.

Later in the interview, Interviewee #5 says:

Interviewee #5: Um, I think it makes me feel a lot more connected with people. With my friends, not just with my friends, but, like, I feel, like, it gives you an outlet with, like; I get to see what celebrities and professional athletes, like, Tweet. Or if it's just stuff about a game they just played. When I go to concerts, I like to see what they say afterwards or . . . So I'd say it makes it, like I'd say from the celebrity side, like, you . . . there's . . . like, you're not in contact with them but, like, they are not going to mail you a letter to up give updates so it's mass updates and it makes you feel like you know celebrities or . . . so I guess that's cool. And with friends, it's, I don't know, it's just cool to see what they are up to, I guess. I mean sometimes it's, like, too much, like, too much to keep up with, but it's cool to see just what people are up to.

Inside jokes were a common reference to relational connectedness by participants.

Interviewee #7 offers insight towards this sub-dimension while also reconfirming social media's ability to bring together people around a shared phrase or outlook. Notice the undertones of Patronage.

Interviewee #7: Yeah, yeah. Uh, for me it's always fun just to connect with people, um, on Instagram or Twitter or whatever. Specifically, Twitter with inside jokes because, uh, honestly because it's fun for me to go back through and be like, "Oh, I remember when I Tweeted this, and that day when we did this together, or I remember when we used to say this a lot, or . . ." One my most frequently hash-tags (#) is 'all black.' I love black. Why? I don't know. Um, it's always been my favorite color since I was a little kid, and it's a huge part of the way I see fashion, which is, like, simple colors. And so black is a way to just express sharpness, and I Tweet #allblack all the time, but that's just maybe a phase that I've gone through. Um, so it's fun for me and I have certain friends that we throw the 'all black' everything around with. It's fun. There are certain people that I have certain #'s with that we actually say out loud. Like, "# . . ." whatever.

Interviewee #9 elaborates on social media's allowance to keep up with old friends. Again, notice the undertones of Visuality.

Interviewee #9: Yeah, uh huh. Um, Facebook for me it's nice just to keep up with my high school friends at home or people, um, like that, just because I'm not home and California is very far away, so it's just an easier tool to, instead of calling or texting them if they aren't going to call or text you back with the time change and everything, you can get a little snippet of their life. Um, Pinterest for me, that's kind of more . . . I want to be an event coordinator so I get a lot of ideas for, like, social events or wedding invitations or something like that. And that's for more of, like, ideas. I use Pinterest for cooking a lot too. So I'll pull off . . . I cook a lot of recipes through Pinterest. Um, Instagram is more . . . I love pictures, I love seeing people, and kind of what they're doing, and their captions, and for me, you know, if something's cool or if we're doing something just to post that. Twitter is a little different. I usually . . . whatever I Instagram, I link it to my Twitter because it's just a button. And so I don't really Tweet too much, um, but if it is something, it would be, like, someone says a funny line or something like that or re-Tweet something that someone else said.

Later Interviewee #9 offers the negative side of social media Connectedness.

Interviewee #9: Um, overall, I would say some, most aspects are positive I would say. Just, it kind of gets annoying because people don't necessarily know how to communicate without it. And it's, like, hard for person-to-person and I'm kind of a relational person, talking person-to-person, and so, like, other people would rather be on their phones and Tweeting or Facebooking or rather be doing that stuff, but besides that, I think it's positive in the sense of since I am far away from home I'm still allows to know what's going on at home and be connected to my friends there or people, like my roommates I lived with in Italy. Like, we we're all in different states and we can still connect through a search engine like that. Um, Instagram to me has been positive. Like, just photos of what your friends are doing that's kind of what I like about it that. It's just photos; it's not statuses, not a job change or anything like that. Um, so overall I would

say it's been positive trying to keep up with different friends and family members from, like, all different areas of my life.

G: Sure. Do you use . . . let's go back. Can you describe maybe a specific time where you were trying to have a face-to-face conversation with someone and they were just on their phone Tweeting, updating statuses, or something like that?

Interviewee #9: Yeah. Um, my roommate now, she . . . she's a little different now from the summer, but before that she, like, you couldn't have more than a five minute conversation without her being on her phone. Whether it was texting someone, going on Instagram scrolling through Friends pictures, or if someone was talking to her through, like, messaging on Facebook, she always has it up and she said she was still listening to you but it didn't feel like it was because she was always typing in front of you rather than eye-to-eye contact.

Again, Interviewee #10 shares a brief family point of relational connectedness, similar to Interviewee #3.

Interviewee #10: Oh, it just happened, but the comment didn't load when . . . like my grandma just commented on the chocolate fountain one, and someone made a comment about it but when I tried to load it, it didn't load, but it was like something funny. Like my grandma from Minnesota always, like, comments, like, "Love you. Miss you. Praying for you." And she will always tag me in her post so I see them and stuff like that. Um, yeah, that's pretty much it. But, like, everything I do on social media she sees and she comments on all of it, just telling me how much she loves me and, like, how cute I am, pretty much.

These are just a few of the numerous excerpts that pertain to relational connectedness. Although a number of variations of relational connectedness exist among these excerpts and throughout the interviews, the commonality of remaining connected still abides: specifically, connected with the intention of cultivating a relationship.

4.2.3.2 Connectedness to the 'Outside World'

A differing view of the connectedness dimension found a separate aspect of Connectedness among participants. This new theme highlights the Connectedness to other people or entities. The following excerpts accent participants' desire or action to connect with news organizations, world events, businesses, etc. with the expectation of simply gaining knowledge.

Interviewee #4 offers an explanation of how social media provides a constant stream of information. Notice the previously discussed tinges of the sub-dimensions within Visuality.

Interviewee #4: Um, yeah, I think usually when I wake up I turn on the TV, watch Sports Center, check on the phone, check all the social media sites, see what's going on, see what's happening in the morning. Um, kinda throughout the day you are just randomly sitting around not doing anything, just kind of check it. Um, any big things that happen, for me in the sporting world, um, like Twitter is big for me. Get on Twitter, see what's going on. See what the buzz is going on. Um, most of the time, just sitting around, just kind of bored, get on social media, check it out, just kinda something to kill time a little bit.

Interviewee #6 explains how social media helps to keep users informed without the effort of seeking specific news.

Interviewee #6: Well, ah, it's mostly the waiting things but I know my generation doesn't, we don't get the newspaper at our doorstep or anything like that and so . . . I can't think of anything specific. But I don't know, recently Miguel Tejada got in trouble for using ADD medicine playing in the pros, and I didn't hear about it from Sports Center, and I didn't hear about it from reading the newspaper, it just caught my eye that somebody re-Tweeted it, maybe somebody I don't even know and I was, like, "OK, I know Miguel Tejada. I recognize that name. I want to see what happened to him." And that was it, you know what I mean? So . . .

Again, similar to Interviewee #6, Interviewee #7 recounts how social media allows information to come and be filtered by the user to gain as much information or, and in the case of Interviewee #7, more than desired and expected.

Interviewee #7: Um, I follow people that I can stay connected with, um, in other worlds outside of soccer and school. Um, it's just a cool avenue from that standpoint, for me, because without those things I'm not so sure I would be up to date on, like, world events or things going on outside of my scope. Um, I would definitely say that because of Twitter I have found out many more, like, things going on in the world. Um, whether it's, like, an airplane crashing or some type of tragedy, uh, I find it out on Twitter before I find it out, you know, online or from a newspaper or something like that. And I would say that is especially because I don't watch TV that much . . . So that's like my connection to the outside world, if that makes sense . . . Yeah, I love how you can personalize who you follow and certain people Tweet certain ways. Some people, just, tell it like it is. Some people give you the story and you have to actually follow a link to

get to it. You know? Things like that. A person that jumps to my mind is ESPN. They don't, like, Tweet something then say you have to follow a link to read the rest of what they want to tell you, just so they can get a hit on their website. They just, you know, they will be Tweeting live when a big NFL game is going on, or even a soccer game is going on. Like, "Ball just hit off the crossbar." And they'll Tweet about it. Just things like that. You know, if I'm busy or if I'm at work in a meeting or something like that, I can check Twitter and see, you know, what's going on in the U.S. game. Stuff like that.

Interestingly, as can be seen from the above excerpts, the concept of using social media during periods of 'waiting' or to 'kill time' still exists in this dimension while Visuality is present, as well. Although it necessary to separate Connectedness from Visuality, this is one example of how intersubjective and interwoven the social media experience is for these participants. See Chapter 6 for further research objectives that would provide a better avenue to answer some questions these interconnected dimensions beg.

4.2.4 Presentability

The participants' consciousness of the fact that they were ever present on social media appeared to make them more conscientious of what they put on their profiles, how they commented on the profiles and pictures of others, who they followed, and what apparent perceptions were. Nearly every participant referenced some form of Presentability. Whether that was in the form of being bothered by other peoples' 'annoying commenting' that happened numerous times a day, to overly emotional expressions, to perfect pictures, all participants took responsibility for the fact that they knew what social media could be if it was mindlessly used: wasteful and tasteless.

4.2.4.1 Perception is Reality

The idea that what people perceive on social media through pictures and comments may not be accurate was omnipresent throughout the interviews. Some

participants took the stand that they were going to do everything in their power to ensure that their image was not tainted by the rash comments or posts of others, even if that meant un-following a person or asking an individual to remove a picture that could be of question.

Interviewee #3 explains how Presentability is important for personal integrity.

Interviewee #3: Um, yeah, I definitely, I think that's a great way to put it. I really want to . . . I do use it as my secretary to, like, look presentable, I guess. Um, like, I have posted stuff, like, for instance, Young Life Camp. I used it a lot this summer for keeping in contact with my guys and [teammate] and I are on the same team, so we upload, like, pictures and videos, "Get excited for camp! It's in two weeks," or X amount of days. Um, but yeah, I would definitely agree I use it to kind of make me presentable and if there's pictures, of course if there's pictures that I don't look great in or stuff like that, I'll remove those or, just, not that anyone uploads those pictures, but, um, yeah, definitely to look presentable . . . Um, I don't . . . I'm pretty, uh, pretty . . . like I said. I want to seem or want to be presentable. And I feel that's social media, like, when you go and lash out, like, if it's in anger or even if it's in joy, it makes it fake to me. It makes it less genuine and less meaningful because you're trying to be, selfishly or pridefully, like, "Hey, this was awesome. Look I baptized my little cousin today, and it was so awesome." I don't know. It's just, to me it's just . . . Like, for me, I feel it's, like, a secretary, like you said. That's a great example. I really don't, um, I take take take. I don't really give to whatever.

Later Interviewee #3 elaborates:

Interviewee #3: Um, I would definitely say, like, I wanna say physically, and I think I, um, kind of live that out. That's where I find transparency is when you're face-to-face. You can say stuff and not have to go through, like, a foreign language, social media, you know, everybody's watching because . . . (mumbles) . . . I don't know. I don't think people make a new identity of themselves, but they definitely, like, just like I do, you know you want to make yourself presentable you want to show, "Hey, I was at this party doing this and this party, um, or with this girl," and . . .

Interviewee #6 wisely offers a transparent explanation of the, at times, vanity of social media use.

Interviewee #6: Mm hmmm. I mean I think that happens all the time. I get frustrated with my Facebook, I'll just be scrolling through and I probably said it four or five times while I've been at college. I'll be like, "Um, I'm gonna delete this. I'm so tired of this." And I don't. And mostly that's just out of curiosity, you know I still want to know some

things, I guess if you want to take, like, a Christian perspective from it, it's a lot easier for me to, like, go and waste 15 minutes on Facebook and scrolling through and looking at stuff, even repetitively that I've already seen, than it is, necessarily, to go read my Bible for 15 minutes. It's so mindless and easy. You don't have to do anything. You have to concentrate more watching TV than you do checking your Facebook whereas, ah, if you sit down with the Bible you've actually got to pay attention if you want to get anything out of it at all.

