

Experiences of Coping with Injury in NCAA Division I Athletes from Low-to-Middle Socioeconomic Status Backgrounds

Matthew P. Bejar
Mount Mercy University

Ted M. Butryn
San José State University

The integrated model of psychological response to sport injury is one of the most extensive frameworks to address the psychological responses to athletic injury. While this model indicates that socioeconomic status (SES) influences how athletes cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally respond to injury, this claim has not been substantiated. Individuals from low SES backgrounds typically experience an exceptional amount of stress, which may complicate how they cope with a negative event. The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore the experiences of athletes from low-to-middle SES backgrounds coping with injury. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 NCAA Division I athletes who had sustained recent injuries that lasted at least four weeks. The data were analyzed using an interpretational qualitative analysis. Multiple participants initially reacted with catastrophizing thoughts; however, they employed mostly adaptive forms of coping, such as comparison to past experiences, perseverance, and positive reframing. Overall, multiple participants adopted a "shift-and-persist" approach, which helped buffer some of the stress associated with sustaining an injury. These findings suggest that exposure to adversity does not necessarily diminish resilience. Rather than applying a "blanket" approach, coaches, athletic trainers, sport psychology professionals, and other practitioners should be cognizant of SES and other identities when physically and psychologically assisting injured athletes during rehabilitation.

Address correspondence to: Matthew P. Bejar, PhD, Department of Psychology, Sociology, and Social Work, 1330 Elmhurst Drive NE, Mount Mercy University, Cedar Rapids, IA, 52402; Phone: (319) 363-1323 ext. 1861; Email: mbejar@mtmercy.edu

Injuries are unfortunate and inevitable occurrences in any sport. Athletes invest a great deal of time towards achieving optimal performance. Because their self-worth is often tied to these performances, they often perceive a long-term injury as a traumatic event (Quinn & Fallon, 2000; Smith, Scott, & Wiese, 1990). On a sociocultural level, intense training regimens, attractive incentives and rewards for successful athletes, dangerous terrain and climatic conditions, and cultures that glorify risk and minimize pain increase the likelihood of injuries occurring (Pargman, 1999), especially in collegiate and professional sports. On the psychological level, managing an athletic injury can be cognitively, behaviorally, and emotionally challenging (Pedersen, 1986). Injured athletes are subject to a number of psychological detriments, such as lowered self-esteem (Smith et al., 1990), mood disturbances (Carson & Polman, 2008; Quinn & Fallon, 1999, 2000; Udry, Gould, Bridges, & Beck, 1997), helplessness (Carson & Polman, 2008), social isolation (Henderson, 1999), and fear of re-injury (Podlog & Dionigi, 2010; Podlog & Eklund, 2006). Consequently, understanding the psychological aspects of injury is crucial as athletes work to rehabilitate and return to play.

Several sport psychology scholars have examined both the psychological predictors of injury (Andersen & Williams, 1988; Williams & Andersen, 1998) and the post-injury responses of athletes (Bianco, Malo, & Orlick, 1999; Hagger, Chatzisarantis, Griffin, & Thatcher, 2005; Quinn & Fallon, 1999, 2000; Rees, Mitchell, Evans, & Hardy, 2010; Tracey, 2003; Walker, Thatcher, & Lavalley, 2007; Wiese-Bjornstal, Smith, Shaffer, & Morrey, 1998). The integrated model of psychological response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998) is one of the most comprehensive frameworks to address the psychological responses to athletic injury and rehabilitation. In this seminal paper, Wiese-Bjornstal and colleagues outlined several situational factors (e.g., type of sport, level of competition, scholarship status, access to rehabilitation services, family influences) and personal factors (e.g., type of injury, history of injuries, personality, gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status [SES]) that influence athletes' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. In turn, these responses are posited to impact the physical and psychosocial recovery outcomes. Ample research has substantiated this point, particularly for the use of coping strategies. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined *coping* as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 141). With regard to athletic injuries, problem-focused coping has been associated with rehabilitation attendance and adherence (Hagger et al., 2005). Also, instrumental coping (i.e., attempts to ease stress by becoming educated about the injury or seeking the advice of health-care providers) has been associated with shorter recovery times (Quinn & Fallon, 2000). Furthermore, injured athletes who utilize social sup-

port have been shown to cope more effectively with the demands of rehabilitation (Green & Weinberg, 2001; Rees et al., 2010). Clearly, the coping strategies that athletes employ carry significant implications for both their physical recovery and psychological well-being.

The Influence of SES on Stress and Coping

While numerous scholars (e.g., Albinson & Petrie, 2003; Quinn & Fallon, 1999; Rees et al., 2010; Tracey, 2003; Walker et al., 2007) have investigated various components of the model, and although Wiese-Bjornstal et al. (1998) listed SES as one of several personal factors that influence an athlete's response to injury, this assertion has not been investigated. In his research with African American athletes, Messner (1992) found that young male athletes from lower-class backgrounds were likely to view sport as essential for social mobility since other options of supporting their families were limited. He noted that many athletes lacked the resources to train, hone their skills, and be noticed by others. Because athletic programs at colleges provide this support, there is significant value in athletic scholarships granted to athletes from low SES backgrounds. As a result, these athletes may experience pressure to obtain and maintain a scholarship. Because there is more at stake, they typically experience greater levels of stress compared to athletes from upper-class backgrounds that have more options. Outside of sport, individuals from low SES backgrounds are likely to encounter more stressors (e.g., family conflict, economic strain, discrimination, exposure to violence) than those from more affluent backgrounds (Chibnall, Tait, Andresen, & Hadler, 2005; Kristenson, Eriksen, Sluiter, Starke, & Ursin, 2004; Santiago & Wadsworth, 2009). In conjunction with sport-related stressors, these factors can present challenges when low SES athletes are confronted with a long-term injury. The influence of SES on resultant coping strategies is a potentially vital yet strikingly underdeveloped area of research in sport psychology.

