THE SPACE BETWEEN US: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SHAME IN ELITE ATHLETICS

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Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

in the

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

TRINITY WESTERN UNIVERSITY

April 2020

ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand elite athletes' experiences of shame. The question that guided this research was how is the phenomenon of shame lived in the experiences of elite athletes? In order to understand how participants experienced shame, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research (van Manen, 1990, 2014, Launeanu, et al., 2018) was used. Seven retired elite athletes were interviewed about their experiences. Through the participants' lived experience descriptions, shame was uncovered as (a) a dialogical phenomenon revealed in the space between persons, (b) characterized by feeling personally violated and subsequently vulnerable, (c) embodied in acts of hiding from self and others, and (d) the portal or gateway to encountering a person as they are. From these essential features emerged the metaphor of shame as a *dance,* which represented a dynamic relational space permeating the dialogical rhythm of an encounter of two persons. This dialogical rhythm also unveiled and pointed to the essential qualities of the person experiencing shame. These findings highlighted that research, theory and clinical practice within sport and counselling psychology would benefit from understanding shame as having a protective, self-revelatory quality.

Keywords: Shame, elite athletes, hermeneutic phenomenology, lived experience, encounter, dance of shame.

PREFACE

This research project was approved by the Trinity Western University's Research Ethics Board on November 6th, 2017 (REB File No. #17G17).

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could not have finished this project without the wisdom, presence and support of so many wonderful people. You all paint the picture of a particular kind of support that was necessary to see this thesis through.

Derrick: Words don't capture the gratitude I have for you and your support throughout this thesis. Your wisdom and academic guidance go without saying, but I am most grateful to you for never wavering in your belief in me, and for creating a space in our work together that was filled with rich care and presence. I am so honored to have come to know you.

Mihaela: Thank you, Mihaela, for your big vision, your boundless creativity and your relentless willingness to courageously fight to see something in and through this research. Your ability to live phenomenologically has inspired me, and for you too I am thankful.

Sharon: Thank you for being in the trenches with me. I am amazed by some of the lessons I have learned in reaching out to you for support; particularly the courage that friendship requires and the sweetness it can offer. Thank you my dear friend!

Marnie: I am so grateful for everything you have been in my life for the past four years. And as this project progressed, I have been so touched by how meaningful it was to be understood by you. Looking forward to celebrating life, post-thesis, with you!

Existential & Spirituality Lab: When I think back on my time at TWU, I will inevitably think of "the lab" being one of my most treasured spaces. This group was a source of emotional and spiritual reprieve, intellectual stimulation, and felt like a family at times when I was far from my own. Thank you in particular to Tammy, Janelle, Ben, Megan,

Marnie, Ryan, Carli, Ivy, Céliane, Dave, Nicole and Chantel for your ongoing presence, support and insight, and to Derrick for organizing such a meaningful space.

All Professors and staff at TWU: As I complete this thesis, I am left with fond memories of all professors and staff at TWU. Particularly as it pertains to this project: Janelle: thank you for our periodic heart-to-heart check-ins that seemed to be perfectly timed; Krista: thank you for cheering me on and for sharing your belief in me; and Bart: thank you for encouraging me to press into my athletic history. TWU Professors & staff: You all have blessed many students, and I count myself as fortunate to be one of them.

BCIT Crew: You have unknowingly been a light during some dark days. Thank you for checking in with me, cheering me on and reminding me of where I am heading. I have been so lucky to have you part of my early development as a psychotherapist, and wish for many more years of learning together.

"The Actresses:" Ishleen, Sharon & Allana: I am so grateful that you shared your enthusiasm for this project through performing the phenomenological text. You infused this project with new energy right at the end when I needed it most. Thank you!

My dear family: I would not have finished this project if it were not for my parents, brother, and my dear cousins who have always been a stable and supportive presence in my life. I wish we were doing life in the same province, but the distance has made for creative ways to stay connected, and for this I am grateful!

Classmates: I look back at my time at TWU with fondness because of you. Thank you to the many of you who have offered kind encouragement and a good laugh when I needed it.

Amy, Zoe, Andrea, Steven, Lucy & Hannah[1] and those who were involved in the pilot interviews – Thank you. I have been touched by your vulnerability, honesty and the ways that I met you in your experiences of shame. I hope this project honours you.

And to those who I have not mentioned: those who have texted, called, inquired, dropped off food and cheered me on from close or afar, thank you! I love you and am touched to have come to know you through this project.

[1] Pseudonyms were used to protect participant's identity.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the mosaic of "loving others" who have dared to accompany and dance with me through life's suffering, grief and disappointments. You have modeled love in a way that has inspired such great generosity. I know I owe you nothing, but I offer you my deepest gratitude for the ways your care has coloured my world.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (Genesis 3:7, New American Bible)

Figure 1. Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Mascaccio (1424-1428).

It is fascinating to gaze upon Masaccio's fresco *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1424-1428) painted in the church of Santa Maria in del Carmine in Florence. Adam and Eve are portrayed in the nude; Adam bows his head, Eve looks up in anguish, both are covering their nakedness. Masaccio's rendition of the famous story of the fall of Adam and Eve inescapably transports viewers into an experience of anguish and suffering. As I gaze upon it, I feel a mixture of emotions: displaced embarrassment, a desire to avert my eyes, but also a simultaneous longing to remain with Adam and Eve and to know their pain more intimately.

Similarly, in this thesis, I was interested in a particular kind of pain and suffering: the experience of shame. As will be described, I was privileged to encounter six people

who generously shared their experiences of shame with me. This suffering is conveyed in part by the individuals quoted below (emphasis added):

> As I sat out for the finals (a first in my athletic career), I stared down at one of the many notes I'd scribbled on my jacket sleeve, "no moment defines me"… What I would have done then to believe those words. I felt that I had completely failed my family, my sponsors, my country and myself. *And I couldn't wait to disappear*. (Turski, 2017, para. 15)

> Despite knowing that I didn't have the qualification standards to make the Games, the decision to end my season felt like an utter failure, like I was giving up. I had sealed my own fate: I was not going to be an Olympian. I called my coach, bawled my eyes out to my parents, then *detached as quickly as I could* from the elite running world. (Van Buskirk, 2017, para. 15)

> It was a tough pill to swallow knowing I wouldn't get this opportunity again. It was over, and there was nothing I could do to change it. I was prepared for retirement, but the finality of this moment was overwhelming. My Olympic dream had came true yet *I still felt worthless*. (McLean, 2017, para. 29)

These words were spoken by three of Canada's top athletes. All competed on the international stage. All have proven to be experts in their respective athletic pursuits. All have spent countless hours training to reach athletic superiority. However, what also unites these athletes is something deeper. There is a distinct heaviness to these comments: Longings to disappear, feelings of worthlessness and defeat, a yearning to flee in the face of failure. Although not stated explicitly, to encounter these athletes is to encounter something of their experience of shame, "an inner torment, a sickness of the

soul" (Tomkins, 1963, p. 118). As I read the full testimonies of these athletes on a CBC sport website, I was also struck by what was not said in their words. Their dialogue was often stunted, particularly as they discussed the shame they experienced. What could these athletes share if they felt supported? What might be revealed if their experience was expressed openly?

While I have not met these individuals personally, I feel like I know them and the experiences they have endured. I, too, have experienced shame as an athlete and have chosen to explicitly access my experience as a gateway to further explore this topic. Throughout this research process, I have considered myself to be what Romanyshyn (2013) refers to as a *wounded researcher*; one who through this investigation enacted embodied, soulful research on something that had already laid claim upon me. Romanyshyn (2013) also suggests that "research from a soulful place chooses the researcher as much as, or perhaps even more so, than he or she chooses it" (p. 4). This too has been my experience. In the quiet moment of my days, I have listened, and have noticed the personal invitation to engage with a small niche in the athletic world: in experiences of shame.

Dignity and Sacredness of Human Experience

What feels most pressing to highlight in this introduction is the intentionality of how this project has been designed to illuminate and promote the dignity and sacredness of athletes as persons. This intention has been purposefully integrated into every stage of this project: from its development to its final completion. I look to colleagues who have studied athlete experiences in sport psychology with the integration of a more holistic view of the athlete (Tamminen & Bennett, 2016), and draw inspiration from existential

phenomenological philosophies (Buber, 1970; Frankl, 1970; Längle, 2013, Levinas, 1985) and certain theologians (O'Connor, 1991 as cited in Sisters of Life (SV), 2019; John Paul II, 1995), who all place the sacredness of the human person as central. I have also been particularly inspired by the work of an active-contemplative religious congregation of sisters known as the Sisters of Life (SV, 2019). These sisters have dedicated their lives to the enhancement of life from conception to natural death and encounter people as irreplaceable and unique. What unites these various inspirational sources is the common notion that the dignity of human person is central and crucially important in all realms of life, including research and clinical practices. While holding this belief, my deepest intention for this project is to describe the meaning of shame in such a way that invites readers to transcend understandings of athletes' experiences beyond roles, performance abilities and entertainment value into an encounter with something sacred: the dignity and beauty of the person of the athlete.

Current Study

These intentions served as the ground of a phenomenological inquiry into this topic. The purpose of this research study was to understand how the elite athletes live experiences of shame. This topic broadly situated within sport psychology, contributed to expanding the knowledge to this area of research by offering an experiential, phenomenological understanding of shame as experienced by elite athletes. Moreover, this research study adds to a new, yet growing area in sports psychology aiming to emphasize a holistic understanding of the athletes as persons rather than just performers (Andersen & Speed, 2010). Furthermore, this research aims to contribute to the study of the phenomenology of shame in counselling psychology, particularly to the area of study

that considers shame a specific kind of interpersonal (DeYoung, 2015), personal, self-revelatory (Längle, 2013) experience. As such, the research question guiding this research project is: how is the phenomenon of shame lived in the experiences of elite athletes?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will review the existing research literature on shame and elite athletes' experiences connected with shame in order to formulate the rationale for the present research project with respect to the current knowledge in the aforementioned areas. To this end, I will review the existing research literature on shame and the main perspectives of shame, to depict how shame is understood and some of the shortcomings related to this. I will then turn my attention to reviewing the relevant research pertaining to elite athletes' culture as one important context in which shame manifest – which is the focus of this research project. Specifically, I will discuss the elite athletes' experiences that are conducive to shame. The theories and current research connected to understanding experiences of shame in the athletic culture will then be reviewed. To conclude, I will delineate the rationale for this research project together with articulating the purpose and research question that this study addressed.