Interviewees #8 and #9 provide explanations of how someone's unpleasant or distasteful social media etiquette can taint their personal image.

Interviewee #8: Um, I'd say there's, just, sometimes there's someone who will . . . I don't like it when I'll read, like a, like a, someone Tweeted something and it's on Facebook and it's, like, this rant about something and I'm just like, "You don't need to put that on Twitter. You don't need to put that on Facebook." Like, that's just kind of annoying, almost. So it's just, like, for me, I would never, like, put up a status of my emotional state. (Laughter) Um, so it's just kind of, like, more chill. Like, I'll go on, see what other people are doing . . . I definitely put up more statuses during the season, and say, like, "Hey, our game's tonight. Come out." But I would never say, like, "Oh! So disappointed with the way we played tonight." Like, that just wouldn't be something that I would ever say. So I guess more casual in that I don't like to get too involved with what I write or read. Like, if I read, I don't usually read the paragraphs that you can tell, that are just somebody ranting. Um, I just, yeah, I just kind of peruse and if something peaks my interest, look at it, but I'm not a huge commenter or things like that. I'm just more of a see it (laughs).

Interviewee #9: Yeah, um, I remember last year a girl on our team, she posted this, like, really dramatic, like, paragraph status on Facebook, and everyone started commenting, like, "What? Are you OK? Is something wrong"? And, like, I just, I thought it was really weird, but I'm not a person to, like, go and comment on that. I'd rather, you know, text her and be like, "Hey, is everything OK?" and stuff like that. Um, but I think probably I've asked people to take down a photo that's maybe not the most appropriate. I know I've done that before. And I've asked them, or I'll 'un-Tag' myself so people can't see, like, I was necessarily in that photo or had been with them or something like that.

Overall, there was a sense of frustration among the participants with people who constantly posted or often put up needless pictures with no back-story. Others expressed their frustrations, especially male athletes towards female social media users, about how some social media users feel the need to put up new 'selfies' on a consistent basis.

'Selfies' are pictures a social media user takes of oneself. Often these pictures can portray an image that may not be realistically accurate. Interview #10 explains:

Interviewee #10: Um, I've tried to avoid the people who do stupid things on social media just because, like, I don't want it to affect me at all. So, people are, like, constantly uploading, like, selfies on Instagram, like, I won't follow them because I don't really, I mean, I just don't care to see that and it's just like, "Why are you creating this perfect image of yourself?" Um, and people who Tweet 20 Tweets a day I don't follow just because, because when I refresh my feed I want to see, like, one Tweet from everyone and look through it and then be done for the day. Like, just seeing that and I don't want to, like, I don't want to see what you're doing every five minutes. I just don't really care. Um, and then Facebook I like because it gives a good variety of, like, you'll see people post cool videos of just a bunch of different things, like cool music videos and stuff like that and so I like looking at that because I don't know, social media's a good way to spread things around and usually finding cool things so...

G: Definitely. Can you give an example of maybe sometime you've stopped following someone just because their updates got annoying or you weren't really interested in what they were updating?

Interviewee #10: Um, yeah. There's a girl who, a year younger than me in high school, who was, I mean I kind of knew, kind of acquaintances with, but was never really like super-close with her. And she followed me so I followed her back and then after like a month or so of just, like, tons of selfies and stuff I just un-followed her because it's just, like, I don't know. I just don't care really to see it at all.

G: Mm hmm. Why do you think people upload like tons of selfies?

Interviewee #10: Um, definitely because you can edit them and make them look perfect. It's like, um, I don't know, you can look extremely beautiful in a picture you take of yourself while you're alone, and perfect angle and perfect lighting, and you can totally edit it to make it look even better. Um, I think it's definitely to add to their self-esteem. Um, and I know that because there will be sometimes there will be things, like if I get a ton of, like I send something, "Oh, people like me." I mean, I try my best not to think that way, it's just, I mean I think it's human nature, like, when a ton of people are supporting you, like, you think it's a good thing. So, when girls upload pictures of, like, very scandalous outfits and a ton of guys Like them, they probably feel better about themselves so, when in reality, I mean, I don't necessarily like that, I mean it's not really my type of girl I guess (laughter). So they continue to upload them because people continue to, like, Like them.

There was a common sense of those who regularly engaged in putting themselves out in social media networks with individual comments or individual pictures were conceded, emotionally awkward, unstable, or weak. Simply, athletes may not want to associate with these people because naturally they are more confident in themselves as

individuals and find images that are different from those they find in athletics to be annoying.

4.2.4.2 Emotional Control - Or Lack Thereof

As touched on above, emotional control in the dimension of Presentability held a massive place in the experience of participants. Each felt the need to be conscious of controlling the amount of emotional expression they allow to be shown on their social media profiles as well as who they associated with who used social media as a personal sounding board or soap box. The general sense was that participants did not want needless drama in their lives. This was often expressed by participants removing themselves from the online presence of social media users who were often emotionally scattered or volatile, which meant un-following them.

Here Interviewee #2 suggests that people who are emotionally unstable on social media are cowardly.

Interviewee #2: I think it's one of those things where it's like, if there wasn't a keyboard in between the situation, the situation would have been a lot different.

Interviewee #7 maintains the position that personally social media is not an appropriate place for emotional outlets.

Interviewee #7: Um, I never use it to vent. I don't like to share my emotions on it because that's posted out there for the world to see. Um, as you may know or can see, I definitely put walls up. I definitely, I do protect just who I am. I don't know why, that's just how I've always been, um, and that it showed through my Twitter.

Interviewee #7 continues by turning the conversation towards how personal convictions drive the desired image that ought to be portrayed.

Interviewee #7: I made a comment earlier that I don't use social media to evangelize, I guess you could say. Um, and that's not to say that I think it's wrong, at all. It's just not who I am. My faith is something that is really, really personal to me, I guess. Um, and do

I think that a verse on Twitter is really going to change someone's life? Maybe . . . If it strikes them at the moment they really needed to hear it, um, I think that God can work in really cool and mysterious ways, really. Um, but I can't say I've ever used it for a platform emotionally. Um, I definitely use it to share what I am interested in. Um, specifically, fashion, soccer, just things that are going on in the world. Um, you could, you could, um, I'm sure that by reading my Twitter or by seeing my Tumblr you could make the assumption that I may be a believer because I don't use profanity online, or that I don't Tweet about certain things, and you know you can make assumptions about anyone just about what they Tweet and who they follow.

Interviewee #7 then continues by noting that because social media is not a face-to-face interaction there is room for misunderstandings, which can lead to convoluted communication and tainted images.

Interviewee #7: Um, but I really try to keep my emotions off of it because it's there forever, you know. You are putting that out in writing and anyone can twist and bend what you say into a certain way. Um, and honestly that's not even to say that that's wrong, that it's wrong for people to share their emotions on it. It's just not, I don't know, it's just not how I've ever been. It's hard for me to even sit down and to . . . that's my own personal opinion but emotionally I don't think I would have anything else to elaborate on. Unless you have questions about that . . .

When asked about different emotional situations on social media, such as talking about a coach, Interviewee #4 said:

Interviewee #4: You never know (laughter). You never know when they might. Um, but I just really try to stay away from that, um, just because you know you're putting it out there for everyone to see and usually a lot of times someone can get a hold of that and relay that to a coach . . . And I feel like if you have a problem with a coach and, you know, another player, or whatever. That's between you and that person, not for, like, everyone else to see.

Furthermore, Interviewee #4 goes into detail to share a personal story about how lack of self-control and conflict resolution skills led to pain with a family.

Interviewee #4: Oh yeah. Yeah, multiple times, and, um, it's just really like I don't know. It's just really, like, negative kind of energy around it. You're kind of just, like, "Man, if you got a problem with the coach, go talk to him." A lot of people just seem, just seem like babies. Unfair and I've never really been one to sympathize with that. I mean, even if they are being treated unfairly or what not . . . Just keep it off social media and go handle it yourself. I mean you don't need other people to see that and get their

opinions and I've never really been one to just, like, bash someone else on a social media site. So . . . yeah . . .

G: OK. Can you share a story about that?

Interviewee #4: Um, well actually in high school my dad, my dad was my high school coach, so I would say I wasn't going to be Tweeting on him in there.

G: (Laughter)

Interviewee #4: But there are guys on my team who were unhappy with the playing time they were getting and, you know, would Tweet things about my father that, um, how they weren't getting enough playing time, how he was you now a bad coach, whatever. I don't know exactly what they were, and it's just, like, for me that was hard not to respond because I wanted to just, I wanted to, just, kind of Tweet back at them but I was like, "Well what's that going to do?" It just kind of gets in this whole social media argument and stuff like that. And then you end up saying stuff you don't want and anyone can see and it's kinda just all this big drama around all that. Definitely, I've been around that and the kid that's coming into [the college], I mean, he would do the same thing if he was unhappy with his coach. He would let everyone know and it's just kinda, like you know, you just never really, you never really want to see that. You never really, I just never really enjoyed that or reading that or anything like that so . . .

Interviewee #5 offers an example of how boyfriend/girlfriend relational issues, which was noted by a number of participants, and parental comments have generated negativity.

Interviewee #5: Yeah. Let's see, I mean for me a negative experience like in high school, um, I had a girlfriend, um, and social media for me was like, I . . . it would just trigger, like, jealousy. If, like, my girlfriend would Tweet at another guy or she Liked one of his photos, you know, it'd just, like, trigger this, just, jealousy. Um, and then, like, in the sports world, like I said, like, negative experiences, like guys Tweeting about my father. Really that's, like, taking it really personal. Um, and just, ah, you know, people have said some bad things you know, ah, about others on social media websites and so it's always just kind of like some negative stuff and I can't really pin point a specific example and just stuff like that, in general.

Later, Interviewee #4 elaborates more with a different story about emotional control on social media and how it has affected team life. Interviewee #4 also offers a glimpse of personal growth and understanding regarding social media use.

Interviewee #4: Yeah, I think more it's for me to relax. I've always tried to stay away from, ah, like, being, like, really emotional on social media, just, like, letting it all out there . . . feelings out there. Um, because I think that can really get you into trouble and, like, you see some professional athletes after a game just kind of let loose on social

media, and, um, you know they can get in trouble for that, but I've always been one, like, it frustrates me when I see people, like my friends will have a game or something and you know they just don't play as well and they're, like, on Twitter just kinda, like, expressing their whole feelings. Like, don't use social media as an outlet to express that because I think there are better ways, more constructive ways to do that, but, um, there are times when, ah, you know, I think in the past I've done that and it's just like, "Oh boy. Why did I do that?" You know?

G: Can you share an experience or maybe a story of both when you've seen someone else do that on social media, kinda let loose and vent, and tell how it made you feel, and then maybe give an example of when you, yourself, did that?

Interviewee #4: Yeah, um, just, ah, there's a kid actually, um, he's coming into (the college) but we followed him on Twitter, and he just gets very, like, talks about himself a lot. Um, and, like, after every game you'll know how good or how bad he did, and how, what his thoughts were on it and, um, I think it put him in a bad place before he even came into (the college), just got a bad rep. Like, "Oh boy, here comes this head case drama." Just because what he's Tweeting on social media about basketball games or whatever. Um, and I think there are times where I've, I try to stay away from that now but I know, like, in the past, like in high school, um I think there was like a game, we lost, real big game to like a county rival, and I was just like blowing up Facebook like I always, if there's always something, you always go and search like a real deep quote ah . . .

G: (Laughter)

Interviewee #4: . . . and to get, like, people commenting, like, all these Likes.