While there is ample research in other disciplines (e.g., health psychology, public health, nursing) suggesting that individuals from low SES backgrounds encounter many challenges and consequently employ maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., Brady & Matthews, 2002; Chibnall et al., 2005; Farmer & Ferraro, 2005; Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011; Jarvis & Wardle, 1999; Kunst, Groenhof, & Andersen, 1999; McIlvane, 2007; Mossakowski, 2008; Santiago & Wadsworth, 2009; Williams & Rucker, 1996), other studies have revealed exceptions to this view. For example, Chen, Miller, Lachman, Gruenewald, and Seeman (2012) proposed that low SES individuals who demonstrate resilience adopt a "shift-and-persist" approach to life problems. People who utilize this strategy manage their stressors through cognitive reappraisals and emotional regulation (shift) and endure life with strength by focusing on the future (persist). These authors found that adults who grew up in

low SES households and utilized “shift-and-persist” approaches had lower risks of disease; whereas, this strategy was not found to have a protective effect in high SES individuals. Consequently, these techniques may help individuals from low SES backgrounds cope with hardship in a productive manner. Likewise, Williams and Lawler (2003) found higher levels of hardiness (i.e., having a sense of control, being committed to oneself and work, and viewing stressors as challenges instead of threats) in minority groups of adults. These authors concluded that even though living in impoverished conditions typically results in community stress, it has the potential to foster more hardy attitudes compared to individuals living in more affluent neighborhoods.

Culture and Coping Research in Sport Psychology: Methodological Considerations

A number of cultural sport psychology scholars have investigated cultural influences on coping with acculturation and discrimination (e.g., Blodgett et al., 2014; Kontos & Breland-Noble, 2002; Schinke et al., 2010). Additionally, Plaatje and Potgieter (2011) qualitatively explored the role of environment, ethnicity, and culture in coping with stress before, during, and after competition in 33 South African professional football (soccer) players. They found that non-Caucasian athletes were exposed to many barriers associated with a lower socioeconomic position, such as absence of family support structures, home circumstances, poverty, and substance abuse, which hindered coping in these participants. In contrast, Caucasian players identified intrapersonal variables, such as personality differences, high expectations, and communication problems that complicated their abilities to cope with acute stressors in sport. To our knowledge, however, there has been no investigation that has centralized culture (e.g., SES, ethnicity, nationality) with regard to athletes’ responses to injury.

Additionally, Anshel and colleagues (e.g., Anshel, Jamieson, & Raviv, 2001; Anshel, Kang, & Miesner, 2010; Anshel, Sutarso, & Jubenville, 2009; Anshel, Williams, & Hodge, 1999; Gan & Anshel, 2009; Puente-Díaz & Anshel, 2005) have quantitatively examined gender and cultural influences (e.g., race, ethnicity, nationality) on how athletes cope with acute stressors (e.g., experiencing intense pain during a match); however, a similar investigation pertaining to chronic stressors (e.g., long-term injuries) is lacking. Also, SES has not been taken into consideration. Moreover, the complexity of this topic may not have been adequately captured using scales. While these aforementioned studies demonstrated significant differences in coping styles among males and females and various ethnic groups, the authors failed to provide meaningful explanations to support their conclusions. Analogous to Thorpe’s (2010) critique of traditional quantitative methodologies in studying extreme

sports, these studies on coping may also reinforce stereotypes (e.g., females using primarily emotion-focused coping) while failing to account for the complex cultural dynamics, regional differences, and intricate political histories of the participants. In other words, the predominant use of scales may obfuscate the participants' subjective experiences. By strictly adhering to positivist methodologies, researchers may inadvertently marginalize certain individuals as the "Other" and ultimately misrepresent their histories and ways of thinking (Ryba & Schinke, 2009).

The present study is primarily situated within a *social constructivism* paradigm. In contrast to positivist claims of singular, generalizable truths, constructivists assert that realities are multiple, subjective, and co-constructed (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Employing qualitative methodologies, particularly those rooted in grounded theory, are valuable when theories regarding a particular phenomenon are underdeveloped or lacking (Creswell, 2007). Grounded theory can also be a valuable analytical strategy in illuminating the voices of minority groups (Ryan, 2013). Moreover, inductive approaches enable participants to create new meanings that may reflect the nuances of SES and related identities not considered in previous frameworks. Accordingly, by utilizing qualitative methodologies, researchers can produce a more comprehensive and rich account of how the cultural contexts of athletes influence how they cope with injury and other chronic stressors.