Shame as Human Experience

Shame is commonly felt and well-known experience to human beings. From a child feeling ashamed after wetting his bed to an adult ridiculed in front of her peers for missing an important deadline, the felt experience of shame touches people of all ages, genders and has been integrated into the social fabric of communities and societies at large. While there is some evidence that suggests that shame based practices have been used to establish identity and enforce (or seek to enforce) desired behaviours in various social hierarchies (Stearns, 2017), the full sociological and cultural conceptualization of shame is beyond the scope of this literature review. Wong and Tsai (2007) have presented this well elsewhere.

The etymological analysis of the word shame reveals some of its features. The word shame has its origins in the French Teutonic word s*kem* derived from the root word *kem*- meaning *covering*, or *covering oneself*. The Old Norse word for shame was *kinnroði* literally meaning *cheek-redness* (Harper, 2013). The etymological analysis of the word acknowledges that shame entails the exposure of the self in some painful way in relation to some other; however, could there be more said? Is there a commonly held understanding or perspective of this phenomenon?

Theoretical perspectives on shame. A glance through the literature reveals a multiplicity of definitions, perspectives and understandings of shame. According to Blum (2008), a review of the shame literature finds it "full of contradicting empirical findings, criticisms and controversies" (p. 91) suggesting that there is no overarching theoretical consensus of how to understand and define this experience. Furthermore, because of the persistent ambiguity regarding its meaning, it has also been proven difficult to distinguish shame from cognate phenomenon such as embarrassment, guilt and shyness (Blum, 2008; Vallelonga, 1998). Despite most perspectives acknowledging that shame involves some form of reference to the exposure of the self, many of the differences in these perspectives vary on whether that exposure is intrapersonal (i.e., to oneself) or interpersonal (i.e., to an other), whether the experience of shame is inherently pathological or inherently protective or adaptive, and whether shame is functional (i.e., having a special purpose or useful) or dysfunctional (i.e., not useful).

In the following paragraphs I introduce and critique some of these perspectives making reference to these characterizations. The perspectives addressed will include

understanding shame as an affect, an interpersonal/relational experience, an emotional experience and shame as a personal self-revelatory experience.

Shame as adaptive affect. From an affect perspective, shame is understood as an inborn and predetermined affective response to some stimulus (Barrett, 1995; Gilbert, 2007; Tomkins, 1963). In other words, shame is conceptualized as an intrapersonal experience activated automatically without the mediation of a cognitive evaluation. It is therefore a wired-in, adaptive, expressive communicative aspect of human experience characterized as an outward signal that offers messages about one's internal state (Bowlby, 1988; Greenberg, Rice & Elliot, 1993; Lazarus, 1991; Nathanson, 1992; Tompkins, 1962, 1963).

Tomkins (1962, 1963), the proponent of affect theory, claimed that shame/humiliation had an adaptive function of inhibiting or modifying affects responsible for experiencing positive affects (Tomkins, 1963, p. 122). Put simply, according to Tomkins, the task of shame is to block the development of positive affects that would otherwise motivate us to act in an inefficient or inadequate manner in our social environments (Tomkins, 2008).

Tomkins uses the example of wrongfully attracting the attention of a person in public (e.g., waving at someone who turns out to be a stranger). The affect of shame is activated in this case as an adaptive mechanism protecting the individual from misplacing positive affects where they are not warranted. Other examples could be when a student is unexpectedly exposed in front of the class for a poor grade; the pleasurable or comfortable state is suddenly interrupted and the rupture is embodied in downcast eyes, a slump of muscle tone most visible in the head and shoulder, and a sense of confusion and

disorientation. Therefore, Tomkins (1963) suggests that shame has an adaptive function by signaling to the person to modify their behaviour and reduce communication when there is a potential threat of exposing oneself to some harm.

Furthermore, Tomkins understanding of shame has been expanded upon by the work of Allan Schore (1994, 2003a, 2003b, 2012) in his Affect Regulation Theory (ART). Drawing from a neurobiological perspective while also acknowledging the impact of the other (i.e., interpersonal), Allan Schore suggests that the interactions that occur in attachment relationships, specifically related to any barriers in emotional connection, influence subsequent embodied responses of shame. According to Schore (1994, 2003b), shame is not simply about the absence of some attachment figure but rather about something wrong with the attachment figure's presence at the time when an individual needs a caring response. For example, a caregiver continually neglecting to respond to her child's bid for attention can result in an experience of shame. The shame response, according to Schore (2003a), includes cascade of responses: a parasympathetic low-arousal state that drives an individual to hide and to assume a cognitive analog of seeing oneself as a failure. In this sense, Schore's perspective on shame acknowledges the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of this experience, and is similar to Tomkins in that a shame response can be considered an adaptive one.

Shame as interpersonal experience. Some theorists who adopted an interpersonal/relational understanding of shame have contended that an experience of shame could be both inherently damaging to human functioning because of the damage to human relationships and also adaptive. Jordan (1997), Gilbert (2007) and DeYoung (2015) echo and extend Schore's (1994, 2003a, 2003b, 2012) work by highlighting

certain nuances pertaining to the relational and interpersonal dimensions of shame. These will be described below.

Shame as maladaptive interpersonal experience. Jordan (1997) describes the experience of shame by highlighting the damaging relational dimensions of the experience: "…shame is most importantly a felt sense of unworthiness to be in connection, a deep sense of unlovability, with the ongoing awareness of how very much one wants to connect with others…there is a loss of the sense of empathic possibility, others are not experienced as empathic and the capacity for self-empathy is lost." (p. 147). She goes onto to explain that shame strikes a person, not because of wounded pride or a loss of self-esteem, but rather because there was some failure to have a basic need met, namely his or her need for emotional joining and connection (Jordan, 1997). From this perspective, shame is changed or healed when a person is brought back into relationship where empathy and emotional joining is possible. Therefore, Jordan understands shame to be a maladaptive, interpersonal experience.

Shame as adaptive relational experience. Gilbert (2007) highlighted the importance of attunement from important attachment figures, and the role of shame during this process and highlights the adaptive nature of this experience. Gilbert's research is based on the ethological-evolutionary theory of attachment, and on the results of numerous empirical studies concerning the role of positive relations in human functioning. He believes that what undergirds optimal conditions for healthy development in childhood and for the success of healthy development throughout adulthood, is the need to be accepted by others. He states that an important factor that impacts the achievement of this need is shame. According to Gilbert, the primary

function of shame consists of signaling that we are at risk of losing (or that we have already lost) the appreciation of other people. Therefore, shame emerges in situations where our exposure causes external reactions that threaten our belonging to a particular group, indicating that we may not be valued to other people. In this sense, Gilbert 's work points towards shame being an adaptive relational experience, where a negative evaluation could serve as an adaptive purpose.

Furthermore, DeYoung (2015) extends these perspectives by proposing that, "shame is the experience of one's felt sense of self disintegrating in relation to a dysregulating other" (p. 18). Similar to Jordan's (1998) and Gilbert's (2007) conceptualization, this definition assumes that shame is an experience of a self-in-relation to another person, not as an isolated intrapersonal experience of damaged self-respect or low self-esteem. However, in contrast to Jordan's (1997) understanding of feeling unloved or Gilbert's (2007) understanding of feeling unappreciated, DeYoung (2015) proposes the terminology of *disintegrating* and *dysregulating* to draw attention to the essential experience of the shamed self in relation to others.

The term disintegrating draws from self psychology which assumes that having a coherent sense of self is necessary for human beings, and a disintegration of that sense of self threatens personal psychological annihilation (DeYoung, 2015). Therefore, DeYoung (2015) proposes that the term disintegrated captures the most essential experience of the shamed self. Furthermore, instead of describing a relationship with an unempathic or disconnected other, DeYoung (2015) proposes that the term 'dysregulated' other speaks more precisely to what is happening between self and other in moments of shame. The term dysregulated other comes from affect regulation theory (Schore, 1994, 2003a,

2003b, 2012) and is defined as a person who fails to provide the emotional connection, responsiveness, and understanding that another person needs in order to be well and whole. For instance, when a dysregulated other, someone whom I would like to trust and should be able to trust, is unable to respond to me or lacks in their response, I may feel disconnected, alone and overwhelmed. From DeYoung's perspective, this is at the core of the experience of shame. In sum, DeYoung (2015) and the other theorists from an interpersonal/relational perspective suggesting that shame is an inherently relational experience with potentially damaging outcomes if relational ties cannot be repaired.

Shame as emotion. From an emotion perspective, shame is understood as a dysfunctional, maladaptive intrapersonal emotion. Shame is often categorized under a class or cluster of emotions known as self-conscious emotions (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). These emotional experiences are often compared and contrasted in the literature (Blum, 2008; Lewis, 1971; Miller, 1985; Tangney & Dearing, 2002) to reveal commonalities and distinguishing features. One common comparison reflected in the literature is the comparison between shame and guilt. For the purposes of this literature review, shame will be compared to guilt so as further distinguish shame. Comparing shame to other emotional experiences such as humiliation, embarrassment and shyness is beyond the scope of this literature review, but these comparisons have been presented well elsewhere (Blum, 2008; DeYoung, 2015; Tomkins, 2008).

Shame is not guilt. H.B. Lewis (1971) was first credited with noticing the difference between shame and guilt. Lewis argued that shame involves fairly global negative evaluations of the self whereas guilt is a negative evaluation of the self's behaviour. The main difference is feeling that 'I am a bad person' (i.e., shame) verses 'I

am a worthwhile person who did something wrong' (i.e., guilt) (DeYoung, 2015, p. 30). According to Lewis, guilt includes feeling tension, remorse and regret, but did not effect one's core identity. In contrast, shame is an acutely painful experience that typically includes feelings of being exposed and feeling fundamentally flawed, defective or a worthless being. In this way, shame and guilt have been described to have very different origins, meanings and effects in human experiences (DeYoung, 2015), but both reflect a maladaptive reference to self with potential negative outcomes.

Tangney and Dearing (2002) extended and credited Lewis' work and suggest that shame and guilt are both self-conscious emotions because they involve self-evaluation. But they also point out that shame is always inextricably linked to a relationship of self with others (i.e., interpersonal). Furthermore, in contrast to affect and interpersonal perspectives, Tangney and Dearing (2002) suggest that the origin of shame is linked to two cognitive milestones: a child's awareness of self as separate from others and his understanding of standards against which behaviours can be evaluated. So while Tangney and Dearing (2002) view shame as a painful emotion, their working definition tends towards conceptualizing shame as a cognitive process with an acknowledgment of the interpersonal influences.