G: (Laughter)

Interviewee #4: It's, like, part of it too is, like, sympathy or something like that, um, um, when, like, an experience like that comes up.

Interviewee #8 shares a detailed story about an experience that hits very close to home regarding a lack of control on social media.

Interviewee #8: Because there is no way that it's not going to get back to your coach. And either 1) you are just really emotional and don't realize that, or 2) you don't care. Which makes me, like, that's even more stupid that you don't really care what you are saying about your coach and how they conveys to your team. Especially if it is something about another teammate, like that's just like, that's the part where I'm just like, I'm the casual Facebook user or whatever. I don't want . . . I don't need to read that. I don't need to know that. You don't need to write that. Um, because I think that's where problems can happen. I know someone, he's a football player. He put up something, like, against his coaches. Like, I'm transferring schools and all this stuff. He didn't end up transferring. He's still at the school, but it's just, like, it created all this mayhem of why would you say that? Just like that . . . nothing good can come from that.

G: Yeah, and that happened here at [name of college] with the football player?

Interviewee #8: Not at [name of college]. It was at [name of university].

G: OK.

Interviewee #8: He went to my high school so I saw it.

G: Got it. Um, would you say that kind of . . . can you describe that kind of vibe you get from examples like you just gave for the person at [name of university]?

Interviewee #8: Mm hmm. Well my first reaction would be, I think, kind of irresponsibility. I feel like there are going to be consequences that come from writing that, and it was just a dumb thing to write. Um, it doesn't make me feel sorry for that person. Even if it might even be deserved, it's like I don't feel sorry because your coach said this, and you got kicked out of the meeting. Whatever it is . . . Like maybe if you had told me that, then maybe I could have talked to you about it, but putting that for the world to see and wanting people to feel bad for you, that makes me not feel bad for you at all. Um, and, um, so yeah, I would definitely say negative feelings just because being an athlete I know how much team matters. So something like that is not going to help the team. So it just . . . I mean I could even say angry. If it's a . . . depending on what the person says because it makes me feel like you don't care. Like, why are you . . . what are doing? Nothing . . . just, nothing good. So, um, thankfully that's never happened to a team I've been on. Um, but I know that the littlest things can get around and be blown up. And that's a place, a Facebook post, a Tweet that everyone sees, that's where it can start.

G: Sure. Why do you think people feel the need to put something like that out there?

Interviewee #8: Um, they are looking for support. They are looking for the people to comment on it and say, "Yeah, you are right." Um, maybe they are even looking for a little bit of an argument to happen, um, with the coach. At least then the coach knows he's serious. Um, but I think it's absolutely the wrong way of going about it, which is why I would react negatively. But I think that person probably just is irresponsible and maybe a little immature and doesn't know how to handle it so they are in the heat of the moment and write something that maybe they would go back to and say, "Why the heck did I write that?" But they wrote it and now people have seen it. Even if you delete it, people have seen it. Um, I would like to think that most of those are more of a heat-of-the-moment, like, comment or status or picture or whatever it is. Um, and that when the person was not as emotional they wouldn't have written that, but I think when people get angry that's when, like, the negative consequences will come later because they take that out and write an easy sentence because it doesn't take anything and then two hours later, someone is knocking on their door saying, "What the heck are you doing?" Um, yeah . . .

G: OK. Good. Almost done. You kind of alluded to some negative experiences you've had with social media. Is there anything you want to nail down as specific or elaborate on?

Interviewee #8: Um, just general social media? Like, not necessarily athletic or athletics?

G: It can be either.

Interviewee #8: Um, well, like the incident with [name of university], um, kind of some background. It was a guy named [name of player] who is my age and goes to [name of university]. His younger brother [name of younger brother] lives with my family and is basically my brother. So it's kind of like a family, but not family, with [name of player] was the one who did it. So I saw the consequences from what he wrote and then, um, whether hearing it from [younger brother] or just reading it. Um, then I know now my parents have been very careful with [younger brother] saying, like, "Don't you ever write something about your coaches or your teammates on Facebook, or Tweet it." Um, so

that's caused us or them to be more cautious, encouraging [younger brother] not to do that because that's his brother and he saw the bad things that came from it so now I think he's learned a lesson through [name of player from university], but that's something that even then made me think more like I'd better not write anything that could come across like that. Um, there have been other situations, probably more, well in high school I would say I can think of one where somebody . . . It was figuring out which shirt you wanted to be, like, the class shirt and this girl, one of my friends was the one in charge of it, trying to, like, organize it all. So, like, they put options on Facebook for people to Like, the winner is the shirt. Well, then the winner wasn't approved by the school, so all these people got upset about it and there's this one girl who basically blew up in my friend's face and, on Facebook, and I was just, like . . . I remember getting so mad about that but I didn't comment anything back because that was just going to fuel the fire. But what I did was I actually messaged my friend who had the argument or the words directed towards her. I messaged her and said, I don't even remember what I said, but I said something about, like, "Sorry that girl is saying this and this. I understand . . ." and I kind of encouraged her to try to not react on Facebook because that's just going to be a bigger problem. And I remember she responded back in the private message and was just like, "Thanks. Other people, like my parents have told me the same thing. I'm not going to say anything back." So it's just, like, little things like that usually get on my nerves when I see people saying things that they probably wouldn't say to the person's face, but because it's being typed out they have more guts to say it. Um, so that's where more problems come out because it's easier to type something than say it. Um, but I usually try and avoid entering into those kind of conversations. But that time I was pretty upset about it so I remember even writing it out, but I didn't send it. So I messaged her and was like, "I really want to say something but that is just going to be what she wants anyways."

Some participants felt so emotionally attached to social media that they maintained it took away from their physical experience of life. This manifested itself in some relationships, and many participants dealt with the issue by significantly decreasing their use or deleting their social media. Note the relational issues again expressed by

Interviewee #5.

Interviewee #5: Um, yeah. A couple months ago me and my girlfriend broke up. And just to, like, make it easier so I wasn't thinking about her a lot, I just un-followed her on Twitter and Instagram or whatever, but I found myself, like, still, like, searching her name on Twitter just, like, seeing what she was up to and stuff. So that was like . . . I guess, like, at the time I felt, like, like, imprisoned by social media just the fact that if it weren't for social media it would have been a lot easier to, like, just, like, ignore her, and not wonder what she was up to or whatever.

Interviewee #6: Mm hmmm. I mean I think that happens all the time. I get frustrated with my Facebook. I'll just be scrolling through and I probably said it four or five times, while I've been at college I'll be like, "Um, I'm gonna delete this. I'm so tired of this." And I don't. And mostly that's just out of curiosity, you know I still want to know some things, I guess if you want to take, like, a Christian perspective from it, it's a lot easier for me to like go and waste 15 minutes on Facebook and scrolling through and looking at stuff, even repetitively that I've already seen then it is necessarily to go read my Bible for 15 minutes. It's so mindless and easy you don't have to do anything. You have to concentrate more watching TV than you do checking your Facebook whereas, ah, if you sit down with the Bible you've actually got to pay attention if you want to get anything out of it at all.

Interviewee #10: Um, because, um, I don't know. I wanted to use, better use my time. And, like, I just don't want to . . . If it's not on my phone I don't really care to see it. I don't really feel like I miss out on much but, um, especially in the summer because when your here at school you know everyone on your feed, you know, like, what they're Tweeting about and when they Tweet in the summer, I mean I'm not around so I don't really care to see what they're doing with their friends back home. Um, and, like, I kind of want to be more present so there will be times when I delete my Twitter and, like, I'll delete Instagram and Facebook. Like, there's been times when I've had no social media on my phone and just so I'm, like, more present with the people I'm around, because a lot of people tend to be stuck on their phones a lot so . . .

The intersubjectivity of this dimension, Presentability, is palpable. There may be little difference between the experience of appearing presentable and controlling emotions on social media. Often, as seen above, athletes swing simultaneously between sharing stories of experiences in which emotional control, or a lack thereof, was displayed and the subsequent judgment of the virtual assailant that follows. A good deal of maturity was shown by a number of participants in that they realized their social media activity does not replace the authenticity of their physical, daily interactions with other humans. The action of disengaging from their social media, an effort that seems counterculture to many who were interviewed, to reengage in reality was admirable from the standpoint of the researcher. Ultimately, I suggest that athletes are drawn away from negative social media experiences, which can be primarily categorized as needless drama,

because they are in pressure packed situations. Much like a few participants felt that social media offered a comedic, relational outlet for the stresses of academics and sports (as noted in the Patronage dimension), removing themselves from negative, emotional situations may be an example of a similar form of stress outlet. Many athletes are already a participant in high-drama and at times negative environments: their respective teams. Athletes by nature are competitive and win or lose games, playing time, starting positions, or more. These losses or gains offer enough stress and emotional rigor to their being, so it seems quite natural that they do not want to subject themselves to needless drama: social media negativity. Thus, this becomes manifested in Presentability because athletes realize 1) they do not want to be a negative image bearer and 2) they do not want to be affected by negative drama. Therefore, athletes consciously (although maybe for subconscious reasons) decide they will not represent themselves poorly nor will they allow themselves to associate with others who do.

4.3 FINAL COMMENTS

In this chapter, the four dimensions of the experience that athletes have using social media were epitomized with dynamic elucidation from excerpts and narratives extracted from participant interviews. The four dimensions of note (Visuality, Endorsement, Connectedness, Presentability) helped empirically denominate the primary objective of this thesis:

1) To gain understanding on how athletes use social media to describe themselves, their athletic peers, and their coaches.

This chapter has also helped to provide one sentiment of the quest to answer the sole research question as well:

What does it mean to be an athlete who uses social media?

Throughout this chapter, it was always my goal to allow the participants to carry the voice of the research study. Their narratives and excerpts were to shine above the empirical language of phenomenological methods. Admittedly, some may suggest that I may have, at times, allowed the participants to carry this chapter rather than affording myself the luxury of guiding their voices in cohesion to answer the research question. Nevertheless, I do not think this is the case. Chin-Yi (2008), as I referenced in Chapter 3, suggests that the ability for the researcher to seek understanding from the perspective of the participant is most critical for truth to manifest. Thus erring on the side of the participants' voice is to err on the side of phenomenological truth.

What is interesting to consider is the roles an individual plays in the greater community in which he or she finds value and acceptance can certainly have ability to influence how the individual redefines his or her actions to meet the apparent criteria to receive merit. For example, though the experiences of these participants are very intersubjective, they are well within the context of athletics or sports. It is possible that similar experiences are present in the respective communities of other groups, such as musicians, with different language to describe the experiences. Chapter 5 will propose how the dimensions found in the experience of athlete's social media use are uniquely their own. Specifically how the communal underlying themes of the interviews yield textural and structural motifs about the collegiate athletic community as a whole.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS - THE STRUCTURAL MOTIFS OF ATHLETES' ONLINE COMMUNICATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

While Chapter 4 sought to offer the textural dimensions of the experience that participating athletes had with online communication through social media, Chapter 5 seeks to build on these communal underlying thematic dimensions and provide the structural motifs regarding the collegiate athlete community as a whole. This is in accordance with the second research objective of this study, which is . . . :

2) To use the textural and structural themes from athlete interviews to gather how athletes subconsciously communicate their unique position in their respective societies (that is an athlete in a collegiate environment).

. . . And allows a complete elucidation of the *essence* that is a collegiate athlete's social media lived experience.