While sport and exercise psychology scholars were initially slow to include publications and conference presentations focused on cultural diversity issues (Kamphoff, Gill, Araki, & Hammond, 2010; Ram, Starek, & Johnson, 2004), in the past decade, a growing number of researchers (e.g., Hanrahan, 2004; Ryba & Schinke, 2009; Yan & McCullagh, 2007) have made efforts to centralize the experiences of athletes from traditionally marginalized populations. In particular, Ryba (2009) has challenged sport psychology professionals to be critically aware of the ethnocentrism present in mainstream sport psychology research, noting that much of the current knowledge base was formed from observations and practice involving Caucasian, heterosexual, middle-to-upper class athletes. Treating these findings from Western culture as universal laws of human nature is not amenable to the experiences of various members from disenfranchised groups. Accordingly, many scholars in cultural sport psychology have offered various approaches for integrating cultural studies into mainstream sport psychology (see Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009 for a full review). For instance, Fisher, Roper, and Butryn (2009) called attention to the prominent role of one's psychosocial context, locating an athlete's identity within a web of power dynamics that advantages some individuals, while disadvantaging others. In particular, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletes from low SES and ethnic minority backgrounds who participate in revenue-producing sports may experience stressors that other athletes do not.

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore the experiences of injured NCAA Division I athletes from low-to-middle SES backgrounds. Our objectives were to centralize the experiences of low-to-middle SES athletes, a traditionally underrepresented group in the sport psychology literature, and generate thick descriptions of their accounts, rather than make predictions about coping across SES groups. Specifically, we wished to examine the intersection between SES-related and sport-specific stressors. Additionally, we sought to identify coping strategies that were uniquely (or partially) influenced by one's SES background.

Methods

Participants

Purposive sampling methods were utilized to obtain 11 participants who: (a) were a member of an NCAA Division I athletic team; (b) sustained injuries within a year of institutional review board (IRB) approval which lasted at least four weeks until returning to play; and (c) came from low or middle SES backgrounds. Six athletic trainers at an NCAA Division I institution were contacted in order to help identify and recruit participants who met these first two criteria.

The first phase of the study, where participants completed demographic information and the FAS II (Currie et al., 2004), comprised 34 (22 male, 12 female) NCAA Division I athletes at a university in the Western United States who had sustained an injury that: (a) occurred within a year of IRB approval, and (b) lasted (or was expected to last) four weeks until full participation in practice and/or competition. The overall mean FAS II score was 6.03 ($SD = 1.82$) and ranged from 3 to 9. Because the sample contained higher scores (20 participants in the high SES range, 10 participants in the middle SES range, and four participants in the low SES range), the authors included participants who scored "5" or lower (i.e., low-to-middle SES) on the FAS II in the main phase of the study.

Ultimately, 11 participants (nine males, two females) with a mean age of 20.00 years ($SD = 1.26$ years) took part in the second phase of the study. This smaller sample consisted of six athletes who identified as African American, two as Caucasian, two as Asian American/Pacific Islander, and one as Latino. They participated in football ($n = 8$), gymnastics ($n = 1$), tennis ($n = 1$), and soccer ($n = 1$). At the time of the study, 10 of the 11 participants had full athletic scholarships, and one participant had 35% of his education-related costs covered by an athletic scholarship. The sample comprised athletes with various injuries, including three with shoulder injuries (clavicle fracture, two with labrum tears), two with hand/wrist

injuries (wrist fracture, ulnar collateral ligament tear), two with foot/ankle injuries (Achilles rupture, broken foot), two with hip/upper leg injuries (femoroacetabular impingement, hamstring strain), and two with knee injuries (meniscus tear, anterior cruciate ligament [ACL] tear). Their recovery times ($M = 19.5$ weeks, $SD = 11.0$ weeks) ranged from 4 to 39 weeks. The mean FAS II score was 4.27 ($SD = 0.90$).

Measures

Demographics. Participants completed demographic information pertaining to their age, gender, sport, eligibility level (year) in their sport, date of injury, type of injury, and estimated recovery time (from date of injury to expected date of full recovery). The date of full recovery referred to when they expected to be training and/or competing at a full level again.

SES. In order to assess SES and identify low-to-middle SES athletes, participants completed the FAS II (Currie et al., 2004). Possible scores ranged from 0 to 9. For the purposes of this study, scores were divided into the following groups: low SES (0-3), middle SES (4-5), and high SES (6-9) based on previous recommendations for interpreting the scale (Boyce, Torsheim, Currie, & Zambon, 2006; Cho and Khang, 2010).

Boudreau and Poulin (2009) noted that household income can be a sensitive issue; thus, when adolescents and younger adults are asked to report parental education, occupation, and income, there tend to be low response rates. Furthermore, younger individuals may not be knowledgeable about their family incomes. Likewise, for this study, college students may not have had this information available; hence, an instrument with simpler questions (e.g., "Growing up, did you have your own bedroom?") was selected. Currie, Elton, Todd, and Platt (1997) demonstrated that response rates in adolescents increased when using the Family Affluence Scale I (FAS I), the original version of the scale, as compared to asking about their father's occupation.

The validity of the FAS I and FAS II has been well-established. Currie et al. (1997) observed a strong positive relationship between FAS I scores and classification of father's occupation. Boudreau and Poulin (2009) also noted a significant positive relationship between FAS II scores and mother's occupation and highest level of education. Boyce et al. (2006) found that FAS II scores significantly related to family income levels. Lastly, Lin (2011) observed moderate associations between FAS II scores and education and occupation of both parents.

Experiences of coping with injury. Semi-structured interviews were used to examine low-to-middle SES athletes' experiences of coping with injury. Utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol allows the researcher to ask specific questions in a systematic fashion

related to the research question, while allowing the interviewee to digress (Berg, 2004). Accordingly, the participant may address a particular issue that the researcher had not previously considered; hence, the interviewer can probe beyond predetermined questions. Through broad and open-ended questioning, interviewers and participants co-construct the meaning of the situation (Creswell, 2007). A modified version of Podlog and Eklund's (2006) interview guide was used for the present study. This contained questions pertaining to the athlete's appraisal of the injury, emotional reactions, coping strategies, and perceived social support. Questions were also added that centralized SES issues (e.g., "Growing up, what opportunities did you have for training?").