M. Lewis (2008) also understood shame from this perspective. M. Lewis' (2008) perspective assumes that a necessary condition for shame activation is the early development of complex cognitive structures, such as a concept of self, self-awareness or an ability to evaluate one's behaviour with reference to a particular standard. According to M. Lewis (2008) such cognitive capacities cannot be achieved prior to the age of three, thus suggesting that shame can only be experienced after developing these faculties. One

assumption that emerges from this perspective on shame is that shame as an emotion and subsequent cognitive process can have destructive implications for interpersonal relationships, where the capacity for guilt is understood as a relational strength.

Brown (2006) also shares some similar perspectives with M. Lewis' (2008) and Tangney and Dearing's (2002) work. In her grounded theory study, Brown identifies shame as a self-conscious emotion defined as "an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love" (p. 45). While there is an effort to incorporate a broader relationally conscious perspective in Brown's work and theory (i.e., according to relational cultural theory), it is assumed that someone's feelings of shame are something to come to terms with and move beyond, and thus requiring resilience and courage to engage with. While this definition and approach to understanding shame (i.e., as something to be fixed or adjusted) captures the intensely painful aspects of the experience in relation to self and others, it assumes that the shame is inherently indicative of some pathology that requires healing, rather than to acknowledge what the shame might be suggesting about what is important to the individual who is experiencing it.

Shame as self-revelatory personal experience. Finally, the last perspective I hope to describe is shame as a personal self-revelatory human experience. This perspective draws from existential analysis (EA), a phenomenological and personal orientated psychotherapy which has influenced this study and is relevant with respect to its understanding of shame. EA psychotherapists aim to help individuals make authentic decisions and to deal freely and responsibly with the world and others. (Längle, 2019, p. 319). This is accomplished through attending to the four fundamental conditions that are

required for experiencing a fulfilled existence, namely a connection with world, life and relationships, one's personhood and meaning. The focus and conceptualization of this thesis draws from the EA psychotherapeutic framework (See chapter 3), specifically within the third fundamental motivation, which aims to put into focus the uniqueness of being a person.

Längle (2005) stated that in order to live a fulfilled existence, one must become aware of being oneself as a unique autonomous person. We develop our uniqueness through receiving respect, appreciation, and justice (i.e., by whom am I seen, considered and respected? For what am I appreciated?) (Längle, 2019). If these experiences have been made, one will live with authenticity and self-respect. However, if these experiences are missing, Längle (2004) believes that loneliness will result and as well as a need to hide behind shame.

From the perspective of EA, shame is understood to be a feeling of when the person/self feels exposed or judged in an evaluative sense, resulting in a feeling of loss of self worth or value. The function of this feeling is to protect the intimacy of the person (Längle, 2004; Steinbock, 2014). Since the protection of one's own preciousness has been entrusted to each person, shame is a protective response aimed to preserve the person's intimacy and dignity even in the face of a negative evaluative gaze (Längle, 2004). Längle also (2004) says, "without shame, there is no encounter. Behind shame is a mystery – the person." In this sense, Längle believes that where there is shame, there is also the mystery of human person, but cloaked or hidden. This perspective is also written about in Steinbock's (2014) work, and summarized in him stating, "shame arises within the emotional sphere of the person in a way that reveals me to myself," (p. 71) suggesting

that shame is a self-revelatory emotion, creativity pointing to the unique mystery of the person. From this perspective, an experience of shame, while still innately difficult to bear, can simultaneously enable people to delineate themselves from others, and to actively and consciously 'hold their own' in an effort to respect their own worth.

Comparing perspectives. The perspectives presented offer a brief overview of some of the definitions and conceptualizations of shame in the current literature. The key distinction between these perspectives is the way shame is characterized in relation to self or other (i.e., shame as an intrapersonal experience, an interpersonal experience, or some combination of both), whether the experience of shame is inherently pathological or inherently protective or adaptive, and/or whether shame is functional (i.e., having a special purpose or useful) or dysfunctional (i.e., not useful). It is my impression that while authors use the single label *'shame'* to denominate the experience, what they are discussing is the phenomenon using multiple differentiations. This could be due to shame being chameleon like in its very nature (i.e., it has many ways of revealing itself), and/or due to the fact that it has been studied from various perspectives. Therefore, as indicated by Blum (2008), understanding shame is not straightforward or simplistic, but rather includes a multitude of perspectives that should be acknowledged to garner a more holistic understanding of this experience. In this way, I agree with Vallelonga (1998) who suggests that there are many faces to the phenomenon of shame in the current literature.

In this study, I gravitate towards framing my understanding of shame from a more personal perspective as drawn from the existential analytic framework described (i.e., shame as an inherently self-revelatory and protective experience), while also

acknowledging that an in-depth exploration of the interpersonal and contextual factors associated with experiences shame is integral to understanding the experience. From this stance, I assume that we are constantly shaped and influenced by the situations we live through. Since we are (or may be) constantly formed in this way, it was deemed important to acknowledge and account for the wider situations that individuals, such as athletes, are a part of. In other words, the context in which shame is experienced (i.e., athletic culture, sport ethic) has been assumed to be part of the experience of shame itself, and will be acknowledged as an important part of understanding shame in this project.

An interesting example highlighting the interpersonal and contextual dimensions of shame was in an intercultural study conducted by Bagozzi, Verbeke & Gavino (2003). In this study, Dutch and Filipino salespeople were presented with scenarios in which they were made to feel shame by their customers. In both groups, shame was experienced with equal intensity, however, researchers observed differences in shame regulation strategies and in the behaviour that was in consequence of experiencing this emotion. The Dutch would withdraw, whereas the Filipinos would intensify their actions connected with maintaining the relation. This study revealed that, in addition to undesired social consequences (e.g., decreases of empathy, or emergence of anger and aggression), shame could lead to the activation of behaviours that are positively evaluated in relations with others (Bagozzi, Verbeke & Gavino, 2003). Thus, these intercultural studies suggest that the influence of shame on behaviour is not unequivocal and it may vary depending on the values and beliefs associated with a given culture or context.

Since shame has been understood to be a complex experience, conceptualized in a variety of ways, it my belief that there is a continuing need for the exploration of shame

as a lived experience. Furthermore, while shame is a common felt experience and has been studied from a variety in perspectives, I wonder if studying shame in a different context might reveal something unique about the experience that has yet to be understood in the literature. In the next section I will address and describe the contextual factors of a particular group of individuals – elite athletes. As will be discussed, athletes exist in unique web of relational, cultural and contextual realities, and while experiences of shame have not been extensively studied in this domain, shame has been acknowledged as something athletes are encouraged to manage for the sake of performance optimization. However, before exploring how athletes' shame has been studied in athletic contexts, I will first introduce what uniquely characterizes athletes.

The Experience of Shame in Athletes

The breath-taking achievements of expert or *elite* athletes, such as the swimmer Michael Phelps or the tennis stars Serena and Venus Williams has long fascinated spectators. With seemingly little effort these athletes perform impossible skills with remarkable consistency and precision. While the reality of becoming elite at a particular endeavor is not limited to athletics, what can be said about the world of "elite-ness" is that there are particular factors and characteristics, both observable (physical behaviour) and unobservable (systemic, emotional, and other personal sides of the experience/relationships) that define the lived experiences of those have reached this level of expertise. In the sections that following I will define the term elite athlete, give an overview of some features that characterize athletes and introduce some social and contextual factors that characterize the world athletes compete, practice and live in.

Key definition. There has been considerable inconsistency and confusion among researchers with regards to the criteria used to define *elite* or *expert* athletes (Polman, 2012). Ranging definitions have been identified, from Olympic gold medalists and world-record holders, to regional and university level athletes. According to Swann, Moran, and Piggott (2015), due to the variability in samples, either absolute expertise (studying a group of truly exceptional athletes), or relative expertise (studying expertise using comparisons between experts and novices) has fostered considerable variability of participant expertise, making it difficult to compare and synthesize findings across studies and sports.

In response, Swann et al. (2015) developed a working definition of an *elite athlete*[2]. This definition incorporates three primary themes which claim to judge the validity of elite athletes within their sport (athlete's highest standard of performance, success at the athlete's highest level, experience at the athlete's highest level) and two further themes (competitiveness of sport in the athlete's country, global competitiveness of the sport) which can be used to determine validity of sport expertise between sports. Please refer to Table 1 below for a summary of these categories. For the purposes of this study, an elite athlete refers to a person who has reached a standard of performance akin to Swann et al.'s (2015) competitive elite description.

[2] From this point forward, the term elite athlete and athlete will be used interchangeably to mean the same thing; a person who have reached a standard of athletic performance akin to Swann, Moran & Piggott's (2015) characterization of a competitive elite athlete.

Table 1

Model for Classifying the Validity of Elite Samples, Swann et al., 2015.

Within Sport Comparison				
Variable	Semi-Elite	Competitive Elite	Successful Elite	World Class Elite
Athlete's highest standard of performance	Regional level; university level; semi-professional; 4th tier leagues or tours	Involved in talent development; 3rd tier professional leagues or tours	National level; selected to represent nation; 2nd tier professional leagues or tours	International level; top tier professional leagues or tours
Success at the athlete's highest level	Success at regional, university, semi-professional, or 3rd or 4th tier	National title or success at 2nd/3rd tier	Infrequent success at international or top tier	Sustain success in major international or globally recognized competition
Experience at the athlete's highest level	< 2 years	2-5 years	5-8 years	8+ years
Between Sport Comparison				
Competitiveness of sport in athlete's country	Sport ranks outside of top 10 in country; small sporting nation	Sport ranks 5-10 in country, small-medium sporting nation	Sport ranks top 5 in the country; medium-large sporting nation	National sport; large sporting nation
Global competitiveness of sport	Not an Olympic sport; World championships limited to a few countries, limited national TV audience	Occasional Olympic sport; World championship limited to a few countries; limited international TV presence	Recent Olympic sport with regular international competition; semi-global TV audience	Regular Olympic sport with frequent major international competition; global TV audience

Note: Adapted from "Defining Elite Athletes: Issues in the Study of Expert Performance in Sport Psychology," by C. Swann, A. Moran, and D. Piggott, 2015, Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 16, 3-14.