Naturally, this is difficult since athletes vary in maturity, expectancy, goals, world views, etc., from campus to campus, sport to sport, and inter-gender. To gain a proper understanding of the athletic experience as a whole, I would have to travel to several different campuses in the United States interviewing as many athletes as possible to yield a data set worthy of an assertion that reflects the diversity of the entire collegiate sporting population. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, I will seek to illustrate the structural motifs of those athletes who are from the institution narrowed because this begins the process of greater understanding for those in communication, sporting, and

media arenas regarding the lived experience of collegiate athletes. See Chapter 3 for a reminder on who these athletes are and where they come from.

To be clear, as Chapter 2 sought to provide a philosophical, literary review of the phenomenon and Chapter 3 provided empirical explanations of data collection processes, this chapter will remain with the lived experiences of the participants as understood through their narratives and interview excerpts. Furthermore, while Chapter 4 described the textural dimensions of *what* the athletes' social media experience pertains of; Chapter 5 will remain loyal to the structural motif of *how* the athletes who participated experience the phenomenon of their social media use in their collegiate environments.

Specifically, this chapter will focus on how athletes vary in their response to the closing question of each interview, "What does it mean to be an athlete who uses social media?" Quite frankly, athletes seemed to be united on a singular aspect: their differences. Every athlete interviewed used social media by different means, through different mediums, for different reasons, and with different expectations. There were commonalities in a few responses to this primary question, but none shared a verbatim conception as to why they used social media and what it meant for them as athletes. Nevertheless, nearly every answer participants provided for their personal perspective on the above question fell into two categories: Responsibility or No Difference. Athletes felt they had a Responsibility as an athlete on their campus to use social media wisely and as a communicative resource. Others felt that an athlete who uses social media is no different (i.e., No Difference) than any other individual who uses social media. Furthermore, many participants held an almost Nescience towards their social media use, which falls in line with the 'subconscious' aspect of the second research objective. This is

quite fascinating and I will attempt in this chapter to unravel *how* they share their social media experience through their differences by also seeking to understand *how* these athletes experience social media relative to the topics discussed in Chapter 2 of the literature review.

5.2 THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY

In Chapter 2, the double-sidedness of social media was alluded to. Since social media is the common informational medium for individuals in this current day and age, as confirmed by many of these athletes in Chapter 4, social media also has the ability to send pervasive negative and/or positive messages to any individual who has an ear to hear or an eye that is willing to see (Hastings & Tracey, 2005; Tandon, et al., 2012; Borzekowski & Bayer, 2005; Riffe, 2006; Vlahovic, et al., 2012; Johnson & Cooper, 2009; Thilmany, 2012; Lenhart, et al., 2010). Social media users can become equally emancipated as enslaved by their consumption and utilization of social media. The two sub-sections below seek to explicate and shed light on the Responsibility that some athletes share in their social media use.

5.2.1 Caution and Awareness

When asked personally, “What does it mean to be an athlete who uses social media?” many participants immediately began to describe their need to express caution and awareness in their social media use. They seemed to understand, either having seen it for their selves or heard of horror stories, what Han and Dodds (2013) said in Chapter 2, these sites can be a “breeding ground for inappropriate behavior and relationships” (p. 11).

Interviewee #3: But, um, I don't really know what it means, I guess, to be an athlete on social media. Just that people probably look at my page and, "Oh yeah, he's a college soccer player". And I mean all my buddies who played in high school don't play anymore. Um, definitely they see that and are probably watching what I'm doing and know I live a different way they do and that I'm living for something greater than they are. Although they may never tell me, they are probably very interested and see that, so they want to be kind of up to date on what I am doing and if they are not then they are not.

Interviewee #6: Um, um, I would guess at a D3 collegiate level, just like at every level, it means you have to be careful. Because even if you're not Tweeting about your sports or anything like that, you can just reflect poorly on you and your character. I just had a meeting with Coach the other day about as a team leader I have to watch what I say, who I say it to, and how I say it, even. Which is a lot of, you know, common sense things, but we all slip up. And if you happen to slip up and put it on social media, you can't really back track. Somebody somewhere is going to see it, and they are going to have some opinion, and maybe it won't affect you, you know in the moment, but it could in the long run.

Interviewee #10: Um, well I just think being an athlete at a school I think you kind of have responsibility. Um, I think a lot of people naturally look up to you. Not to like toot our own horns or what not, I just think people are naturally drawn to people who can do awesome things with their body. Um, because not everyone can do that, not everyone was gifted with that, um, so I think posting stuff that is naturally more positive or uplifting to people is nice because a lot of people take that to heart because I just think, yeah, a lot of people look up to you without knowing . . . But yeah, I think being an athlete you really need to think about what your posting before you post it because, um, one bad thing can tear apart a whole sports team . . .

From these statements, it certainly appears that athletes are aware of the clout they could potentially carry on their respective campuses. This awareness leads them to a healthy level of caution in their social media endeavors. Many previously implied or explicitly stated that they were aware of the public nature of social media. By understanding this, they knew that adding or saying something on social media is not philosophically different than doing something inappropriate in front of 3,000 or more fans at a game, or acting or speaking incongruously at the local mall where they could be recognized by fans and local store owners.

5.2.1.1 Wisdom Perspectives

Stemming from but separate in relation to general Caution and Awareness was the need for a few athletes to express their views and experiences with social media regarding younger generations. They seemed to allow their experiences with younger social media users to influence and guide their own personal, current usage of social media. I feel this is important to add in this section because it is a completely unique perspective yet also connected to those excerpts alluded to in Chapter 4 when athletes referenced seeing professional athletes get in trouble on social media. It is learning from a different perspective (looking on the experiences of others less well-known rather than looking on the experience of others more well-known). This represents a new layer of experiential learning that guides participants' personal usage.

Interviewee #7 explains how following a girlfriend's younger sister broadens the understanding of the pervasiveness of social media among the current culture's youth.

Interviewee #7: Yeah, for me it's been positive, but it's positive because I would never want to . . . you can personalize these things, right? So why would you allow it to be negative if you have control of that? Um, I've never experienced the bullying side of it, but I think, I quite honestly think that's because I'm older, and so I wasn't really young dealing with this stuff. Like my girlfriend, I follow her younger sister just to keep tabs on here, she's, like, 14 years old. But I'm really close; she's like a little sister to me now. But she Tweets about, you know, stuff's going on in her life if she's Tweeting about it. Like, she'll Tweet about drama with friends, about some boy, about whatever, you know what I mean? Girls can be mean, like, really mean. So, I've never experienced that because I'm older, I think, but I can see how negative it can be especially, especially, um, if I were to have had Twitter in high school and to have seen what those kids post because they think they can just post things, like, whenever, like, constantly and say whatever they want and think that only their friends see it and only, like, the people they want to see, see it. None of them make it, like, ah, a closed account. You know how you can make it, like; you have to request to follow someone? None of them have those settings on their accounts so, like, anyone can go on there and see what they're Tweeting even if they're not following them. So, say she Tweets about some kid named Joey, who they hate his guts. And little Joey can go on and see what their saying about him, even though they think he can't.

Interviewee #7 then uses these experiences to elaborate on how these learned experiences and cautions guides his social media experiences.

Interviewee #7: So, I think that there always needs to be the balance of maturity when it comes to the social media, especially if you're looking to get a job. You know, you can't be Tweeting about the night you had last night, when you're five shots deep, and went and did this crazy . . . you know what I mean? Like, there needs to be professionalism that comes with it. And I think for me when I talk about it, and I do sound pretty positive with it, because I've been able to control it. And I've been able to make my account, you know, block it off to other people; I've been able to only follow the certain people I want to. And that's why I said I never check Facebook, because it's not that way. I have way too many followers, there's way too many people on there, I don't know, so I just don't even bother with it, you know? And I've never deleted it, I've thought about deleting it many times but I never have because I never know if I'm going to need to get on there and get in touch with someone or, you know, this day and age if you don't have someone's phone number you can get on Facebook and message them, you know. So I, just, I don't know, I just never deleted it because if I ever need it, it's there. But it would be really interesting to hear what, what high schoolers thought about, like, their use of social media. Whether it was with Twitter or something, because I don't know, they . . . it's just one big drama machine for those kids, but . . . I don't know. And I only follow one, and she's, like, 15 years old, and I can see all of it. I can't imagine if I followed five of them what my feed would look like. But . . .

Interviewee #10 offers similar feelings of secondary or tertiary experiential learning.

Interviewee #10: Um (sigh), I, um, I think that social media is, people are becoming too consumed in it, I think so. I think it's gotten to the point where it's pretty unhealthy, actually. Um, because I know there are 4th and 5th graders and 6th graders that have all these social medias, and are . . . I see people, I don't have a Vine but people show me a Vine. There are people making 30 Vines a day, the really popular ones that everyone knows are Vines of them by themselves and I'm just like, "What are you doing?" Like, "Are you working?" It just seems like people are very consumed with it and I think it takes away a lot from, you know, living a daily life of, you know, interacting with people and achieving things. And, um, I think it's very easy for people to live vicariously through it, and kind of become a different person online. Like, I don't know if you've seen the show, like, *Catfish*, but like it's this show where two people online-date and one of them kind of thinks something's going on with the other one and professionals come in and they have the two meet. And almost 90% of the time the person is someone different then they say they are, and they say they're a guy on social media but they are a girl in person, and it's just crazy how that stuff can work because you never know on social media. It's hard to ever really know if people are telling the truth or lying, it's much

easier to do that through the Internet than when you are in person obviously. Um, so I don't know, it kind of freaks me out and I see young kids out with their grandparents just sitting on their phones or tablets, or whatever they are playing with, like, the whole time they're eating, and it's like, I don't know, appreciate the time you have with them because you don't have them much. So . . . so, I try to, especially when I'm with people, like, I think it's best to have it off or not use it, because . . . be present, it's kind of a big thing for me. So . . .

Since many athletes held different perspectives on their existential social media use, the above excerpts from this section help to reveal how their experiences and perspectives, although variegated in detail, are common in primary thematic elements and therefore important to understanding the *essence* of a collegiate athletes' social media experience.

5.2.2 Endorsement

To return to Han and Dodds (2013), the benefits of social media for athletes, and all individuals for that matter, are massive. Individuals have the opportunity to “meet new people, stay connected with friends, and express their views and opinions” (Han & Dodds, 2013, p. 11). Also, as alluded to in Chapter 4, social media's natural crux is the relational aspect of Connectedness, which implies Patronage of various forms. However, it is important to speak towards a new type of Patronage: Endorsement. In the excerpts from the interviews that were used to provide explanation and bring life to the dimension of Patronage in Chapter 4, no participant explicitly used the word ‘endorsement.’ My word choice to describe the overarching theme of the dimension led to me employ the word ‘endorsement’ at various times in the text as the best way to conjugate the actions described in participant interviews to answer the textural question, ‘*What do athletes experience?*’. However, this is completely separate from the Endorsement that will be used in this chapter. In this chapter, Endorsement is used to describe *how* athletes

experience social media. Chapter 4 elaborates on *what* athletes experience social media as: that is as a form of Patronage. Chapter 5 reveals *how* athletes use social media: that is as a means of Endorsement. Nevertheless, it is important to note the concept of inception and if the participants used the word ‘endorsement’ authentically or if the term was planted subconsciously during the conversational interviews. Still, it is critically important and fundamentally different thus denoting the importance of illustrating how Endorsement as a structural concept is wholly unique and separate from the textural concept of Patronage.

To begin, Interviewee #2 plainly suggests that social media can be used more effectively.

Interviewee #2: I think, honestly, I don’t think . . . (sigh) I think I could use social media way more effectively, as an athlete, probably. Um, I mean one of the things that I do a lot of the time, like, in season, whether it be soccer or lacrosse, is, like, I’m always, I’ll always post on game days. I’ll be like, “Yeah! Got a game today. Come out and watch it at . . .” Blah blah blah. Um, but I think if I was more, um, if I had a Twitter, I think it would be, it would be way more effective, I think. Um, or at least I would be way more effective. And you can really use, you can really use it to your advantage too. Whether you want, whether you want to boost your own popularity and confidence in yourself, or whether it’s boosting your team or, um, (clears throat) whether it’s just having fun, you know, making comments about different events that happened at practice or in a game or whatever. But I think, I think because I’m kind of a constant-quiet user I don’t think that I use it to its full potential as an athlete.