Procedure

Approval was obtained from both the IRB and the Head Athletic Trainer at the aforementioned NCAA Division I university. Demographic items and the FAS II were combined into one questionnaire. Informed consent forms and questionnaires were given to six athletic trainers, who distributed them to athletes in their respective sports that they supervised. As written in the consent forms, athletes were informed of the purpose of the study and that a follow-up interview may be requested based on their questionnaire responses. After athletes signed the consent forms, they completed the questionnaires. This information was kept confidentially in a secure location. Athletes who scored in the low-to-middle SES range (0 to 5) on the FAS II were contacted via phone or email and asked to participate in an interview.

Prior to data collection, a pilot interview was conducted with a former NCAA Division I athlete who previously sustained a long-term injury. The purpose of the pilot interview was to see how NCAA Division I athletes would understand the interview questions, feel about being interviewed, and test out the sequencing and length of the questions. Ultimately, no changes were made to the interview guide. In the second phase of the study, the 11 selected participants took part in semi-structured interviews with the first author. After the interview, participants were given an opportunity to ask questions, as well as provide feedback on the interview protocol. Lengths of the interviews ranged from 30 to 70 minutes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim; transcripts averaged approximately 15 pages in length and ranged from eight to 22 pages, single-spaced.

Data Analysis

The data were inductively analyzed based on the recommendations of Côté, Salmela, Baria, and Russell (1993) and Gratton and Jones (2009). Key themes were identified within

and across interviews using an interpretational qualitative analysis (Côté et al. 1993) derived from grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach allows researchers to generate themes based on the participants' statements rather than a pre-existing framework.

First, both authors thoroughly read each transcript multiple times in order to become well-acquainted with the data and capture the participants' meanings from their subjective viewpoints. Then, per the procedures outlined by Côté et al. (1993), the researchers created tags, or raw data themes, that were one to five word phrases pertaining to the interests of the study, namely their socioeconomic backgrounds, perceptions of injury, emotional reactions, and coping strategies. Next, tags with common themes were grouped together into categories. These categories, or higher-order themes, were given names to reflect commonalities among the data both within individual transcripts and across multiple transcripts (e.g., the raw data themes "prayed" and "became closer with God" were grouped into the higher-order theme "use of religion"). Finally, higher-order themes were further grouped into general dimensions comprising related categories (e.g., the higher-order themes "emotional support" and "use of religion" were grouped into the general dimension "emotion-focused coping strategies"). Raw data themes, higher-order themes, and general dimensions were repeatedly modified during the research process (i.e., when each author independently analyzed the data, during the peer debriefing stage when both authors discussed the data, and while the manuscript was being written) until the researchers agreed on a satisfactory scheme to represent the data. Both authors agreed that data saturation occurred by the tenth interview.

Trustworthiness. The researchers utilized multiple strategies for increasing the rigor of the study. First, because it is critical for the researcher to acknowledge his or her biases and assumptions in order to gain an awareness of how they may impact the research process (Creswell 2007), the first author participated in a bracketing interview conducted by an experienced interviewer. In a bracketing interview, the researcher explores his or her biases and presuppositions that may influence how the study is designed and implemented (Dale 1996, 2000). During the bracketing interview, the first author discussed his biases as a Division I athlete, middle-class background, prior injury experiences, coping strategies, and other issues that were relevant to this study. While this technique is generally associated with phenomenology, we believed that, given the primary researcher's experience with injury, this was an effective strategy for identifying assumptions that may impact the interview process. These biases and their potential influences at various stages in the research process (e.g., data collection, data analysis, manuscript preparation) were continuously discussed throughout the study.

Second, member checking, which entails sending the verbatim transcript to the participant, was used to enhance the credibility of the study (Miyata & Kai, 2009). This allowed the participants to provide feedback on the meanings derived from the interview, and they also had the option of removing or elaborating on any of their statements (Dearnley, 2005). One participant preferred the removal of one sentence that she thought may have portrayed her negatively. This request was honored since it did not relate to the purpose of the study. Additionally, one participant clarified the meaning of one brief statement that appeared to be vague to her. Overall, however, there was minimal feedback from the participants. Lastly, a peer debriefing session was conducted with an experienced qualitative researcher (second author) in order to ensure the dependability of the findings, or the stability of the observations (Miyata & Kai, 2009). In this session, the second author discussed and challenged the first author's initial data scheme before arriving at a consensus. As a result, some raw data themes and higher-order themes were combined, and other data not pertinent to the objectives of the study were omitted.

Results

Through an interpretational qualitative analysis, we produced four general dimensions with 12 accompanying higher-order themes: reactions to injury (confusion, catastrophization, sadness, and frustration), problem-focused-coping (comparison to past experiences and perseverance), emotion-focused coping (positive reframing, use of religion, and emotional support), and avoidance coping (playing through pain, isolation, and mental distraction). Due to page constraints, we focus on the higher-order themes that are most relevant to SES: catastrophization, comparison to past experiences, perseverance, and positive reframing. Moreover, the other higher-order themes have extensively been reported in the sport injury literature. First, we provide notable background information on the participants.