Distinguishing features of athletes. The following paragraphs intend to describe some features that uniquely distinguish elite athletes. Such factors include the time and

energy demands required to compete at high levels, tendencies towards early specialization in sport, and influences of social valour and notoriety.

Demands on time and energy. The energy and time commitment is necessarily high for elite athletes. The majority of an athlete's resources are intimately connected to developing physical, emotional and psychosocial expertise in the confines of an athlete role (and at the exclusion of other roles) for the sake of performance optimization. By the time an athlete reaches the elite level, many hours of practice and competition encapsulate their day-to-day preoccupations. For instance, NCAA Division I athletes competing in top tier colleges in the United States spend 35 hours or more on athletic commitments per week, suggesting that training and preparation can be considered akin to a full time job. As noted by Werthner & Orklick (1986), "for elite athletes, it is impossible for him [or her] to be much else" (p. 337).

Not only are time demands high, speed of skill acquisition is of great importance. The faster and more efficient an athlete can be in developing their expertise, the more desirable and praise-worthy they become. One factor that motivates athletes to pursue their improvements with great haste is the short nature of their careers. The typical length of a professional football, basketball and baseball player is only 4-5 years and only one in five position players will have a single-year career (Witnauer, Rogers, & Saint Onge, 2007). Thus some athletes adopt a win-at-all-costs approach to their careers, sacrificing their futures for the achievement of their present goals (Martinelli, 2000). Hence, the ways in which an athlete uses their time to pursue their goals uniquely distinguishes them from other expert groups.

Early participation. Athletics may also specialize in sport early in life. For example, according to Côté, Lidor and Hackfort (2009), it is characteristic for Olympians to have sampled five different sports between the ages of 5-15 before specializing in their sport of choice. Additionally, the early specialization pathway is also characterized by a high volume of deliberate practice (Côté et al., 2009) highlighting how elite athletes tend to arrange their schedules around expertise development even from an early age.

Furthermore, young athletes also develop commitment to their sport by forming a web of personal relationships connected with their participation personal reputation (Coakley, 2009). Athletes who believe that their primary means of gaining parental and social approval is through athletic achievements may avoid situations or people that they view as a threat to their identity as an athlete (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). This indicates that when athletes are enmeshed into a sport culture and its subsequent system, they may not engage in exploratory behaviours outside of sport pursuits (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). Since sport systems are often structured in a manner that promotes compliance with team norms rather than independent thinking, athletes have no pressing need to engage in exploratory behaviours (Finch, 2009). Such evidence indicates that early participation in sport may create a context for immersion in sport culture, impacting an athlete's social and emotional worlds.

Social valour and notoriety. Another important factor to consider is the degree to which social valour accompanies athletic success and how this experience impacts athletes. Sport in general has been transformed over the past number of decades to become more globally consumed and commercialized (Lindsay & West, 2010). This has changed the nature of elite amateur sport, bringing international attention and financial

gains to young sportspeople where there has not been such attention in the past. As a result, this shift has changed the way athletes likely perceive themselves and others in their athletic circles.

In a five-year study conducted by Adler and Adler (1989), basketball players were interviewed as they entered into a world of celebrity and athletic fame. The term the "glorified self" (p. 299) was coined to describe an identity that may arise when an individual becomes the focus of intense media attention, leading to their celebrity status. The development of this glorified persona was due to the treatment of the athlete as an object by others (particularly the media) to accentuate certain storylines and attract the attention of sports fans. Furthermore, the experience of social valour has been investigated in a series of studies by Carless and Douglas (2009, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). The term "performance narrative" (Douglas & Carless, 2006, p. 14) was coined to describe a narrative that revolves around performance outcomes (i.e., winning or being the best) and achieving athletic excellence. Therefore, it can be said that optimal athletic achievement is often considered as a part of how both spectators and the athletes see themselves and understand who they are and how they function in their worlds.

Summary. The pursuit of elite athletics is a unique way in which individuals may choose to engage with their experience of the world. As described, athletes develop their expertise within a context that demands high commitment of time from an early age. This commitment is to develop sport-specific expertise, all with the possibility of burgeoning social notoriety among friends, family and the public at large. Athletes are therefore a unique group of individuals worth studying. The section will aim to describe the social norms that govern the interpersonal dimension of elite sport.

Norms in elite sport. One aspect of being an elite athlete is the complex interactive social process at the core of maintaining connection with sport. As noted, sport can be considered a unique social context since it is governed by a set of specific intrinsic values and norms. These values and norms manifest themselves implicitly and explicitly in a variety ways on the individual, structural and cultural levels. For example, athletes may behave according to stated and assumed norms (individual level); these norms are embedded into the way sport is organized (structural) and the specific culture that is created (Knoppers, ten Boom, Buisman, Elling & De Knop, 2001).

Furthermore, according, to Hughes and Coakley (1991), elite athletes and coaches adopt norms that guide the evaluation of attitudes and actions in the world of elite sport. It is in this context that elite athletes come to internalize the values that guide their understanding of who they and what is or is not sanctioned in relation to their behaviours and emotional expressiveness as an athlete. These norms have been termed the *sport ethic* (Coakley, 2009; Hughes & Coakley, 1991) and are typically formed around four general principles: (a) being an athlete involves making sacrifices for the game; (b) being an athletes involves striving for distinction; (c) being an athlete involves accepting risks and playing through pain; and (d) being an athlete involves refusing to accept limits in the pursuit of possibilities.

Overall, there is some evidence that suggests that these norms resonate with athletes' experience. For instance, Fogel's (2011) work revealed substantial evidence that 'paying the price' and 'playing through pain' are concepts that resonate strongly with athletes (e.g., tackle football) at all levels. Furthermore, these norms have been studied empirically in relation to behaviours associated with overconformity (i.e., excessive

commitment) to them. Excessive commitment to these norms tends to be celebrated and defined amoung athletes and their communities as *supranormal* (Coakley, 2009). For instance, when some athletes engage in diet and exercise routines to improve performance, overconforming athletes may develop eating disorders (Johns, 1998). Where many athletes may take ibuprofen after training or games, overconforming athletes may undergo high dose injections of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or develop an addiction to prescription medication (King et al., 2014). Furthermore, other studies have framed similar constructs using the terminology of performance narrative (e.g., Carless & Douglas, 2013a, 2013b). Similar to the distinction norm of the sport ethic, the performance narrative perpetuates the idea that optimal performance outcomes distinguish athletes as better than their competitor. These performance narratives are told and retold by other athletes, coaches, the media and governing bodies, sending the message that the ultimate goal of sport is to set oneself apart as best.

Studies have also found that despite an athletes' knowledge of the risks associated with their conformity to these norms, they continue to be driven to compete (e.g., Atkinson, 2011; Fenton & Pitter, 2010). At the core of the decisions to engage in the overconforming behaviours associated with these norms is the socialized belief that commitment to the sport ethic provides the athlete mental (Pettersson, Ekström & Berge, 2012), physical (Atkinson, 2011; Fenton & Pitter, 2010), and social advantages (Waldron & Krane, 2005). Therefore, acknowledging the implicit and explicit nature of the sport ethic (Hughes & Coakley, 1991) is important for a more complete and deeper understanding of shame as experienced by athletes. The paragraphs below describe the

four dimensions of the sport ethic in greater detail, followed by how these dimensions are connected to an experience of shame for athletes.

Sacrifices for the game. The first norm of the sport ethic highlights that athletes must be dedicated to *the game* above all other things. This norm stresses that athletes should love *the game* and prove it by giving it top priority in their lives. This is demonstrated through an athlete's unwavering commitment to meeting expectations of fellow athletes, making sacrifices to stay in their sport and facing demands of competition without backing down.

Striving for distinction. Secondly, athletes must strive for distinction. This norm captures the expectation that athletes are to seek to improve and achieve perfection relentlessly. Breaking records and winning championships are the ultimate mark of distinction because it reaffirms that athletes are a special group dedicated to pushing the limits, exceeding others and being the best that they can be, no matter what it takes.

Accepting risks and playing through pain. Moreover, athletes are expected to endure physical discomfort, pressure and fear without backing down from competitive challenges. Athletes should simply accept that this experience of pain is a part of the game. According to Leahy (2008), many sport activities pose inherent risk of injury, but voluntarily accepting these risks is a mark of true athlete.

Refusing to accept limits. Lastly, athletes are expected to accept no obstacles in the pursuit of success in sport. This norm stresses the obligation to pursue athletic greatness at all costs. According to Hughes and Coakley (1991) an athlete does not accept a situation without trying to change it or overcome it. External limitations are recognized as invalid. Coakley (2009) notes that "athletes don't accept obstacles without

trying to overcome them and beat the odds; dreams, they say, are achievable unless one quits" (p. 164). Therefore, when there is a perception that limits could impede achievement, there are efforts to provide pep talks, therapy or technology to alter those perceptions (Coakley, 1991).

Summary of the sport ethic. According to Hughes and Coakley (1991), athletes conform to a set of social norms that defined belonging to elite sport culture. These norms include (a) sacrificing for the game; (b) striving for distinction; (c), accepting risks and playing through pain, and (d) refusing to accept limits. Overconformity to these norms have been studied empirically and suggest that athletes do in fact incorporate these norms into the social fabric of their interactions. Therefore, given that shame is a common human experience that is experienced in relationship with others, understanding the social fabric of elite sport culture offers a richer glance into the influences that may impact the understanding of the experience of shame, as studied in this thesis. Sport as an evaluative practice will now be explored adding to the understanding of sport culture.

Sport as an intensely evaluative practice. Another distinguishing factor that frames the athletic experience is the potential for sport to create an atmosphere of evaluation (i.e., evaluation of performance and/or appearance). Since sport is predicated, in part, on establishing status through a public display of physical and technical ability (or lack thereof), performance is often associated with high stakes outcomes. Therefore, athletes tend to be under careful scrutiny by coaches, administrators and spectators alike. There is evidence that this scrutiny, which is focused on achievement and the evaluation of this achievement, can elicit shame (Tracy & Robins, 2007). For instance, in a content analysis on elite athletes' stressors, Thelwell, Weston, Greenless and Hutchings (2008)

found that performance related stressors that were tied to the evaluation of performance were the most frequently reported stressors, suggesting that sport participation may foster pressure to perform optimally, especially under scrutiny.