I was unsure of what exactly Interviewee #2 was referring to, so I pressed a little further for explanation, and Interviewee #2 explained the apparent difference between Division III athletes and Division I athletes in how they should appropriately use social media.

G: To endorse yourself, or your team or . . . ?

Interviewee #2: Yeah, yeah exactly. To endorse myself. Like, I never, I don’t think I ever use it to endorse myself.

G: OK.

Interviewee #2: Um, I'm never like, (macho voice) "Yeah, just had a hat-trick. It was sweet." I'm never like that. Um, I think I use it to more endorse, I would say, I use it to more endorse a team than . . . definitely than to endorse, um, me personally. But I could see how, I think that as the level increases, um, the level of play increases, it's more and more important to . . . to endorse yourself. Solely for the reason because, um, once you go from college to pro, or whatever, you're starting to, coaches are starting to see who brings fans as well as, you know, whose scoring goals. So, I think it changes as the level goes up because if you are endorsing yourself as a high school student everybody just thinks you are a douche, or just thinks, like, you're a hot head, like, whatever, as comparable to when you are a pro, you know, or a high-level college player. Like, I can understand how it'd be more prevalent to, like, a D1 football player because people are, like, seeing you on TV every weekend and are watching you all the time. But I don't think for a D3 athlete it's that big of deal to endorse yourself. It's more important to endorse your team, and have fans come out and support you.

Interviewee #4 offers very similar explanations of athlete Endorsement.

Interviewee #4: Yeah, yeah. I think so, I think that's what most, I think that's what it all comes down to really is just, um, a lot of athletes use it as just a way to endorse themselves. Professional athletes obviously . . . I think that's exactly what social media's for. Um, when you get down to college athletes, not like D1, yeah still I think a lot, and D3, um, even though it's not as big, I still think that athletes use it as ways to get themselves out there. I mean I find myself, I think it's stupid, but I find myself a lot of times worrying about, you know, getting more followers or getting my name out there, um, putting up photos that a lot of people are going to Like, like pictures of me playing basketball, whatever. In a lot of ways it's very vain and, um, yeah. I think kind of just a way to get your name out. That's mostly what social media is for most athletes, is ways for them to endorse themselves.

Interviewee #6 suggests similar thematic concepts based upon the level an athlete participates in his or her sport.

Interviewee #6: And um, yeah . . . um, yeah, otherwise as an athlete I mean it's also a great way to reach out, as a pro a great way to interact with like fans and things like that, to make them feel like you actually know them, even though you've never seen them in person, but, ah, I don't know I think it creates a lot of, a sense of false intimacy, I guess, that would be the best way to put it. But you can also use that to your advantage, if you so choose. So . . .

It is also clear from Interviewee #10's initial excerpt in this chapter that there are themes of Endorsement in the latter sentences of the quote. Here I have provided the conclusion to the initial thought:

Interviewee #10: Um, and I think it's a good way, and easy way to influence people like to support you in that sport. I think it's a way to attract people to games and stuff like that because you can make one post that hundreds of people see. Like, if you say, "Game tonight at home at 7:00," there will be 300 people that follow me that see that, and it's just so . . . if there's things you want to make an announcement about and you want a ton of people to know about, I think it's really easy to connect.

These excerpts from participant interviews help to reveal *how* Endorsement is a shared experience of the shared Responsibility of being an athlete. Simply, part of the Responsibility of being a collegiate athlete is being a good ambassador for one's self, team, athletic department, and institution. Being a good ambassador is twofold: maintaining a worthy public persona which implies drawing others to oneself virtually (i.e., social media) and physically (i.e., games). Even some excerpts in Chapter 4 allude to a shared Endorsement experience in describing the Patronage that is shared between athletes, their teammates, and their fellow athletes across the athletic department. This further shows how intersubjective the social media experience is for participating athletes. The next section will continue to reveal how interconnected the social media experience is for athletes by again highlighting the shared unity through diversity.

5.3 NO DIFFERENCE

Findings of the interviews revealed that many participants found little difference in an athlete using social media compared to a non-athlete using social media. This could be, given the context of the college which confined the study's participants, athletes identify first with being a human being or a citizen or a student as something greater than an athlete. Thus, the mindset and cognitive considerations of their involvement with social media would flow first through the lens of their first self-view (a human, a citizen, a student, or something else) and not an athlete. This could be a reason that explains why

some participants saw *no difference* in their social media experience as an athlete compared to their experience as a non-athlete. It is entirely dependent on the initial context the athlete chooses to see him or herself and then accurately reports their observations. Still, the tension between Endorsement and No Difference is stark and will be discussed below in light of participant excerpts.

5.3.1 Similar Experiences . . . Different Contexts

The following excerpts provide an insight into *how* athletes view their social media usage as no more different than any other individual using social media. There are a number of similarities to the textural descriptions found in Chapter 4. The difference, again, is the contexts in which these answers are given that make these narratives separate and valuable to the structural descriptions that are imperative for this current chapter.

5.3.1.1 Similar to Patronage and Endorsement

The following excerpts have common themes to Patronage or Endorsement that have been previously discussed in this research paper. What is interesting is that they use these descriptions to clarify how they believe an athlete's social media experience is no different than a non-athlete's social media experience. The common language and underlying themes suggest that 1) either participants were unable to deconstruct the elements of their experience, or 2) that their experience is extremely interconnected.

Interviewee #4: (Sigh) Oh, to be an athlete who uses social media? I think a lot of it is just kind of having fun with it. Um, I feel like being an athlete and social media now a days, is kind of like they go hand in hand. I feel like (laughter), I feel like most athletes feel like social media is, like, a must. I feel like, I feel like as an athlete you obviously have people, like, who come and watch you play and you know I think people enjoy that about themselves, like, people coming to watch a team, or watch you play, and I feel like a lot of times they carry on off the court, off the field, you know, into the social media

world. Yeah, and I feel like being an athlete and having social media kind of, kind of just go hand-in-hand nowadays. So . . .

Interviewee #7: Um, for an athlete (clears throat), I think from an athletic standpoint, like I've said, it ah, it's the first thing that draws me to it. Um, it's truthfully the best way to stay in contact with other teammates, other people I've played with, and it's the best way to stay in contact with the team's you love. You know? The team's you follow. Um, from a fan's standpoint, you know, and then from a competitive standpoint it is a great way to Tweet about a big game that's coming up, or Tweet about [other university], Tweet about Swede's, you know, things like that. Ah, it's a great way to have some type of camaraderie with your teammates. Um, yeah it's always, it's always really fun as an athlete to get on Twitter after a big game and see what people had to say about it. Um, and I had mentioned [other university] just because those are usually huge games for us. But there are other games, for me as an athlete playing PDL, which is just semi-professionally, we still have people that write blogs about our teams, people coming to our games posting thoughts about you know things like that. From an athlete's standpoint, it's cool to hear what people have to say about . . . I mean that can be negative too, there's plenty of negative stuff, yeah, don't get me wrong, um, but at the end of the day it's just people's opinion. So you can't let it really affect it, affect you, so yeah.

Even within these excerpts the line between Endorsement or Patronage and Connectedness is faint, at best. Participants flow freely from one theme to the next as if there really is not a difference in being connected to another person and endorsing oneself or one's team.

5.3.1.2 Similar to Connectedness

The tensions continue when participants feel that there is No Difference in athletes using social media compared to non-athletes using social media, but use lingo that suggests their existential primary aspect of social media usage is Connectedness, which is the expected commonality across all social media users.

Interviewee #5: Ah, I don't know. I wouldn't say there's, like, a huge connection personally, I guess on, like, Twitter and Instagram I follow, like, a lot of professional athletes, so I guess it's cool to see, like, what kind of gear they are wearing or whatever. And, like, what area they are training, I don't know, like, pictures of them training or whatever, I guess it's cool to see. And I guess, like, otherwise you wouldn't really be able to catch a glimpse of that.

Interviewee #8: I think it's not too different than another person using social media, but I think it can be . . . it can provide a lot more opportunities for success or failure: um, success being a community at [name of college] between athletes, success being encouraging a teammate with a funny photo. Um, positive little moments can be a big deal to an athlete who has an environment or maybe a lot of pressure. Those funny videos can be a little helpful after a rough practice. Things like that. Negative, meaning consequences after a stupid statement, a stupid photo, um, commenting on things. Just saying things you shouldn't say. It can provide an outlet to people who probably shouldn't have that outlet because they are going to use it, and they shouldn't. Um, but I think if you use it responsibly, it can be very useful and encouraging other teams, encouraging teammates, um, telling family, like, family can see what your team's doing. I mean, even my grandparents have Facebook and they can check the scores if they weren't able to come to the game. Um, little things like that can provide more of opportunities that are more important for an athlete than for just any other person who doesn't have some score to tell the whole world every weekend or whatever it is. Um, so yeah, it can be a very positive thing. It could also be a very bad thing.

Interviewee #9: (Laughter) I've never really um put the two together. I mean I would just say because social media pretty much I think, it's huge in our generation and stuff like that, it's just kind of the norm now. It's not like, "Oh she's always, or he's always Tweeting or Instagramming" or stuff like that. Um, I think if someone isn't doing that it's kind of the opposite and you're like, "Oh, why don't you have a Twitter, why don't you have Facebook, why don't you Instagram, why don't you this, why don't you that," and um, but I mean, I don't know, I just think it's normal. If I'm an athlete compared to a normal student I know everyone has one so, um, so, yeah.

G: So you would say there's not really a way to differentiate an athlete's Twitter or Pinterest page versus a non-athletes page or in the way that they use it?

Interviewee #9: Um, I think on Twitter or something like that the guys necessarily I follow, they follow, like, the big football or soccer stars and they will, like, re-Tweet stuff like that. Or if they follow, like, a really big college football team, they'll Tweet more about that than I'd say the normal person would. I just don't normally follow anything like that. So, I personally don't follow something like that. But I can see some differences in different athletes but just not necessarily myself.

G: How about from male athletes to female athletes?

Interviewee #9: Yeah, I definitely think there is a bigger difference. They, I would say males, are more the people that follow the bigger, the football stars, baseball stars, basketball stars and re-Tweet that more than a woman. Like, I don't even follow Hope Solo or anyone on the women's national team; it's just not really a huge interest to me.

G: Sure.

Interviewee #9: Um, I probably think males are probably more interested in, like, professional sports than females are interested in professional sports.

The common theme through these excerpts is that social media provides a Connectedness, as alluded to in Chapter 4, and that is also is the essential crux of all

social media experiences. Since some participants suggest that there is No Difference in being an athlete or a non-athlete using social media when defaulting to describe their common Connectedness experiences, or the experiences of those close to them, it could be that participants have such a shared experience with social media use that they cannot individually articulate their personal convictions relative to their social media experience. Furthermore, social media may be so culturally relevant for today's younger generations that explaining one's beliefs as to what constitutes the primary experience is difficult. Much like asking a wine-taster to explain how her palette senses smells or tastes that others' cannot, athletes cannot remove themselves from the culture of social media to explain how they are unique in their experience of social media as an athlete.