Sociocultural Backgrounds

In order to provide context for the results, we have included background information relating to their SES backgrounds. Before addressing their injuries, participants discussed their family backgrounds and connections with sport. Specifically, they discussed family hardship, opportunities for training, and the perceived significance of participating in NCAA Division I athletics. Some of these key experiences had implications for how they approached their injuries.

Generally, many participants indicated that they had limited opportunities for training in comparison to their current teammates. Sam expressed that he had little knowledge of

training techniques, such as strength and conditioning, strategy, and football terminology. He stated:

I didn't know anything about my position; no one really taught me how to do it. I just thought like, "Man, I want to play football, and I will be really good one day." I didn't really understand anything. A lot of other people had their parents like help them play football, and they would teach them stuff and work out with them. I didn't think I had to do any of that stuff...I didn't even know how to like hit the hole, cut, or any of that stuff. I would just like get the ball and just like do my thing. I came here, and I was like, "Holy shit, I don't even know how to play running back."

Generally, Sam took the initiative to train himself without the assistance of his parents. Nonetheless, when he began to train with his college team, he realized how little information and instruction he had received in comparison to his teammates. Likewise, Richard acknowledged that he had not been exposed to the technical and tactical aspects of football prior to college at his school. In a similar manner, Simon noted that his high school did not provide as many resources, such as the amount of coaches and practice time, compared to the more affluent schools in his district. He stated that the facilities were older and more rundown relative to other programs. Additionally, Catherine, a gymnast, realized that her background differed from most of her teammates in that she was not able to afford private lessons prior to college.

Next, multiple participants noted that their sport became a significant part of their lives when they began to receive scholarship offers during high school. For example, Brett stated that he did not take football seriously until receiving offers from multiple schools. As a result, he viewed football as an opportunity to provide a "better route" for himself and his family since his parents would not have to pay for his education. At the same time, this was also a source of stress. For instance, several of Richard's scholarship offers were rescinded due to a previous injury that he sustained during his senior year of high school. Also, Michael noted that receiving a scholarship was very important because it gave him "a chance to do something with my life" and provided him with an opportunity to move away from his neighborhood, where there was ample gang activity. Finally, Emily stated that an athletic scholarship to a U.S. school allowed her to focus on both her sport and her education, an opportunity that did not exist in her native country.

In addition to concerns related to obtaining and maintaining an athletic scholarship, participants shared many past and current stressors related to their family life and socioeconomic background. Sam identified multiple difficulties beyond school, such as his parents separating, his mother recovering from brain surgery, breaking up with his girlfriend, and experiencing a shaky relationship with his father. Also, Brett, an African American male,

experienced racial and class discrimination when growing up, as he dealt with false sexual assault charges for over a year. Specifically, he noted that he was able to be more easily prosecuted in comparison to the actual offender, a Caucasian male from an affluent neighborhood. Additionally, Ian discussed his experiences of being raised by a single mother and struggling to make ends meet as they frequently changed residences. Lastly, both Simon and Michael noted that they were exposed to gang activity growing up. In particular, Michael acknowledged that he grew up in a neighborhood where he heard many gunshots every night and ultimately even joined a gang. However, after some of his friends died or were severely injured due to gang violence, he distanced himself from these affiliations.

Catastrophization

Nearly all participants' initial reactions to their injury were negative, which was in line with countless studies on injured athletes (e.g., Carson & Polman, 2008; Quinn & Fallon, 1999, 2000; Tracey, 2003; Udry et al., 1997). In particular, multiple participants shared many catastrophizing thoughts in response to their injuries. Catastrophization refers to the act of having an irrational belief that is characterized by framing an event much worse than it actually is and/or expecting the worst possible outcome (Ellis, 1994). Many athletes predicted disastrous consequences as a result of their injuries. Overall, a common trend was that some of the participants initially interpreted their injuries in absolute terms (e.g., "never," "always," "nothing," etc.). For instance, Ian stated that his injured shoulder would "never be the same". Additionally, Michael said he would never be a starter again.

Similarly, Sam, who sustained an injury during a coaching staff change, initially thought that he was never going to play again since coaches made playing time decisions based on offseason performance. Furthermore, in the context of Sam's family background, he perceived his injury as a severely negative life event. In particular, he discussed family issues, such as his parents separating and his mother undergoing brain surgery; thus, he was already experiencing ample stress at home. Additionally, he ended his relationship with his girlfriend during this time. The simultaneous occurrence of all these stressors facilitated a perceived a sense of helplessness. He stated:

It's like what do I have going on for me, you know what I mean? Usually, it's football, but I don't have football, and then nothing was going on good at home. It's like I don't have anything—what positive things have happened, you know what I mean? Nothing. Because of several events that occurred beyond his sport, he tentatively viewed his injury as evidence that nothing positive would happen in his life. In other words, because of recent events in his life, he assumed the worst possible scenario would occur.

Comparison to Past Experiences

Many participants drew upon past experiences to help cope with the stress of their present injuries. For instance, Simon compared his injury to his past life experiences beyond his sport. For instance, he noted that having to deal with his family's house catching on fire or the gang activity at his high school presented a lot more challenges than his present injury; thus, he was prepared to manage this setback. He stated:

I've been through a lot of things in my life, so compared to having a surgery, which I've never had before, but dealing with things that I've done in my past, such as my house catching on fire, or just other daily stressors that we've talked about, it's not something that is too major. I was definitely able to be prepared for anything to happen because I've done a lot of struggle in my life.