Furthermore, the evaluative nature of sport is embedded into the relational dynamics between athletes and their teammates and coaches. This leads to a structured pattern of evaluation reflective of the specific end with which teammates and coaches were brought together: performance optimization and athletic success (Kleinert et al., 2012). Commitment to this shared purpose is self-monitored and governed by the expectations of a sport culture. Moreover, these comparisons are ever changing, with current status providing no guarantee of future status. In fact, higher perceived status (e.g., being ranked higher in a poll as opposed to an opponent) may actually contribute to feelings of devaluation if a supposedly 'stronger' team loses to a weaker opponent (Partridge & Elison, 2010). In this case, there is great potential for athletes to experience shame when confronted with new competition experiences. Given that shame is a relational experience, the evaluative nature of the sport hints at the potential for experiences of shame to be part of relational dynamics athlete's experiences.

Summary. Elite athletes are guided by certain norms (i.e., the sport ethic), which have been embedded into the nature of sport as a social experience. Evidence suggests (Atkinson, 2011; Fenton & Pitter, 2010; Carless & Douglas, 2013a, 2013b; Fogel, 2011; Johns, 1998; King et al., 2014; Pettersson et al., 2013; Waldron & Krane, 2005) that these norms resonate with the athlete experience. Furthermore, one key aspect of the social experience of athletics is the evaluative nature of sport culture in general. This evaluative feature of sport culture is embedded into the relational dynamics of coach-athlete

relationships and the cultural of athletic participation. Given that shame is a common experience that is experienced in relationship with others and situated in the world in a particular context, such as athletics, I now turn my attention to the present literature, and will present how shame has been studied in the context of elite athletics.

Empirical review on shame experiences in elite athletes. Interestingly, taken together, the literature on athletes' experiences of shame suggests that little is known about the experience of shame for athletes. The following paragraphs will outline what has been studied and determined about the experience of shame for athletics.

Firstly, athletes' most often experience shame when they have perceived that they have failed. Conroy and Elliot's (2004) research has determined that one reason why athletes develop a fear of failure is that they fear experiencing shame and embarrassment. In this research the experience of shame was connected to envisioning oneself doing poorly on the field and disappointing coaches due to poor performance (2004). This was supported in a recent narrative study conducted by Battaglia, Kerr and Stirling (2018), youth ice hockey goalies' experiences of being benched as a result of not playing well were examined. It was found that being benched – or more specifically the skate over to the bench – was a shameful experience which signified to others the goalies' inadequacy. This perceived failure particularly implicated coaches' and teammates' negative evaluations as the most significant evaluation making the experience a shameful one. Additionally, McGregor and Elliot (2005) reported that shame was at the root of fear of failure, and that athletes' with high fear of failure who performed poorly were more likely to experience shame. Therefore, based on McGregor and Elliot's work, it has been

found that athletic environments which tend to value outcomes, such as winning and losing, can lead to more experiences of shame when perceived failure has occurred.

Secondly, frameworks attempting to understand and explain shame in sport psychology have loosely conceptualized shame as detrimental experience that negatively impacts performance outcomes. The fundamental assumption held from this perspective is that emotions are triggered by a person's appraisal of the probability of achieving a relevant sport related goal (Hanin, 2004). From this broad standpoint, evidence suggests that positive and pleasant emotions are generally associated with adaptive performance outcomes while negative or unpleasant emotions (including shame) are generally associated with maladaptive performance outcomes (Cerin, 2003; Elison, 2005; Partridge & Elison, 2010). Therefore, controlling and managing negative emotions for the sake of performance optimization is a common theme permeating the literature, clinical practice and theoretical understanding of emotion in sport, including shame. Evidence of this can be noticed in various emotion coping models that are frequently referenced in the sport psychology literature. The next few paragraphs will describe some of these models.

Individual zones of optimal functioning (IZOF). One popular model that has guided much research on emotion in sport (specifically around managing anxiety) has been the *individual zones of optimal functioning* (IZOF) model (Hagtvet & Hanin, 2007; Hanin, 2000, 2004). The IZOF model is sport-specific framework that describes the relationship between emotional experiences and relative sport success in sporting tasks. See Figure 2 below for a visual depiction of this model.

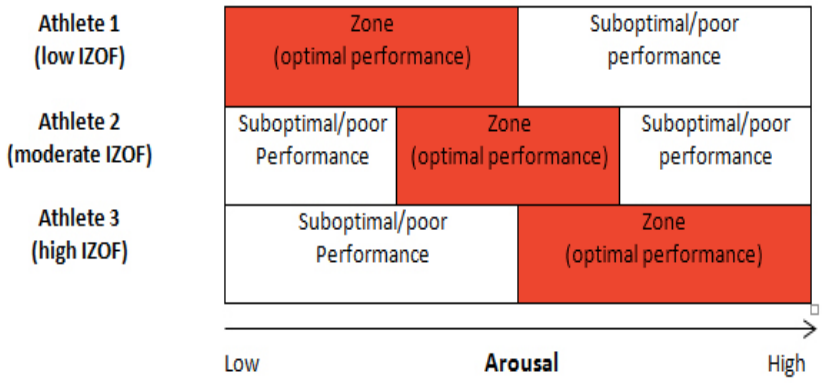

Figure 2. The Zones of Optimal Functioning Model, Hanin (2000c)

When considering experiences of shame in light of this model, Hanin (2000c) has not made any explicit claims about shame itself, but suggests broadly that individual athletes must decide from themselves if a given emotion will help or hinder their performance and act accordingly to manage the experience to optimize their performance. While this model is practical in many respects, it also neglects to acknowledge the deeper meaning or function of emotional experiences in general, and particularly neglects to address the experience of shame.

Coping models. Another important area to consider is the research on coping in sport. It has been established that the inability to cope with stress is a significant factor in the failure of athletes to function fully in many types of athletic performances (Lazarus, 2000). Lazarus' cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion emphasizes the process of appraisal, which concerns the ways people construe what is happening for their well being in relation to their goals, values and beliefs in their given environment. Therefore, it is widely accepted in sport psychology literature that athletes of all ages and abilities need to be able to cope with performance stressors, not only to perform optimally, but to make sport a satisfying experience (Nicholls & Poleman, 2007). Less

effective forms of coping with stress have been found to lead to sport withdrawal (Klint & Weiss, 1986; Smith 1986), decreased performance (Lazarus, 2000), and athletes not being able to pursue careers in professional sport (Holt & Dunn, 2004).

Furthermore, Lazarus (1991, 2000) suggests that more positive emotions (e.g., pride) will result from events that facilitate goal attainment (e.g., first down), whereas more negative emotions (e.g., shame) are likely to emerge from situations that prevent goal attainment (e.g., fumbling). Similar to the IZOF model, this coping model, while practical in some respects neglect to address the nature of the emotional experiences it aims to manage.

Limitations of existent research. While it has been established that athletes would benefit from learning to cope with difficult circumstances, it is interesting to note that the literature neglects to expand on the experiences that are important to manage, particularly the experience of shame. Therefore, given that shame is a common experience that is both costly and part of the athlete experience, both the IZOF model and coping models could benefit from a richer exploration of the experiences of the emotions which are being managed to begin with. Furthermore, the emphasis on appraisal in these models implicates an individualistic approach to studying how people are making appraisals of their emotions. However, as Tamminen and Bennett (2017) suggest, along with other theorists who hold an interpersonal perspective on shame, moving towards a more social or interpersonal understanding of emotional experiences would be one way to expand our current understanding of emotion experience in sport. I would also suggest that integrating a more holistic and broadened understanding of shame using an existential-analytic framework may also provide a more deepened understanding of shame itself.

Rationale of this study. My interest in this area of research originated from three primary concerns. First and foremost, there is little research on athletes' perspectives and experiences of shame in the sport literature. We cannot truly know if and how shame can be managed for athletes without knowing how athletes have embodied and experienced shame. To really understand what shame is experienced by athletes, we need to turn to the athletes who have experienced it. A secondary interest of mine is whether a broader or more holistic understanding of shame would emerge from exploring shame with a more in-depth method, adding to the current broad characterization of shame. I address this concern in chapter 3 when I introduce a particular hermeneutic phenomenological research framework aimed to explore and understand the lived experience in an in-depth manner. Finally, considering the unique personal and social factors of athletes, I wondered if that which distinguished athletes (i.e., dedication to the game, high time demands during the developmental years, evaluative social context) might also reveal something unique about the experience of shame itself.

Therefore, the primary purpose of this research was to fill a much-needed gap in the sport psychology literature and to offer an alternative and more nuanced perspective for the shame based literature: understanding athletes' experience of shame. With that in mind, a hermeneutic phenomenological method was used to explore the research question: How is the phenomenon of shame experienced by elite athletes?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

> Who can listen to a story of loneliness and despair without taking the risk of experiencing similar pains in his own heart and even losing his precious peace of mind? In short: Who can take away suffering without entering it? (Nouwen, 1979, p. 72)

There is a certain privilege that comes with conducting any kind of investigative research, particularly research that showcases the beauty and complexity of human experience. And as Nouwen (1979) so beautifully articulates in the quote above, turning towards the mystery of human suffering, whether it be our own or the suffering of someone close to us, is one way to come to a deeper understanding of it, or even ease its weight or intensity. How I chose to 'enter' or come to intimately know a particular kind of emotional suffering (i.e., experiences of shame) is the central focus of the present chapter. In the following paragraphs, I will describe the research philosophy and method adopted for this thesis, which is primarily grounded in a hermeneutic phenomenology method (van Manen, 1990, 2014) which integrates an explicit personal, dialogical stance (i.e., personal phenomenology; Launeanu, Klaassen, Kwee & Konieczny, 2019) inspired by existential analysis (Längle, 1993, 2012, 2019). The bulk of the chapter will focus on the process of this research as it was applied including the rationale for choosing this methodology. To conclude, I will review the ways that I ensured the rigour of this study.

Paradigmatic Commentary

The following paragraphs comment on my paradigmatic positioning. It will begin with some comments on paradigmatic assumptions in general and then delineate the assumptions that will be foundational to this investigation.