5.4 NESCIENCE

One of the defining aspects of phenomenology is the subconscious experience of individuals regarding a particular phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty, 2004 [1962]). As Merleau-Ponty (2004 [1962]) expressed, and was discussed earlier in Chapter 3, fundamental elements of phenomenology include “a direct description of our experiences” without “subconscious motivation” (p.vii) that yield indispensable invariant properties of the experience of interest (Creswell, 2013; Goulding, 2005; Jopling, 1996). This Nescience regarding the phenomenon, in this study social media, allows the “immediate experiences” (Goulding, 2005, p. 302) to be best expressed and therefore understood (Creswell, 2013; Spiegelberg, 1982). The interviews did yield the structural motif of Nescience in two significant forms: Routine and Open Space.

5.4.1 Routine

Many athletes expressed their Nescience towards their social media use by describing how they used social media in their expected moments of life. Naturally, athletes rarely explicitly stated that they used social media as a subconscious buffer in their schedule because part of their phenomenological use of social media is that it precedes contemplation.

The below sections elicit how athletes in this study regard social media with Nescience in their daily Routine.

5.4.1.1 Daily

During the interviews, many athletes felt that social media was a part their expected and anticipated daily routine. To begin, Interviewee #4 expresses how social media is a part of his morning schedule:

Interviewee #4: Um, yeah, I think usually when I wake up I turn on the TV, watch Sports Center, check on the phone, check all the social media sites, see what's going on, see what's happening in the morning.

Interviewee #7 tells how social media is part of both his morning routine, before going to work or school, and night routine, before going to bed:

Interviewee #7: . . . after I wake up in the morning I would look at Instagram, Twitter, I would look if I have a message and then I'd check my email. So it's kind of funny how it works cuz I start with the social media, then I go to the actual messages, then I go to my email. Um, and then probably from like a work day standpoint, because that's what my schedule has most recently been like, I'd like check it in the morning when I'm like grabbing my breakfast, or whatever, then I have like 10 minutes to myself. And then maybe at lunch if I have a few minutes to myself, I check it. And then I always check it before I go to bed at night. I don't know why, I just lay there and look at my phone really quick before I fall asleep. I'm convinced that me looking at my phone screen like tires my eyes out for like five minutes, then I just shut it off and go to bed. But I always look at Instagram, Twitter, before I go to sleep.

5.4.1.2 Yearly

Social media can also be a part of a yearly Routine, for athletes in this study. The following interview excerpts suggest that, for athletes, social media can be an expected part of their competitive season. Interviewee #2 tells about how, before every game, some form of social media update goes out to Followers to let people know:

Interviewee #2: Um, I mean one of the things that I do a lot of the time, like, in season, whether it be soccer or lacrosse, is, like, I'm always, I'll always post on game days. I'll be like, "Yeah! Got a game today. Come out and watch it at . . ." Blah blah blah.

Interviewee #8 shares a similar scenario with a teammate's social media profile:

Interviewee #8: Um, with a teammate I know, um, especially at the beginning of the season people put up, like, "First game of the season, Friday, [name of stadium], 4:30." Um, like, "Let's roll" whatever. Always Like those. You've got to get the Likes up there so everyone sees them. Um, that's, like, an easy one, right away. Something that [former teammate] always did, she's the other goal keeper who graduated, um, she would always, she was kind of infamous for her random statuses that would be like, "50% chance of rain. 100% chance of thunder." Like she would always put up things like that. So, everyone would kind of know, check out [former teammate's] before the game or whatever.

Clearly, athletes may not explicitly know that social media is a part of their Routine, just as it may not be explicitly understood that they turn on the TV in the morning or they text their parent after a game. However, just as these actions may be accepted as normal, social media has become Nescient to athletes in that their use of social media during specific times of the day and year become expected as normal, and therefore move outside the realm of conscious effort into Nescience.

5.4.2 Open Space

Maybe a more natural time that athletes use social media is in the Open Space that naturally occurs during their schedules. These moments, which can be filled with anything, allow one's mind to wander and body to relax. For collegiate athletes, who are

often accustomed to having busy days with full schedules, it can be difficult to simply sit and do nothing. Therefore, social media often becomes their ‘time filler’ during the day. In fact, participants suggested they used social media in “down time,” to “kill time,” or to “waste time” 17 separate occasions during interviews. The concept of using social media while being “bored” was expressed six times while “scrolling” social media pages as a form of “mindless” “entertainment” was described 18 times.

Here Interviewee #4 elaborates on how social media fills the Open Space that can occur during the day:

Interviewee #4: Um, kinda throughout the day you are just randomly sitting around not doing anything, just kind of check it. Um, any big things that happen, for me in the sporting world, um, like Twitter is big for me. Get on Twitter, see what’s going on. See what the buzz is going on. Um, most of the time, just sitting around, just kind of bored, get on social media, check it out, just kinda something to kill time a little bit . . . Yeah, for the most part. Yeah, just kind of like a time filler . . .

Interviewee #4 goes on to share a specific time the he used social media in this manner:

Interviewee #4: Um, I mean just, I’m trying to think, a few days ago, like, I went in for a doctor’s appointment, was just sittin’ in the office just, like, me by myself. It’s just me bringing out my phone, looking at all different social media sites, see what’s going on, even if it’s nothing really important, even if there’s no one I’m, like, really interested in following, just kind of seeing what’s on the news feed, see what’s kind of going on . . . And just, um, yeah, just kind of wait until something happens, and kill time.

Interviewee #6 also suggests that while social media can fill Open Space, as it is less than needed:

Interviewee #6: I think it’s totally unnecessary but it’s a good time waster.

Here, Interviewee #8 tells how social media is a form of entertainment when she is bored, therefore in Open Spaces of the day:

Interviewee #8: I'd say it's more entertainment. Um, so, want a good laugh? Watch a video. Bored? Seeing what someone else is doing.

Again, Interviewee #4 echoes Interviewee #8 in that social media is used when Open Space becomes boring:

Interviewee #4: Um, most of the time, just sitting around, just kind of bored, get on social media, check it out, just kinda something to kill time a little bit.

5.4.3 Nescience to Conscious

On a few occasions, athletes shared experiences in which they came to a conscious realization of what their personal social media experience had or has become. Below are two examples of when athletes came to almost an epiphany of how they experience social media themselves or from others they are close to.

The first example of how athletes in this study have had a Nescience to Conscious experience with social media actually comes from a secondary source. Here Interviewee #9 tells a story about how a roommate was so consumed with social media that it was difficult to carry on a conversation with the roommate without feeling like social media was dominating. Interestingly, this story is an example of when the Nescience of the social media phenomenon moved into a conscious distraction. Here is the story:

Interviewee #9: Yeah. Um, my roommate now, she . . . she's a little different now from the summer, but before that she, like, you couldn't have more than a five minute conversation without her being on her phone. Whether it was texting someone, going on Instagram scrolling through Friends pictures, or if someone was talking to her through, like, messaging on Facebook, she always has it up and she said she was still listening to you but it didn't feel like it was because she was always typing in front of you rather than eye-to-eye contact.

This story transitions nicely into what may be the best example of when the Nescience of the social media phenomenon for athletes in this study becomes Conscious.

Interviewee #6 elaborates on the realization of how social media can be completely unnecessary and draining:

Interviewee #6: Mm hmmm. I mean I think that happens all the time. I get frustrated with my Facebook, I'll just be scrolling through and I probably said it four or five times while I've been at college. I'll be like, "Um, I'm gonna delete this. I'm so tired of this." And I don't. And mostly that's just out of curiosity, you know I still want to know some things . . .

It is interesting that Interviewee #6 chooses to revert back to the Nescience of social media use after coming to the understanding of what it has become. As discussed earlier, the complexity of the social media experience for these athletes is undeniable and this could be another example of how choosing to not understand or be aware in a manner that elicits personal change allows Nescience to quietly blanket the experience and use of social media for athletes in this study.

5.5 FINAL COMMENTS

In Chapter 5 I have primarily shown how participants expressed their personal convictions as to why social media usage for athletes is no different than social media usage for non-athletes. Candidly, the difficulty in elucidating the separate elements to provide a structural description of *how* athletes experience social media contrary to *what* they experience through social media cannot be overstated. The number of similar themes from Chapter 4 that creep up again from participants who have already noted such themes as critical to *what* they use their social media for was simultaneously frustrating as well as engaging. As previously stated, the difference in these excerpts is the contexts in which they are revealed. The context relative to this chapter was always the final question of the interview, "What does it mean to be an athlete who uses social media?" which was intended to aid in providing the *essence* of the phenomenon. Although there are tensions

between the macro-differences from the structural level of Responsibility, No Difference, and Nescience, there are also tensions that exist between the micro-differences within the No Difference section: namely, the return of the textural dimensions of Patronage and Connectedness. Participants often used different verbiage to describe how they rationalized and explained their reasoning as to why there is No Difference from a non-athlete using social media, yet the themes were common to those expressed in Chapter 4.

Changing focus, in an effort to circumvent the topic before offering a conclusion, as credited to O'Reilly, et al. (2012), in Chapter 2, social media is a significant outlet for many professional athletes and sport organizations, however for adolescents, discussing sport interactions is not of high importance as shown by the “relatively small number and depth of discussion threads” (p. 75). Collegiate athletes typically range in age from 17-22 years, depending on their birthday and how many years they remain eligible to play a collegiate sport (factoring injury, suspension, non-competition years, amongst others). This leaves many collegiate athletes as adolescents and, at best, young adults, depending on their maturity level assuming this is independent of chronological age. Many of these athletes are learning to cope with, and maneuver life’s challenges as they are working through their collegiate years and likely will not come to a complete maturity until well beyond their undergraduate graduation. It is reasonable to assume that while in college they have not grasped a full, quality understanding of how to manage and handle their social media interactions in general; never mind their social media use relative to athletics, simply because they have not yet come to a full and complete cognitive, relational, and emotional maturation. What is interesting is that in looking back through my notes there was no noticeable difference in maturity level, perspective on sport or

self, outlook on life, etc. per athlete for their response to the final question of the interview.

In an effort to explain the tensions that exist between Responsibility and No Difference, relative to the textural dimensions of Chapter 4, I will venture to suggest that athletes identify, naturally, with different people or entities. Simply, each athlete is different, was raised differently, and likely has different goals and expectations. This lends them to gravitate towards people or things which they feel comfortable with and resonate with and away from those that seem harmful or abrasive (Cetinkalp, 2012; Findlay & Bowker, 2009; Kosik, 2012; Leahy, Pretty, & Tenenbaum, 2008; Roters, Logan, Meisner, & Baker, 2010). The natural tendency to drift towards commonality is reflective in the athletes' goals, ethical orientations, social standings, and more (Cetinkalp, 2012; Findlay & Bowker, 2009; Kosik, 2012; Leahy, et al., 2008; Roters, et al., 2010). As athletes congenitally drift towards a specific worldview and existential understanding, the inherent attraction intensifies to and between the commonalities that guide athletes' choices and behaviors. Since social media is such an apparent given in the current culture of the participants, it is expected that their social media experiences would also be subject to the pulls and pushes of their personal wills. Thus the tensions between the contextual descriptions of the participants are unambiguously a microcosm of their greater quest to find their place in the world at large according to their own personal understandings.