In Simon's case, this injury paled in comparison to the challenges and hardship that he faced growing up. Similarly, Michael mentioned the challenges of his socioeconomic background when discussing how he coped with his present injury: "[The injury] wasn't really a big deal to me. I'm able to look back at what I've been through knowing that I don't want to go back there." When Michael looked back on the adversity he had experienced growing up, such as the loss of friends due to gang activity, he was able to put his injury in perspective. In other words, he did not interpret this setback as a severely negative life event.

Additionally, some participants compared their current injury to past injuries. For instance, Richard, who tore his ACL, had sustained the same injury while he was in high school. While other participants discussed some confusion regarding the type or severity of their respective injuries, Richard immediately knew that he had torn his ACL since he was familiar with the physical sensations, and he was able to apply this knowledge accordingly and enjoy a speedier recovery time. According to Carson and Polman (2008), previous injury experience can either enhance or hinder the experiences of injured athletes; however, in this study, some participants used these prior experiences as a positive coping strategy. Moreover, it appeared this technique was a catalyst for other coping strategies, such as perseverance and positive reframing.

Perseverance

Several participants adopted perseverant attitudes when managing their injuries. In other studies, this phenomenon has also been referred to as *determination/motivation* (Gould et al., 1997), *resilience* (Galli & Reel, 2012), and *fighting spirit* (Augutis & Anderson, 2012); however, we believed the term *perseverance* best corresponded to the participants'

original words. The connections between SES and coping were most evident in this higher-order theme. Ian mentioned that he admired his mother as a single parent, who worked extra hours and days in order to make ends meet for both of them. As a result, Ian noted that he learned from his mother to "never give up when times get hard," and he applied this same approach to his injury. Additionally, Michael mentioned the importance of not giving up on his injury and sport. When asked how his family background influenced how he coped with his injury, he replied:

That goes back to like never giving up and stuff like that 'cause I could have just said in my head like, "What if?"...like just gave up—"I'm gonna lose my spot," whatever. And then—and then thinking about what I wanted—what I want to do, and I know I don't want to go through [being part of a gang] again, I was not. So keeping my head up because it would be easy to just put my head down and just give up on everything and then end up being back on the streets.

Michael viewed his sport as a way out of an undesirable life and an opportunity to get a college degree. He mentioned that if he had quit football because of his injury, he would have also lost his education, which he and his parents valued. Generally, his background profoundly influenced him, as he demonstrated resilience in response to his injury. Moreover, while he reacted negatively at first, he ultimately realized that this setback was not as dire relative to other circumstances, such as gang activities and drive-by shootings, that he had endured in his past.

Sam also exhibited a great deal of perseverance despite initially being depressed. He stated:

I can't give up on it because I just have one chance to do it. It's just four years, you know what I mean? Can't give up on it... My dreams, and you know I have to get my degree, and I can't just give up, so that's what drives me...to make my mom happy so she feels I'm successful pretty much.

His mother, who was recovering from a serious illness, was his motivation to focus and persevere through the challenges, including both his injury and family problems. These findings were in line with other investigations outside of sport that have demonstrated that exposure to adversity does not necessarily reduce resilience (e.g., Massad et al., 2009).

Additionally, participants mentioned few issues with adhering to rehabilitation. Some participants drew connections between their family background and their commitment to rehabilitation. For example, Brett said consistency was a significant value that his father instilled in him. He stated:

My dad has always been about being consistent and making sure that you like show up somewhere on time or make sure that when you go there you like work as hard as you

can or whatnot so that helped me out a lot. He called me every day, and he was like, "Yeah, you up for rehab? Are you going?" and he helped me out with being consistent. Brett's father taught him to approach commitments with his best effort; hence, consistency was essential to putting forth his best effort in football, as well as recovering from his injury. Likewise, Tony attributed his persistence and diligence in completing his rehabilitation exercises to his father. Growing up, he was accustomed to his father getting up early in the morning to go to work and coming home late in the evening without complaining. Additionally, Emily stated, "I was upset, but I was devoted. I decided that I was going to do everything to get back on the courts as soon as possible because it was so painful for me not practicing." Like Brett and Tony, she attributed this perseverance to her parents.

Positive Reframing

Several participants focused on positive thoughts and experiences during their rehabilitation in order to abate the negatively toned emotions (e.g., sadness, frustration) that they experienced. For instance, Sam discussed having a renewed relationship with God during his rehabilitation. This was consistent with one of Galli and Reel's (2012) main findings, where injured athletes reported stress-related growth via increased spirituality. Additionally, while Sam initially reported some catastrophizing thoughts, he tried to adopt a more optimistic attitude towards his injury. He did this by reducing the perceived magnitude of his injury (i.e., telling himself that his injury was not so bad), as well as focusing on positive aspects of his life. For example, he reminded himself that he was fortunate to not have to pay tuition. As a freshman, he also noted that he had ample time remaining in his collegiate career to compete and accomplish his goals. He said:

You know one thing that drives me through the injuries is that I have a lot of time left, that I have my school paid for, and that I could bounce back, and that it's just all in my head, that it's not as bad as it seems. That's what helps drive me to keep going.

Likewise, Ian focused on being grateful that he was getting his education, which he said would benefit him in the long-term. Generally, he tried to focus on the positive things he had in his life rather than dwelling on what he did not have, an attitude which he attributed to his mother. In a similar manner, Richard often reminded himself that he did not have to pay for his medical bills, which he indicated would have made his recovery more stressful for him and his family.