Whether one recognizes it or not, all researchers are philosophers in that "universal sense in which all human beings…are guided by highly abstract principles" (Bateson, 1972, p. 326). These principles guide the development of assumptions about fundamental human issues and provide an optic through which to explore and understand the world. Furthermore, Creswell (2003) makes the argument that good research requires a researcher to make explicit the paradigmatic assumptions that shape a study since a researcher's ontological beliefs (beliefs about the nature of reality) and epistemological beliefs (beliefs associated with the relationship between the enquirer and would-be-known) should be consistent with the research methodology. While there are a variety of paradigms that researchers could draw from, some researchers have narrowed the research paradigms to four categories, which include positivist/post-positivist, constructivist/interpretative, transformative and pragmatic (Mertens, 2014). Phenomenological researchers have debated whether phenomenological research is best suited under the positivist paradigm or the interpretive paradigm (Finlay, 2009). As a result, variations of phenomenologists answer the fundamental questions of ontology and epistemology differently. Many paradigms have also been influenced by the eras of thoughts, such as modern and post-modern eras. Phenomenology is not void of this influence either.

Modernists argue that reality is objective and can be quantitatively measured, whereas some post-modernist oppose this, and argue that truth cannot be measured apart from the individual and his or her experience (Finlay, 2009). The impact of this divide influences phenomenological research, such that phenomenology is often divided into descriptive and interpretative phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology reflects a

more positivist view and interpretative phenomenology aligns with a more constructivist view. Both approaches are systematic ways to approach phenomenological research, but they differ in the ways that they respond to basic questions.

For the present study, I chose to employ a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research (Finlay, 2011, 2014; Launeanu et al., 2018; van Manen, 1990, 2014) to gain an in-depth understanding of athletes' experience of shame. Hermeneutic phenomenological researchers aim to return to the embodied experiential meanings of the world directly experienced in both the interview and interpretive process (Finlay, 2012). Hermeneutic phenomenology aligns with interpretative/constructivist paradigmatic assumptions (Laverty, 2003) answering questions related to ontology supporting the idea that multiple realities exist. Instead of claiming that experiences can be fully known, hermeneutic phenomenology allows for understanding to emerge in multiple ways. These realities are co-constructed by the knower and the would-be-known in a relational exchange through one's experience in the world. Therefore, the knower and the would-be-known are considered to have a close relationship. These are the assumptions that guide my approach in this research.

Furthermore, it is important to note that phenomenology can be understood as both an approach to research and a philosophical movement with a dynamic history. Therefore, it was important to immerse myself in the history and philosophy of phenomenology prior to conducting this study. While keeping the overarching aim of phenomenological research in mind, I will briefly introduce the philosophes underlying this phenomenological research in and conclude with a discussion pertaining to hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method. This is an important discussion since

the philosophy undergirding phenomenology will invariably impact the research process (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006).

Phenomenology

> Thus "phenomenology" means…to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself. (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 7C)

The word phenomenology is derived from the Greek work "phenomenon," which means, "to show itself" (Moran & Mooney, 2002, p. 279). As a philosophy, phenomenology is historically rooted in late ninetieth century European philosophy, drawing from the philosophical principles of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), among others. Phenomenologists seek to describe the core or 'essence' of an experience in the world. Rather than explaining a phenomenon, the descriptive nature of phenomenological research seeks to enhance one's understanding of an experience as it is lived. The following paragraphs intend to provide an introduction to the work of these philosophies drawing on particular concepts relevant to this investigation.

As a philosophy, phenomenology emerged at the end of the nineteenth century beginning with the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl criticized psychology as a science, and challenged positivist assumptions asserting that objective truth could be found outside of an individual's experience (Bowe & Sloan, 2014). He aimed to describe the essence of a phenomenon by going back "to the things themselves" (Husserl, 1911/1980, p. 116) insisting that consciousness is intentional, and always directed towards something in the world (Wertz, 2005). For Husserl, navigating the structures of consciousness was understood as a way to grasp a phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1989), not

simply a matter of induction or generalization. Therefor Husserl developed an approach to understanding human experience known as transcendental (or descriptive) phenomenology. Staying true to transcendental phenomenology requires that researchers reframe from deviating from the nature of the phenomenon (Finlay, 2009), without theory or interpretation (Jennings, 2000; van Manen, 2014).

While descriptive phenomenology is concerned with the way a certain phenomenon may appear apart from interpretation, interpretative phenomenology goes beyond this understanding to include the meaning of being (van Manen, 2014). Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a student of Husserl and hermeneutic philosopher, was interested in the study of lived experience. While Husserl's philosophy focused on description, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology concentrates on the importance of interpretation (Dowling, 2007). Heideggar questioned whether knowledge could be pursued apart from interpretation. Since human beings are constantly interpreting their worlds, any knowledge pursued will be influenced by their pre-understandings. As people engage in their worlds, they find meaning in the world around them, but they also construct meaning as they experience life (Laverty, 2003). Rather than tracing back all phenomena to human consciousness (transcendental subjectivity), Heidegger saw the "state of being" as a more fundamental concern (Palmer, 1969). Thus Heidegger sought to see beyond everyday meanings to see the large meaning in 'being' to uncover meanings that are hidden (Dowling, 2007). Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenologists reject the idea of bracketing, arguing that experiences cannot be erased and eliminated, but rather are embedded and implicated in the interpretation process (Dowling, 2007).

Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) extended the work of Heidegger by asking the question "how is understanding possible?" thus attempting to identify the conditions within which understanding takes place (Fleming, Gaidys & Robb, 2002). Following his inspirational mentor, Heidegger, Gadamer believed that language was the universal medium through which we gain understanding of our experiences in the world (Langdridge, 2007). Therefore, if one is interested in understanding experience, Gadamer believed that the stories people tell of their experience need to be explored with the help of some specific hermeneutic, or method of interpretation. This interpretation is an ever-evolving process that occurs through relationship between two people (i.e., researcher and participant). Rather than bracketing their 'horizons' (pre-understandings), a deepened understanding is found through the fusion of one's own horizon with the viewpoint of another (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). In other words, Gadamer believed that interpretation and understanding are inseparable and that one makes sense of their world based on one's own history and dialogue with another.

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Method

Max van Manen (1997), a Canadian phenomenologist, developed a hermeneutic phenomenology research method, which aims to evoke lived experiences through description and interpretation (Finlay, 2011) as described through language (Davidsen, 2013). Using an attitude of openness, researchers can direct their attention to the lived experienced under investigation accessing an experience pre-reflexively – not as a cognitive activity, but as it is lived. In doing so researchers gain "a deeper understanding of the nature of our everyday experiences" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). Unlike other researcher methods aimed at developing theory, the purpose of accessing the meaning of

experience is to deepen the understanding of its significance and to inform practice (van Manen, 2014). This understanding is not aimed at developing a fixed list of how-to instructions, but rather aims to foster "ethical sensitivities, interpretative talents, and thoughtfulness in professional activities, relations and situations" (van Manen, 2014, p.68). Furthermore, hermeneutic phenomenologists use a hermeneutic circle as a means for achieving depth in the analytical interpretations while being reflexive of their own experiences. In this study I will be using van Manen's (1997) methodological guidelines for conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research, while also integrating an explicit personal, dialogical stance (i.e., personal phenomenology; Launeanu, Klaassen, Konieczny & Kwee, 2018) informed by personal existential analysis (Längle, 1993, 2003, 2005, 2012; Kwee & Längle, 2013).

Rationale for hermeneutic phenomenology. The rationale for using a hermeneutic phenomenological method in this research came out two primary concerns. Firstly, we cannot truly know if and how shame can be managed for athletes, without knowing how athletes' have embodied and experienced shame. To really understand what shame can be or mean, we need to turn to the athletes who have experienced it. Hermeneutic phenomenology as research method aims to understand experiences as they are lived and may offer an expansive understanding of shame, adding to current understandings, and serving intentions of this research. A secondary interest, or wondering, of mine is whether a broader, more holistic understanding of shame would emerge from exploring shame with a more in-depth method, not just simple understandings adding to the current broad characterization of shame. With these

intentions in mind, the next few paragraphs will outline the systematic and rigorous research process as it was engaged.

Hermeneutic phenomenology research process. van Manen (1990) proposed that hermeneutic phenomenological research is comprised of the fluid interplay of six research activities. These activities are understood as a creative and flexible method for understanding a phenomenon in its singularity (van Manen, 2014). van Manen (1990) suggested the following activities for this process:

(1) turning towards a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;

(2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;

(3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;

(4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;

(5) maintaining a strong and orientated pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;

(6) balancing research context be considering parts and the whole.

Each of these research activities can be understood as guideposts rather than chronological milestones that are to be completed in a rigid manner. In addition to these activities, I also integrated principles based on personal phenomenology (Launeanu, et al., 2018) including steps that integrated participant and researcher understanding and positioning towards the phenomenon. In the paragraphs that follow, I will briefly describe van Manen's activities in relation to this project, how personal phenomenology was integrated, followed by a detailed description of the research process that I engaged in to complete this research study.

Turning towards a phenomenon. van Manen (1990) states that every phenomenological inquiry is driven by the thoughtful activity of turning towards a phenomenon that concerns or grips us. The act of being gripped by a particular phenomenon implies that a researcher is being invited into an active dialogue with a lived experience that has beckoned, called or laid some claim upon his or her life (Romanyshyn, 2013). In my case, as a retired elite athlete who experienced the crippling effects of shame, I wanted to design a research study that explicitly acknowledged shame as a part of the athletic experience.

Turning towards a phenomenon, as van Manen (1990) suggests, requires the researcher to understand the various assumptions and presuppositions they carry in relation to the phenomenon. This could include 'common-sense' personal pre-understandings, attitudes and existing scientific knowledge about the research topic. While some phenomenologists from the transcendental tradition would call for researchers to bracket these assumptions as part of the phenomenological reduction (Finlay, 2008), van Manen, (1990, 2014) invites researchers to consider how their experiences and presuppositions will invariably impact their interpretations. Engaging in this process, I "tried to come to terms with [my] assumptions, not in order to forget them, but rather to hold them deliberately at bay" (van Manen, 1990, p. 47). Thus explicating these assumptions helped me become open to new understandings of the phenomenon as they developed throughout the research process.