To bolster my personal position (without stealing the weight of Chapter 6), I will offer insight into why understanding these dimensions and motifs of athletes' social media usage is important to the sports and social media worlds at large. Athletes have a

place on the campuses of many colleges and universities as students who are privileged to represent their selves, their respective family, and their school in one cumulative action: their respective sport. Although athletes may not recognize it, they are a unique population and thus a unique exploration of them is needed to have a complete understanding of their subjective experiences. Athletes are often the billboard of academic institutions and social media is one of the potentially most public methods of personal and corporate advertisement. The phenomenological study at hand offers the opportunity to begin to scratch the surface of how the *athletes* feel about their social media use: basically, their willingness to offer themselves to any person who would be willing or interested to learn about or follow them virtually.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, FUTURE ENDEAVORS, AND CONCLUSION

6.1 OVERVIEW

In the previous two chapters, Chapters 4 and 5, I offered the findings of this study on two levels. Chapter 4 initially elucidated and exhibited the dimensions that constitute the experiences that athletes have with their social media. The resulting dimensions that manifested in this part of the research study denote the textural expression of the athletes' social media experience. Textural expressions illustrate *what* the athletes experience. Figure 3 above visualized the intersubjectivity and interconnectedness of each of the four dimensions. However, I neglected to display how each dimension deconstructs within itself. See Table 3 below for clarification. Chapter 5 was written to present the structural

Table 3

Explanation of Dimensional Breakdown of Athlete Experience with Social Media

Textural Dimension	Coincidence 1	Coincidence 2
Visuality	The Art of the Post	See Without Being Seen
Patronage	Personal Patronage	Team Patronage
Connectedness	Relational Connectedness	Connectedness to the 'Outside World'
Presentability	Perception is Reality	Emotional Control - Or Lack Thereof

motifs of athletes' social media communications relative to the environment they find themselves in at their respective college. The structural motifs of *how* the athlete participants in this research study used their social media materialized through the

thematic tensions within their interviews and narratives as either a Responsibility that must be maintained and managed appropriately or as no differently (No Difference) compared to non-athletes. Furthermore, the underlying Nescience regarding athletes' social media experience was obviously subconsciously implied while a few conscious realizations proved that this certainly is a structural motif of *how* athletes in this study experience social media. Thus the *essence* of being an athlete who uses social media was distinguished further.

In this terminal chapter of the research study, I will seek to discuss the imputations of this study as they apply to athletes and their experiences with social media within the context that has previously been highlighted. In short, I will offer the *essence* of the athlete experience with social media. I will also offer a pithy discussion of this study's limitations and future endeavors for research pertaining to the social media experience of individuals. All of this will be done while explicating how and why this study is important to the greater body of knowledge regarding communications, management, and sports.

6.2 RESEARCH DISCUSSION

This research study has several contributions that have the potential to shed new light on social media use in specific populations and open new doors for future study that could offer greater understanding to this constantly changing avenue of communication. The findings of this study show that the answer to the guiding question, '*What does it mean to be an athlete who uses social media?*' is extremely complex, interrelated, and existential. As Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 revealed, many times the athletes themselves have differing opinions on what they find to be the motive for their social media use, why

they use social media, what their expected return from social media is, and ultimately the place that social media holds for an athlete. Nevertheless, athletes generally agreed that there was a communal sense of relational engagement that manifested through maintaining a standard of decency, individual and/or corporate promotions, and valuing visuality over verbiage when using social media. However, the tensions arose when athletes had to pinpoint and describe the unique place that athletes who use social media hold. This is where the complexity, interrelatedness, and existential nature of this phenomenon were revealed. Some athletes blatantly said that there was no difference between an athlete using social media compared to a non-athlete; therefore, for these athletes the meaning of an athlete using social media was lost because their answer was universally interchangeable with any person, profession, or position. Merely, social media is a virtual coffee shop at which all people of races, creeds, and backgrounds can congregate without judgment. However, other athletes held that there was an implicit responsibility that is inherited when an athlete uses social media: a responsibility to the individual athlete, the team, and the athletic community of the college. For purposes of this study, the essence of college athletes' personal perspectives of their own social media use has emerged to simply be that social media is an avenue for the subjective expression and consumption of their unbridled selves. I hold that this research study will contribute to the overall body of research that is available on social media and athlete communications by opening doors to the great unknown of existential social media usage.

One of the ways that this study expands the available body of research is by moving the focus of the research past the numbers to the individual. The empirically

numerical analysis of social media is well chronicled (Duggan & Brenner, 2012; Lenhart, et al., 2010). Still, few scholars have attempted to analyze the data that has come from these quantitative studies to expand the breadth and depth of research to the individual. Although social media use is extremely new in the history of pictorial and textual communication, the scope of social media is growing rapidly in terms of who uses what medium and for what reason or end (Duggan & Brenner, 2013; Han & Dodds, 2013; Hempel, 2013; Kishner & Crescenti, 2010; Lenhart, et al., 2010; O'Reilly, et al., 2012; Thurston, 2013). I believe this has caused research to simply keep up with the changes in socialization by numerically analyzing the shifts in population use of online communication services rather than anticipating how to best utilize the upcoming trends of the virtual communication landscape. This method, while always trailing the proverbial curve, also loses the voices of unique and select populations (i.e. athletes) to the analytically derived mean of the masses. One of these unique, select populations is athletes. Athletes are often viewed by non-athletes 'through the fence.' Particularly in college, athletes share a common bond with fellow students, but are separate. Athletes miss class, have meals that are paid for by the institution, travel at the expense of the institution, and more. Non-athletes see athletes keep to themselves on the way to practice or games, eat together in the cafeteria (if athletes share a cafeteria with non-athletes), and garner television and news interviews. Thus, the divide between athletes and non-athletes in college grows with the rate of information exchange. Social media plays a role in this information exchange. Resolvedly, this study brings the focus back to the unique population, athletes, and seeks to understand from their unique perspective what it means for them to use social media and communicate online. This study moves past the

shortcomings of quantitative research and utilizes in-depth, existential qualitative research to its fullest. This study allows the voices of the individual within unique populations to begin to be heard by going directly to them to find answers to the question at hand. What this study has accomplished that quantitative studies cannot is to reveal the complexity that exists within the individuals of select populations of interest: namely that although common experiences are shared, common motives may vary.

Understanding these experiences and motives as meanings from a phenomenological perspective is natural since the voice and word of the participant is followed as fact and simply allow the findings to be expressed as they unfold (Goulding, 2005; Van Manen, 2011). In allowing the empirical aspect of this study to follow this guidance, I was freed to explore the best way to phenomenologically analyze the data. Since no studies that I could find sought to understand social media from an existential, micro-level, I was left to develop what I felt was the best phenomenological methods to follow. By staying close to the Husserlian phenomenological philosophies that were elaborated on by Goethe and following Schutz's phenomenological methodologies, I was able to find what I felt was a quality phenomenological research process that allowed for the creativity and flexibility necessary to expand the known research of online communication into a new, albeit micro-level. Through these processes, the reader is left with an understanding of the athletes' experiences as friends, teammates, students, and family members: all of which make up who they are as athletes. The existential nature of using social media is impacted by many more elements than just being an athlete: it is the sum of the experiences of the individual who uses social media as a medium of communication. Allowing the participant the freedom to express themselves as needed in

the interviews and allowing me the flexibility to work within the phenomenological methods that I chose, enables the reader the best possible opportunity to fully grasp the experience of the athlete as if it was their own.

It is from the perspective of the participant that I believe allows for the most novel avenue of research to be paved. Moving past the vast numbers of social media and communication research allows true understanding to take place. There is no longer an expectation of causality or expectancy in data analysis, but rather a fluid openness to the data that is derived from participant interviews. A relational engagement with the participant on a level field of simply seeking to understand their experience ensures that the truth of the experience is revealed from the perspective of the participant without the gap of interpretation that can occur when researchers and research study readers interject their personal thoughts and experiences. This study has opened the door to the expressible experiences that come with social media. No longer are mass statistical analyses the only means of understanding the ever-changing landscape of online communication. Now, those interested can understand the experiences of communicating online with social media directly from the communicators themselves. This means that in addition to the quantitatively expressed experiences of social media users, the phenomenon of social media usage from the standpoint of athletes can be understood in a qualitative, flexible manner that is needed to appropriately represent and communicate the actual lived experiences of those involved. By focusing on a small, isolated population who has specific, unique experiences, the voice of the participants are held as supreme and not lost as simply a number in the crowd. The variability and vacillating nature of existential experiences of athletes using social media are best suited to be

understood in a phenomenological manner to enable the research to be dynamic and nascent; reflective of social media and online communication as a whole.

6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The limitations of this study are predominantly related to the breadth of the research elements covered. To be specific, I mentioned in Chapter 3 that the number of participants (nine) although appearing small, falls within the confines for empirical phenomenology (Crewsell, 2013). Still, the sample size could be a limitation. The majority of these participants were male, which could be another limitation. Furthermore, I elaborated in Chapter 3 on the unique environment from which the participants were drawn: a NCAA Division III liberal arts institution that is unashamedly religiously affiliated. It could be that participant responses were more a product of their academic and athletic environment than a reflection of their self. Put differently, athletes from secular institutions (who may have faculty and staff that have different views on social media) may offer different feelings about their social media use.

Based upon the findings of Coyne, Padilla-Walker, and Howard (2013) and Wang, Chen, and Liang (2011), I believe that the findings of this study are not unique to the environment of the participants. Coyne, et al. (2013) found that freshman women at a secular institution spend more than 12 hours a day on some form of media use (ranging from social networking to texting) and that media use was associated with lower grade point averages among other negative academic outcomes, including lack of sleep and substance abuse. Wang, et al. (2011) garnered similar results when their random survey of 48 mixed-gender students from a secular university revealed that nearly three-quarters of those participants spent more than six hours a day on social media sites which led to a

negative impact on academic endeavors. Hence, the seemingly unique perspectives of the participants in this study regarding their apologetic or bashful use of social media relative to their relational, athletic, and academic pursuits may not be so exclusive or *sui generis*. It could be assumed that the negative results of the students in the described studies would drive them to reconsider how they could have garnered more positive results (i.e., better time management relative to social media usage).

Nevertheless, as previously alluded to, social media is an extremely new form of communication that is ever-changing. When coupling an ever-changing medium with a specific group, collegiate athletes, that also vary greatly from institution to institution and sport to sport, it can be difficult to isolate the specific, unique dimensions and essence of the phenomenon. It is quite possible that there are other factors that affect the outcome of athletes' experiences with online communication using social media that were not explored in this thesis research study. Consequently, the results of this study may not be able to be duplicated at other institutions or at other levels of sport (i.e., amateur, semi-professional, professional, or others). The difficulty in conducting a study of appropriate breadth to represent the athletic population appropriately almost indefinitely means the researcher will sacrifice the depth of existential experience.

Additionally, the revelations in this study are limited to what the participants deem as their experiences from their personal perspective. Those perspectives must be taken as fact, but they could be influenced by other outside authorities that shape the athletes' cognition and expression of their social media experiences (i.e., coaches, parents, athletic administration, professors, peers, fans, or others). Although phenomenology calls for interviews with the individuals who experience the

phenomenon, which I accomplished in this research study, there may be other perspectives on athletes' social media usage and experiences such as coaches, parents, non-athlete peers, and so on. These perspectives could express a more holistic essence of the collegiate athletes' social media experience. Again, the difficulty in this approach would be that it increases the scope of understanding but threatens to lose the existential truth of those who participate in the phenomenon. Additionally, as suggested above, this study did not control for gender. Assuming that men and women communicate differently and have different interests, this could also have skewed the data and misrepresented the true communicative expectations of each athletic population.

The ultimate limitation of this study is the phenomenological foundation that was laid from the onset. Phenomenology is simply not intended to establish conclusions. By nature of the methodology, more questions will arise after the culmination of the thesis than answers. Though frustrating and trying to researchers or readers inexperienced in phenomenology, this lack of conclusion is inherently good because phenomenological methods seek understanding of the phenomenon of note rather than an explanation of it (Creswell, 2013; Dukes, 1984). The value of these newfound questions from a dimensional phenomenon of lived experience is that other researchers can take this visceral understanding and can dive into other research methodologies that allow for deeper, more specific forms of explanation (Dukes, 1984).