Furthermore, multiple participants wrested positive value from their injuries, a major finding that was consistent with previous research (Galli & Reel, 2012; Podlog & Eklund, 2006; Udry et al., 1997; Wadey, Evans, Hanston, & Neil, 2012). Despite the physical de-

bilitation of their injuries, some athletes noted that they were able to focus on some of their skills and abilities pertinent to their sport, such as increasing lower body strength, becoming more ambidextrous, and enhancing strategic awareness by spending more time watching film. Additionally, Russell indicated that this injury would prepare him for future injuries or other forms of adversity:

Well, it definitely taught me a lesson. You know, going through an injury, it could take you on a high, or it can take you on a low. Basically, like imagine just a highway, and it just splits off into two, and you can get bummed out about it and be like, "Aw, man, why did this happen to me? Man, I just don't even want to play football"...or you can go the other way and be like, "You know what? This can be a setback, but it's only going to make me stronger"... So it really motivated me, so even if I do get a future injury in—hopefully not in the near future—I know how to exactly deal with it...

Unlike other participants, Russell did not draw upon lessons from a prior injury; however, through positive reframing, he was able to find a way that this injury may benefit him in the future. He attributed this way of thinking to his father, who taught him to be passionate and find positive elements in difficult situations. Lending support to Udry's (1999) assertion, most participants did not realize these upsides until the middle to the end of their rehabilitation.

Discussion

In this study, we qualitatively explored the experiences of lower-to-middle class NCAA Division I athletes coping with injury. This was the first investigation to examine the coping strategies employed by injured athletes through the lens of their socioeconomic backgrounds. Rather than isolating SES as an independent variable, the semi-structured interview format allowed the participants to discuss other factors (e.g., religion, cultural background, family values) that were related to SES. While these responses to injury (catastrophization) and subsequent coping strategies (comparison to past experiences, perseverance, and positive reframing) can be used by individuals across the SES spectrum, the way the participants experienced them was, at certain times during their injury, related to their SES backgrounds. Consequently, SES is a relevant consideration when examining athletes' responses to injury; however, as the integrated model of psychological response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998) indicates, there are several other personal and situational factors to consider.

Overall, there were numerous noteworthy contributions to the both the mainstream and cultural sport psychology literature. As previously stated, multiple participants were able to identify positive aspects of their injury; however, the participants in this study also

attributed this coping strategy to their family background and prior experiences that were partially intertwined within their SES backgrounds. Next, one of the more compelling findings was the self-reported perseverance in relation to how athletes approached their injuries. It would appear that in some instances, being exposed to adversity may prepare an individual for an event that is perceived as less stressful. However, a caveat to these findings is that NCAA Division I athletes, who habitually manage the time, pain, and fatigue of practice and preparation, must exhibit a high level of commitment in order to achieve top performance (Lazarus, 2000). Consequently, it is unclear if perseverance is simply demonstrated more in high-performing athletes, or if one's SES background may influence this. Accordingly, this issue needs to be further explored in order to draw more cogent conclusions.

Positive reframing and perseverance were two of the more common coping strategies that emerged from the participants' accounts. Taken together, this was remarkably similar to Chen and colleagues' (2012) proposed "shift-and-persist" strategy (i.e. reappraising a negative event and remaining committed in the face of adversity), which has been shown to buffer stress in low SES individuals. While some participants initially reported catastrophizing thoughts, many of them exhibited this "shift-and-persist" approach by engaging in cognitive reappraisal, or positive reframing, and exhibiting perseverance. Several participants perceived that their family backgrounds and values may have influenced these coping strategies.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the interesting, and in some cases novel, findings, there were limitations to this study. First, the participants were at various stages in their rehabilitation when they were interviewed. Accordingly, the interviews were retrospective; hence, some participants may not have been able to recall critical information that addressed the research question. A second limitation concerned the use of NCAA Division I athletes. The support structure (e.g., paying for medical bills, providing essential personnel and services for rehabilitation, etc.) in place at this Division I institution may have buffered some of the stress experienced by the participants. Third, the FAS II was developed for European populations (Currie et al., 1997, 2004), and although it has also demonstrated strong validity for Canadian populations (Boudreau & Poulin, 2009), it may not have been an appropriate measure for SES in the United States.

Generally, participants were largely unable or unwilling to straightforwardly discuss issues of SES or social class, particularly as it related to their experiences of coping with injury. This may have been a result of social norms where discussions of SES or social class

are taboo (Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012). Also, participants may not have been educated about class issues; therefore, they were unable to articulate how their own SES background had an impact on their experiences in sport, particularly injury and rehabilitation. The difficulty in getting people to talk about SES may illustrate why this topic has never been examined in the sport psychology literature. Despite these challenges, this issue warrants further investigation. As Sanders and Mahalingam noted, class-based privileges are supported and reproduced by the (lack of) discourse on SES and social class.

More nuanced methods should be employed in order to bring these issues to the forefront. First, focus groups would be recommended for future studies. Hearing other participants' stories may conjure up memories of similar events that would not have otherwise been salient during an interview. Likewise, participants may feel more comfortable discussing their SES backgrounds in a group where many individuals shared similar oppressive experiences. Second, a larger and more comprehensive scale measuring SES should be developed that corresponds to modern technology (e.g., the use of smart phones) and encompasses multiple factors, such as income, assets, resources, number of parents, parental occupation(s), parental education, and neighborhood environment. The four-item FAS II used in the present study may not have accurately represented the participants' SES. Third, utilizing mixed method designs may enable researchers to gain a better grasp of this issue. For example, using questionnaires, such as the COPE Inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) or Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (Endler & Parker, 1990), in conjunction with follow-up interviews may add more depth. Also, these methods may allow researchers to make predictions across groups while also gleaning rich accounts from athletes regarding their experiences.