In order to be aware of my pre-understandings, I engaged in three key processes: (a) I kept a reflexive research journal throughout the research process; (b) I was interviewed by one of my thesis supervisors about my experience of shame as an athlete,

and (c) I dialogued about my experiences with my thesis supervisors and research team. In my research journal I openly described my experiences throughout the research process, specifically reflecting on my experience of shame as it related to my research participants, and the research process. This comprised of a series of emotionally vulnerable entries over the course of a year. During the data collection phase of this project, I was also interviewed by one of supervisors with the interview guide I developed for this research project. In this interview, I reflected on my experience of shame, and shared my experiences openly. After the interview, I transcribed the data and was left with very clear account of my experience and the assumptions I carried. Finally, I remained open to dialogue with my supervisors and research team about my day-to-day experiences of engaging with the research. In these conversations, I was listened too with kindness; these experiences added to the reflections and understanding I had of shame. These reflexive activities will be is described in detail in chapter 6.

Investigating the experience as we live it. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the lifeworld, the world of lived experience, "is both the source and the object of phenomenological research" (van Manen, 1990, p. 53). Therefore the meaning of lived experiences, such as shame, can only be understood through accessing an experience. A researcher can choose to search any corner of the lifeworld for lived experience material (or data): Through interviews, observation, language analysis, personal reflection or reflecting on art and literature (van Manen, 2014). Regardless of how the lived accounts are collected, it is important to recognize that the lived experienced descriptions are never truly identical to the pre-reflective lived experiences themselves; these experiences are already "transformations of those experiences" (van Manen, 2014, p. 313). The

challenge of this type of research is for researchers "to find access to life's dimensions while hoping that the meanings [brought] to the surface from the depths of life's oceans have not entirely lost some of the natural quiver of their undisturbed existence" (van Manen, 2014, p. 313).

For my research, I chose to consider both my personal reflections and to speak with six other elite athletes who had experienced shame. Since my own life experiences were immediately accessible to me and fit the criteria for participation in the study, it seemed fitting to use my personal account as a starting point for exploration (van Manen, 1990, 2014). However, while it is possible that my experiences was unique, it is more likely that the pre-reflective material and patterns that emerged from my interview pointed to something universally shared. Therefore, I chose to "borrow" (van Manen, 2014, p. 313) from other people's experiences to deepen and enrich my understanding of shame. In this way I became more experienced in understanding shame through drawing near to the experiences of my participants. During the interview itself, apart from asking about a participant's history of athletic participation, I made efforts to ask about examples of experiences of shame. I did this by asking questions that helped participants describe their experience in as much detail as possible. I also tried to help participants remain connected with their personal experience of the phenomenon by asking questions pertaining to the feelings, internally experienced impulses (i.e., how are you drawn or repulsed?) and the understanding they had as it related to the phenomenon they were describing.

Even though it was advantageous to be connected with the phenomenon via my personal experience, I also noticed how easy it was for my participants to begin

explaining or theorizing about their experiences of shame, particularly as it pertained to placing blame on coaches and other people who had evoked pain and discomfort. I did my best to help my participants remain connected with experiential content, but it proved to be challenging even with my best efforts. Despite the challenge, I was fortunate that all participants offered some experiential data. During the data analysis stage, I made an effort to consciously focus on the experiential data of the interviews and found the process to flow a lot easier.

Reflecting on essential features. van Manen (1990) asserts that phenomenological reflection is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional process that aims to "grasp the essential meaning of something" (p. 77). It is not a rule-bound process but rather a free act of 'seeing' meaning driven by retaining an empathic openness (the epoché) while reflexively identifying and restraining pre-understanding (reduction) so as to engage the phenomena in themselves (Finlay, 2008). Reflecting on the essential features of a phenomenon is a paradoxical process; it is easy in that researchers have a pre-existing understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, but difficult in that they must remain open to reflectively determine and explicate what the lived experience actually is (van Manen, 1990). Therefore, through reflecting on the essential features, hermeneutic phenomenological researchers hope for "a more direct contact with the experience as it is lived" (van Manen, 1990, p. 78).

As suggested by van Manen (1990, 2014), exploring the essentials features of a phenomenon could happen in a variety of ways. Overall, flexibility and creativity are important guideposts to incorporate so as to maintain a sense of openness towards the phenomenon. Van Manan (2014) suggests that researchers first take a holistic approach,

attending to the interview text as a whole. Researcher could choose to develop a phrase to express the meaning of the text as is. Secondly, a selective reading and highlighting approach could be employed to focus on evocative sections of the text. Researchers ask themselves what the selected texts reveal about the phenomenon and reflect on how and why the text was evocative in the ways that it was. Finally, researchers could also conduct a detailed reading of the text line by line reading the interview in a meticulous manner, identifying essential expressions of the phenomenon, and how it contributes to the understanding of the lived experience.

My experience of data analysis incorporated these three approaches. I would first immerse myself in the interviews by listening to the audio recording repeatedly, allowing myself to be reminded of important phrases, intonations and overall conversational flow. I listened to each interview at least twice using this approach. As I listened, I would take notes on the ways I was impacted by the interview and the impressions I developed of my participant and our relational dynamic. The selective-highlighting process and the line-by-line analysis seemed to be the most helpful in extrapolating evocative quotes that highlighted the essential features of the experience. I would engage these three strategies throughout the analysis process in a fluid manner and relied on my intuition to direct the openness I offered in the process (See Appendix A for an example of some of these notes).

Personal phenomenology. In order to focus my research process on the personal-relational aspects of shame I incorporated principles of personal phenomenology (Launeanu et al., 2019) into my hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. In the following paragraphs, I detail my experience integrating this novel analytic approach.

Personal phenomenology, while possessing a strong theoretical and methodological kinship with hermeneutic phenomenology (Finlay, 2011; van Manen, 1990, 2014) elaborates and places at its core the existential-ethical understanding of the person as the integrating centre of the phenomenological experience (Längle, 2003). The existential-analytical model of the person draws from Längle (2013) framework that portrays the person as "that which says I within me" (p. 213). The person, in this representation, is characterized as an endless, dynamic flow, captured by the I/ego. From this understanding, the person moves between the inner pole of intimacy with one's self and the public pole of personal encounters with others. Therefore, personal phenomenology complements and expands the focus of hermeneutic phenomenology in the recognition that the human phenomena explored in psychological research are personal phenomena revealed in one's personal relationship with the world, others and oneself (Launeanu et al., 2019). As such, uncovering the lived experiences and meanings is done by activating the personal capacities of the researcher by taking an ethical stand and responding or acting in the world (Längle, 2003a; Lévinas, 1985; Wojtyla, 1979).

Similar to the process of hermeneutic phenomenology outlined by van Manen (1997), the process in personal phenomenology begins with an attitude of openness toward the phenomenon, and then the subjective experience of both the researcher and participants is engaged in order to understand the lived experience of the researched phenomenon (Kwee & Längle, 2019). This integrated emotional experience includes both an inner knowing on the basis of inter-subjectivity, and a perpetual openness to new understandings. From this perspective, I acknowledge that the researcher and participant both possess a dialogical capacity constantly in relation both with oneself and with the

world (Launeanu et al., 2019). However, what differs personal phenomenology from van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological research that that at the core of this research approach is the personal encounter between the researcher and research participants. The act of this personal encounter is inherently intimate and personal, and required that I adopted a particular *attitude of heart* acknowledging the other as mystery and gift, and someone to encounter in their otherness. Therefore, instead of the interview being a transactional exchange, it was privileged as an encounter in the context of dialogue.

To do this, I acknowledged that I played an active role in the interviews and became preoccupied with questions such as: In what ways am I being moved by the presence of the other, my participant? What is moving me as he/she speaks about this topic? These preoccupations subsequently gave way to sharing how my participants' presence and words left an impression on me. I acknowledged that my participants changed me as the researcher and resulted in thoughts, feelings and responses that I actively engaged with and shared openly as they arose in me.

Furthermore, when I encountered the emotional life of my participants, I encountered something deeply connected to their person, and I came closer that which reveals something vital about them. According to Längle's (2011) theory on emotionality, emotions detect the personally relevant values in someone's experiences and this give indication of what animates their life. It is through connecting with this vitality that we can be moved by the person that is with us. Therefore, in the case of this research, I came to a deeper understanding about shame through connecting with the relationality and emotionality of my participants. From this stance, I was able to connect with my personal positioning as well as my participant's positioning towards the

phenomenon of shame. In this way, as the participant and researcher encountered each other via their emotionality and positioning, the essence of the phenomenon was detected.

Therefore, in addition to incorporating van Manen's (2014) three modes of exploration, I also incorporated principles of personal phenomenology in an effort to encounter the person of my participants, so as to come to deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing. In the following paragraphs I attempt to highlight some of the important aspects of phenomenological writing. Van Manen (2014) stresses that phenomenological writing is an integral part of the hermeneutic phenomenological research process. Given the importance of writing, it is important to restate that phenomenological research does not end after the thematic analysis; rather, the themes become the structure of the phenomenological text, which seeks to evocatively describe the meaning of a lived experience as it is lived through (van Manen, 2014). The biggest challenge for researchers at this stage is producing the findings (phenomenological text) in a way that portrays the participants' experience in all of their complexity (Finlay, 2011) and to use a textual representation to do this. Creating this text largely depends upon the creativity of the writer, and their willingness to engage with the text in conversation. For myself as the primary researcher, the importance of this process became apparent in data analysis. Spending time writing helped me deepen my understanding of the lived experience, and also encouraged me to think outside of the box, engaging creatively with the nuisances implicitly expressed in the data. It also highlighted the inherent difficulty of producing a text that simply was not a reiteration of the experiences described but an evocative meaningful text.

The purpose and aim of the phenomenological text is to "reawaken our basic experience of the phenomenon described, and…to experience the more foundational grounds of the experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 122). The text becomes an icon that points to a 'thing' that it attempts to describe. As I wrote the phenomenological text for this project, I drew heavily upon metaphors and evocative language to convey what the experience was like. My hope was that readers would read the text and come into closer emotional contact with the lived experience of shame. If the text is phenomenologically powerful, it "acquires a certain transparency…[to] permit us to see the 'deeper' significance, or meaning structures of, the lived experience it describes" (van Manen, 1990, p. 122). This is, of course, a difficult task since the 'seeing' of a phenomenon, such as shame, is always in the past. Therefore, the essential tension of phenomenological writing is found at this crossroad: the text must convey what is happening while also seeking to instill what the phenomenon is like. van Manen (2014) describes the writing process as entering into darkness; others (Finlay, 2011) have referred to this stage as akin to childbirth. Either way, there is a mixture of trust and surrendering asked of the researcher to engage with the flow of creativity that is required to write a phenomenological text. I engaged in this process and generated a theatrically written play evocatively showcasing the phenomenon of shame. This text will be present in chapter 4.