6.4 FUTURE ENDEAVORS FOR RESEARCH

Undoubtedly, this section of the thesis is the most exciting for me to explore and consider. As I mentioned, phenomenology by nature offers more questions than can be answered and the potential for expert researchers in various fields of expertise to seek

solutions is tremendous: the ripple of effect of knowledge. In vein with the previously discussed limitations, future research studies should seek to understand the influential components of those in contact with athletes concerning social media usage. Many athletes in this study spoke of others being a critical part of their social media experience. Following up with these ‘others’ (i.e., parents, siblings, teammates, fans, coaches, friends, etc.) could prove to provide a valuable dimension to the lived experience of athletes who use social media that athletes themselves cannot articulate because they may not be cognizant of the ‘others’ influence.

Other research endeavors would do well to try isolating specific athlete populations to analyze their unique place in social media and online communication. There are unknown numbers of athletes who use social media, and indubitably specific populations differ from others. Specific nationalities could differ in their experience. Specific sports could differ in their experience. Specific colleges could differ from others. Amateur youth athletes could differ from professional athletes. Even males could differ from females in their social media communicative experience. Researchers can begin by aiming to isolate populations and seek their existential experience to determine if these isolated groups vary from the norm of the masses. As noted in Chapter 1, an offshoot of this endeavor could be seeking to understand how athletes uniquely ‘brand’ themselves through social media and how fans or followers ‘buy into’ respective ‘brands’ of specific athletes.

What excites me most about the potential for further research is for the gap to be bridged between educators, academic administrations, athletic administrations, coaches, and athletes. I would like to see further research done on the management implications of

these findings. I would like to see more advanced and expert research done to explicate how coaches, professors, and athletes can better relate and interact. When coaches and athletic administrators can bridge the gap to their athletes, they gain the trust of the athletes which earns them the right to communicate with and motivate the athletes. In turn, I would like to see how coaches, academic administrations, and athletic administrations, at the collegiate level, can develop more advanced, well-supported policies and educational opportunities to empower their collegiate athletes with the skills and knowledge necessary to get the most out of their social media experience. The goal of this would be to provide not only a quality social and educational experience for individual athletes in college, but for teams, for athletic administrations, for universities as whole, and for athletes to understand how to better market themselves for post-athletic career, professional, workforce positions. For example, Junco, Heilberger, and Loken (2010) found that students who utilized Twitter to foster academic discussion regarding a specific class scored better and were more educationally engaged than the control group of non-Twitter users. Based upon these findings, it would serve universities well, as a whole, to seek the best way to marry the tremendous potential of social media and the holistic education that secondary academic institutions *should* be providing their students (and therefore, their student-athletes). The potential for relevant administrative policies and educational opportunities circumventing social media serve to fulfill the role of the university by helping athletes to be better *student-athletes*. Also, athletes could be better served through this advanced, tailored education by molding a young man or woman to be better equipped to manage the rigors of adult life post-college. This could be seen as a

worthy investment for the institution because athletes often times, for better or worse, serve as the biggest billboard for some universities and colleges (Benford, 2007).

6.5 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This study is my first and completely novice attempt at significant empirical research at large, and specifically phenomenological research. I believe this thesis impartially represents my honest and best effort to provide a meaningful addition to the body of knowledge that joins sports, managerial, and communications ventures. Understandably, these connections are new (social media) and very specific both to me and to the scholastic body at large. Often times I had little idea what direction the study could take. Nevertheless, the freedom that comes with phenomenology was both comforting and invigorating. I was often driven to continue with the understanding that as long as I stood the course that Husserl, Goethe, Schutz, and a great many others have blazed before me I would end up with a complete work that was simultaneously open-ended and complete. The entire thesis experience brought me to a depth of appreciation and admiration of scholarly researchers that I was previously numb to. Each chapter allowed me to grow as a researcher and scholar while remaining in concomitant awe of the quality research studies I was able to draw from, and subsequently the men and women who created them. It is with these comments that I proudly offer this thesis as the apotheosis to months of tedious, evaluative reading of literature and vigilant examination of the phenomenon of interest to augment the available body of athletic, communicative, and experiential research.

APPENDIX A VERBAL INTRODUCTION SCRIPT

Hello, my name is Garrett Bireline. I would like to invite you to be in a research study that will examine social media and its role in the lives of athletes. You were selected as a possible participant because you fill the demographic that this study is focusing on: collegiate athletes. I am conducting this study through the Department of Sport Management at Liberty University. Would you like for me to explain the study in more detail to you?

I'd be happy to. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe how an athlete's personal use of social media affects his or her identity and image of himself/herself, teammates, and coaches. There is no more risk in participating in this study than is encountered in everyday life. If necessary, information regarding abuse, neglect, intent to harm self or others, etc., will be reported as outlined in the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' "Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect" policy. I can provide you this information if you would like.

Although you will not receive compensation for participating in this study, the benefits to participation include the advancement of societal knowledge on the role social media plays in the lives of collegiate athletes. The study could allow for more research to be done on social media's role in the lives of other individuals from other age ranges and backgrounds.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that may be published, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Specifically, all audio files and transcriptions of interviews will be saved to a personal laptop and filed on an external hard drive. The laptop will contain a personal username and password that is known only to me, the researcher. The external hard drive will be stored in a locked cabinet in a home office. This data will be stored for a minimum of three years and then deleted from the hard drive. If a participant withdraws from the study after the interview, no transcription will be done, and the audio file will be saved with the other participants' files. I will be the only person to have access to the laptop, the external hard drive, and the contents of both. The researcher will ensure participant confidentiality by numbering each participant and eliminating all names. Voice recognition will not be possible since the interviews will be transcribed and the transcriptions will be the only data source used for the study.

If you agree to be in this study, you will meet for one interview that will last for no more than 30 minutes. All interviews will be conducted on the campus of Wheaton College in the Student Recreation Center room 243. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The total time needed to participate in this interview will not exceed 45 minutes.

Would you like to participate in this study?

Please take a look at this consent form, and if you feel comfortable participating, please return it to me at your convenience.

If you would like to ask more questions, I can give you my contact information. I can be reached at gmbireline@liberty.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

APPENDIX B

EMAIL/WRITTEN INTRODUCTION SCRIPT

Hello Mr. /Ms. X,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study examining social media and its role in the lives of athletes. You were selected as a possible participant because you fill the demographic that this study is focusing on: collegiate athletes. I am conducting this study through the Department of Sport Management at Liberty University.

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe how an athlete's personal use of social media affects his or her identity and image of himself/herself, teammates, and coaches. There is no more risk in participating in this study than is encountered in everyday life. If necessary, information regarding abuse, neglect, intent to harm self or others, etc., will be reported as outlined in the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' "Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect" policy.

Although you will not receive compensation for participating in this study, the benefits to participation include the advancement of societal knowledge on the role social media plays in the lives of collegiate athletes. The study could allow for more research to be done on social media's role in the lives of other individuals from other age ranges and backgrounds.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that may be published, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Specifically, all audio files and transcriptions of interviews will be saved to a personal laptop and filed on an external hard drive. The laptop will contain a personal username and password that is known only to me, the researcher. The external hard drive will be stored in a locked cabinet in a home office. This data will be stored for a minimum of three years and then deleted from the hard drive. If a participant withdraws from the study after the interview, no transcription will be done, and the audio file will be saved with the other participants' files. I will be the only person to have access to the laptop, the external hard drive, and the contents of both. The researcher will ensure participant confidentiality by numbering each participant and eliminating all names. Voice recognition will not be possible since the interviews will be transcribed and the transcriptions will be the only data source used for the study.

If you agree to be in this study, you will meet for one interview that will last for no more than 30 minutes. All interviews will be conducted on the campus of Wheaton College in the Student Recreation Center room 243. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The total time needed to participate in this interview will not exceed 45 minutes.

If you would like to participate in this study, please take a look at the attached consent form. If you feel comfortable participating, please return it to me at your convenience.

I can be contacted at this email address for more information and questions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,

Garrett Bireline
Graduate Student
Department of Sport Management
Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

APPENDIX C CONSENT FORM

Social Media in Sports:
A Phenomenological Study of Athletes and Online Communication
Garrett Bireline
Liberty University
Department of Sport Management

You are invited to be in a research study examining social media and its role in the lives of athletes. You were selected as a possible participant because you fill the demographic that this study is focusing on: collegiate athletes. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Garrett M. Bireline, Department of Sport Management, Liberty University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe how the use of social media affects Division III college athletes' perspectives of themselves, their teammates, and their coaches.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
Agree to meet for one interview that will last for no more than 30 minutes. All interviews will be conducted on the campus of Wheaton College in the Student Recreation Center room 243. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The total time needed to participate in this interview will be no more than 45 total minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

There is no more risk in participating in this study than is encountered in everyday life. If necessary, information regarding abuse, neglect, intent to harm self or others, etc., will be reported as outlined in the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' "Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect." If necessary, participants will be provided with contact information of their campus medical office, campus counselors, and encouraged to consult trusted mentors, parents, or professors regarding any possible adverse reaction to the study.

The benefits to participation are the advancement of societal knowledge on the role social media plays in the lives of collegiate athletes. The study could allow for greater research to be done on social media's role in the lives of other individuals from other age ranges and backgrounds.

Compensation:

You will not receive compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Specifically, all audio files and transcriptions of interviews will be saved to a personal laptop and filed on an external hard drive. The laptop will contain a personal username and password that is known only to me, the researcher. The external hard drive will be stored in a locked cabinet in a home office. This data will be stored for a minimum of three years and then destroyed by deleting them from the external hard drive. If a participant withdraws from the study after their interviews, no transcription will be done, and the audio file will be saved with the other participants' files. I will be the only person to have access to the laptop, the external hard drive, and contents of both. The researcher will ensure participant confidentiality by numbering each participant and eliminating all names. Voice recognition will not be possible since the interviews will be transcribed and the transcriptions will be the only interview data used for the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Wheaton College. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question(s) or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. If you decide to withdraw from this study at any time, contact the researcher immediately. Please see below for contact information. Data collected from participants who have elected to withdraw will be kept within the laptop in the file with the audio files of other participants, but there will be no transcription of their interview or their transcribed interview will be deleted.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Garrett M. Bireline. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at gmbireline@liberty.edu or 630-442-2437. Mr. Bireline's advisor, Dr. Clark T.W. Zealand, can be contacted at ctzealan@liberty.edu or 434-582-2887.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I, _____, have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. I understand that I am participating in an audio-recorded interview session, and hereby give my consent to the above documentation.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers: 1625.080213

IRB Expiration Date: August 2, 2014

APPENDIX D INTERVIEW GUIDE

Central Question/Theme:

What does it mean to be an athlete who uses social media?

Opening Question:

Can you share a story about a memorable experience you have had with social media? Please feel free to share anything, as there is no right or wrong answer during this time. Keep in mind that for this interview social media consists of Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr, MySpace, Instagram, blogs, etc.

Social Media Experiences:

- * Can you take me through your typical use of social media in a given day?
- * How would you describe your use of social media?
- * How would you describe your experience with social media?

Social Media as an Outlet:

- * How do you use social media to convey how you feel about yourself or what you are personally experiencing?
- * Can you describe how you use social media to communicate your interactions with other teammates or athletic peers?
- * Have you ever used social media to describe your relationship with your coach? If so, can you describe the situation?

Ramifications of Social Media:

- * Can you share a story about a negative experience you have had that involved social media?
- * Can you share a story about a positive experience you have had that involved social media?
- * What does it mean to be an athlete who uses social media?

APPENDIX E
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY IRB LETTER OF APPROVAL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 2, 2013

Garrett M. Bireline
IRB Approval 1625.080213: Social Media in Sport: A Phenomenological Study of
Athletes and Online Communication

Dear Garrett,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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