In a broader sense, a greater examination of the methodologies used to study athletes from low SES backgrounds is needed. Decolonizing methodologies are promising approaches that have been encouraged in cultural sport psychology research by multiple scholars (e.g., Forsyth & Heine, 2010; Ryba & Schinke, 2009). These approaches diminish the power differential between researchers and participants, which ultimately facilitate a collaborative relationship between the parties. Because of this rapport, the researchers can glean more rich information about the participants and their needs. More importantly, however, these methodologies can also promote a critical awareness of existing hegemonic norms and ultimately stimulate social change. For example, through participatory action research, Forsyth and Heijne (2010) developed collaborative relationships with inner-city Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg, Manitoba with the intention of enacting changes that would benefit this population. Specifically, they worked to help them reclaim communal sites for physical activity and enable public policy discussion for eradicating socioeconomic barriers to these places.

Additionally, given that SES is intertwined with other identities (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, and religion), future investigations should utilize methodologies (e.g., grounded theory, narrative analysis, autoethnography) that illuminate these complex intersections. For example, little is known about how gender and class identities interact to influence behavior in sport. Research on class/SES issues in sport has typically focused on male athletes (Messner 1992, 2007); thus, studies that illuminate the experiences of female athletes from low SES backgrounds are needed. Lastly, although potentially more challenging, we recommend that this topic be extended to low SES high school athletes who have not committed to a college. In these cases, there would likely be a greater perceived threat of not obtaining an athletic scholarship. Furthermore, these athletes likely would not have access to the number or quality of resources that NCAA Division I athletic departments typically provide. For these reasons, SES issues could be more salient in this population.

Conclusions and Implications

Although Wiese-Bjornstal et al. (1998) exceptionally assembled a comprehensive list of factors that influence athletes' responses to injury (e.g., SES, ethnicity, gender, athletic identity, playing status), their model does not adequately address the complex intersections among these constructs. Given the wide array of personal and situational factors that impact athletes' post-injury responses, the findings of this study should not be generalized to all low-to-middle SES college athletes. Individuals who work with injured athletes should avoid applying a "blanket" approach to assisting athletes and consider other events beyond sport which may impact how they manage their injuries. Generally, we believe that being aware of athletes' backgrounds, including SES, can help develop rapport. Following the results of this study, sport psychology professionals and other individuals should attempt to facilitate the adoption of perseverance and positive reframing in injured athletes. As was the case with the participants in this study, however, it often takes time for athletes to wrest positive value from their injury (Udry, 1999). One may look at athletes' psychosocial backgrounds in order to put their injury into perspective or identify prior instances where they persevered. Additionally, we assert that Schinke and Peterson's (2002) strategies for promoting resilience (i.e., evaluating assumptions, disputing negative thoughts, and de-catastrophizing) can be applied to the rehabilitation setting (see Schinke & Peterson, 2002 for a more in-depth review).

Finally, in line with calls for the infusion of social justice and cultural praxis in sport psychology (Ryba & Wright, 2005, 2010), we agree that sport psychology professionals not only have a duty to facilitate enhanced performance, but they should also be instrumental in

promoting overall satisfaction and empowerment of the athlete. Newburg's (2002) resonance performance model is an encouraging framework to use when working with injured athletes. Although it is not rooted in cultural studies, Newburg emphasizes the importance of the athlete's "dreams" rather than just performance enhancement. Accordingly, this framework encourages athletes to think about other roles and identities beyond sport. In other words, athletes from low SES and other marginalized backgrounds can be empowered by realizing that sport is not the only domain where they can be productive members of society. By and large, coaches, athletic trainers, sport psychology professionals, and other individuals should be more mindful of SES and other identities when collaborating with injured athletes to help facilitate positive outcomes.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

1. Tell me how you got into your sport.
Probe: When did it become most meaningful?
2. Growing up, what opportunities did you have for training?
Probe: Can you discuss any experiences with private club teams or coaching?
Probe: Was there anything you did not have that your other teammates did?
3. Tell me about your family life/family background.
Probe: What were some examples of daily hassles when you were growing up?
(What stressed you out on a consistent basis?)
Probe: Was there any major hardship (e.g., illness) in the family?
Probe: Were there any other major life events when you were growing up? How did you deal with it?
Probe: What values do you carry with you from your family or cultural background?
Probe: How meaningful is your family background/culture in everyday life? How meaningful is it in your sport?
Probe: What comes to mind when you think of socioeconomic status or social class?
4. Tell me about your recent injury.
Probe: What was your initial reaction to being injured?
Probe: How did you deal with it?
Probe: How did this change over time?
Probe: Given that the study is about socioeconomic status, how did that weigh in?
5. Describe the kind of feedback and/or support you received from the significant people in your life.
Probe: What kind of support have you received from them?
6. Did you have any fears that you would lose your scholarship? Discuss.
7. What aspects of your background influenced the way you dealt with this injury?
Probe: What are some values which we discussed earlier that may have had an impact on how you dealt with your injury?
Probe: How has your class and/or family background influenced the way you have managed your injury?
8. Is there anything important to your injury or rehabilitation that we have not discussed?

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