Maintaining a strong orientation to the phenomenon. van Manen (1990) also encourages researchers to remain engaged in the data analysis process, and resist temptation to get pulled away, or to rely on a familiar understanding of a phenomenon without considering participants experiences. This was of particular importance for me to

consider since I had experienced the phenomenon of shame in similar ways to my participants. While my personal experience gave me close access to the phenomenon, it may have also led to complacency or feelings of overwhelm. To counteract this tendency, van Manen (1990, 2014) encourages researchers to fully embrace their interest in the topic throughout the research process. I did this in a number of ways. Firstly, I orientated myself to the experiential data through re-listening and re-reading to the original research texts. As I engaged with the original researcher texts I was reminded of the importance of the research and my passion for choosing the topic. I was also inspired by my participants and felt a sense of solidarity in our desire to make known our personal stories of suffering. I also remained orientated towards the phenomenon through purposeful reflection. I engaged in the process of journaling regularly and would make an effort to connect with my supervisors, colleagues and therapist to share about my process. This was not always easy to do, since engaging with reflections about shame was a difficult, and particularly with another person. However, the times when I did, I experienced a new vigour and energy for the project and seemed to also engage in my own personal growth in ways I had not anticipated. Finally, when I took breaks from my thesis, I would exercise (e.g., go to the gym, hike) or focus on accomplishing a task in a different area of my life (e.g., mastering new recipes, hosting friends). These efforts reminded me that there were meaningful pursuits and joys to experience in the world, which was a necessary and hopeful reminder throughout the process.

Balancing the research context. One of the potential difficulties in phenomenological research is losing contact with participant's experiences after becoming too familiarized with the experiential text. van Manen (1990) recommends

that researchers engage in a back and forth dialogue between parts and the whole of the experiential text as a way to avoid getting lost. This is known as the hermeneutic circle, wherein researchers come to understand the 'being' of something through "moving iteratively between the whole and parts and back again to the whole" (Finlay, 2011, p. 115). In the data analysis, this process could be represented in the ways that a researcher considers the ways that words and sentences shape the meaning of the phenomenon or how a section of dialogue contributes to the meaning of the whole. In the present study, this was a particularly helpful strategy, especially since I used a number of different methods to look at the research text. Returning to the text as a whole was a particularly helpful strategy and ultimately aided me in deepening my understanding of the phenomena.

It has also been noted that there is no particular 'end' to the hermeneutic circle. However, when researchers have "reached a place of sensible meaning, free of inner contradiction, for the moment" (Laverty, 2003, p. 9) the process could potentially end. While engaging with this research, I noticed times of contradiction, particularly early in the process and between people on my research team. However, with time and as certain metaphors offered common language that united understanding between research members, a sense of resolve developed. This resolve offered some confidence that I had reached a place of meaning for the time being.

Research Process: From Start to Completion

In the following section, I describe the details of how this research was carried out from its start to completion. This will include a discussion of how the participants of this

study were recruited, selected and interviewed as well as an overview of the phenomenological analysis.

Recruiting participants. For qualitative research in general, a large sample size aimed at representing the population at large is not the primary goal (Finlay, 2011). Recruitment, as it pertains to phenomenological research, is concerned with selecting participants who can share rich and descriptive accounts of an experience – in this case, the experience of shame (van Manen, 2014). As such, it was important to find participants who were willing to speak about their experiences with me as the researcher. To do this, I employed a purposive sampling technique to in order to find rich information cases. Six participants were included in this study because they had experienced shame as an elite athlete and were willing to dialogue about this in the context of a research interview.

Recruitment. There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to recruiting participants, and it largely depends on the aims of the research and what is appropriate given the phenomenological method employed (Finlay, 2011). Additionally, since phenomenological research methods invite new and unique experiences in the data, there is no need for data saturation (van Manen, 2014). Therefore, in this research it was deemed important to recruit and interview between five to six participants to ensure a variety of experiences and to prevent shallow interpretation of the data. After receiving approval from Trinity Western University (TWU) Research Ethics Board (REB), I was fortunate to recruit six participants and interviewed them between January and June of 2018.

My primary recruitment strategy was via social media (see Appendix B for the social media post) and by word of mouth through family, friends and my research lab at TWU. This was the way I eventually recruited six participants. I also was approved to hang advertisement posters (see Appendix C for this poster) TWU's campus. Two individuals contacted me via the posters but were deemed ineligible due to the selection criteria. Although I was prepared to connect with sport clubs in the lower mainland as an alternative recruitment strategy, this was deemed unnecessary, as recruitment seemed to occur without much difficulty.

Screening interview. Individuals interested in participating in the research were asked to speak with me over the phone or in person for a screening interview (see Appendix D for the screening interview script). The screening interview was meant to determine if participants' experiences fit with the research according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria developed (this criteria will be described in detail below). I was interested in determining if my participants were able to elaborate openly about their experiences of shame and had a capacity for self-reflection. While there seemed to be general interest and enthusiasm to participate in the research, some participants were somewhat hesitant to share openly about their experiences in the screening interview. I was not particularly surprised by this hesitation due to the nature of the content I was asking participants to share. Despite this, I felt both confident that participants had experienced shame, but also aware of the difficulty it could pose to dialogue about these experiences. I made note of these observations in my researcher journal.

Furthermore, prior to the interviews, I attempted to establish an egalitarian relationship with my participants based on mutuality and openness. I did this by ensuring

my participants felt positively involved in my research and invited communication prior too and after the interview. Since vulnerability and establishing trust are necessary for discussing shame (Brown, et al., 2011) I strived to maintain a posture of sincerity as we began to communicate, making myself available to answer questions related to the research. I also decided it was important to disclose that I too was an elite athlete who had experienced shame. These efforts appeared to help gain the trust of my participants and aided in the establishment of the researcher – participant relationship.

Inclusion criteria. As noted on my poster and in my screening interview, I was interested in recruiting adult participants (over the age of 19) who had experienced shame as an elite athlete. According to Swann et al., (2015), elite athletes are considered to be those who had competed and had had success at an elite level and who have dedicated considerable time to competing at a high level. Therefore, in the screening interview, I ensured that the participants had competed at the competitive elite level according to Swann et al., (2015) definition and could identify with the athlete role.

Exclusion criteria. Participants were excluded from this study if they were experiencing significant psychological distress preventing them from articulating their experiences of shame. Psychological distress was understood to include suicidality and/or the experience of a psychotic episode, or any other mental health symptoms (such as high anxiety, etc.). Distress was screened for during the screening interview using risk assessment clinical interview questions (See Appendix D). Additionally, I let participants know that I would be asking them questions about their experiences of shame in our in-person interview. The interview was framed as a potentially beneficial experience, but

one that could also cause some distress. I ensured that all participants were comfortable with this – and they all indicated that they were.

Participants. I interviewed six participants who experienced shame as an elite athlete. Five women and one male were included in the sample. I was also interviewed by my supervisor and included this data into the data set; therefore, seven interviews were recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analyzed. These participants included Amy[3], an international-level basketball player; Zoe, a college level rodeo competitor; Andrea, a university level soccer player; Steven, college level hockey player; Lucy a university level volleyball player; and Hannah, a university level basketball player. Finally, my data was also included in the present study. I was an international level rugby player. The rationale for including my interview into the analyzed text will be described below.

In summary, sport representation included: basketball (x2), hockey (x1), soccer (x1), rodeo (x1), indoor volleyball (x1) and rugby union 15's (x1). Aside from one participant, all participants competed and trained in their respective sports outside of British Columbia. Competition locations included the United States, Europe, and other provinces in Canada. Level of sport representation included: international (x2), provincial/state (x2), and college/university (x3). Finally, each participant had retried from the highest level of sport at the time of the interview and confirmed that they had competed for at least 2 years at their highest level of competition.

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[3] Pseudonyms were used to protect participant's identity.

Participant-researcher. As described, while I was the primary investigator of this thesis, I also decided to include the text of my pilot interview as part of the analyzed text. The rationale for this decision is rooted in premise that hermeneutic phenomenological research invites and privileges the subjectivity of the primary investigator to be fully engaged, involved and interested to what may appear. In this sense, my intersubjectivity was embraced and I assumed that my experiences would play an inevitable part of what was being researched. While I engaged in a process of reflexivity (i.e., research self-awareness, see chapter 6) and honored my subjective experience, I also used this interview as an oppourtunity to grow in awareness of my prior assumptions, biases and beliefs about shame. I believed that reflecting on my own experiences of shame would add to the process of co-creating and presenting an understanding of the phenomenon of shame. Additionally, since I had intimate access to the phenomenon in my lived experience, it seemed appropriate to be transparent and include this data along with the other participants.

Data collection: interviews. After the screening interview, participants and I scheduled an in person interview. All of the interviews, including the pilot interview, were conducted in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia in either a private room in the TWU library or in a comfortable, private location of their choosing. Two participants choose to meet at the TWU campus location and the remaining participants choose to meet either in their homes or in a quiet room located at their workplace. Similarly, my interview was conducted in the privacy of my supervisor's office.

Prior to the interviews, I prioritized creating a comfortable and spacious environment for my participants, one that fostered emotional safety throughout the

interview process (Finlay, 2011). To do this I made sure that the digital equipment being used was well prepared and did not inhibit my participant's sharing. I also focused on spending some unhurried time with my participants causally chatting and setting a conversational tone to our interaction. The relational quality between the participant and researcher is of critical importance because it will "impact the depth and breadth of what participants share with the researcher" (Nealms, 2015, p. 21). Therefore, creating this comfortable environment was a very important part of the interview process itself.

Throughout the interview itself, I tried to be open and inquisitive, and allowed myself to be touched by the experiences shared by the person sitting across from me. Although I was aware of the formalities of conducting a research interview, I also made sure that my human response to our interaction was not hidden or inaccessible, but rather an intricate part of my engagement with the participant. This was also the posture my supervisor had when she assumed the researcher role and I the participant role. Overall, I sensed that my participants were comfortable in our interaction.

Interviewing the participants. In the interviews themselves, I reviewed the informed consent form (see Appendix E) with each participant highlighting the limits of confidentiality, and the risks and benefits associated with participating in this research. We also discussed how the interview would be conducted and I invited participants to ask any questions about their involvement. Following this discussion, all participants signed the consent form and the audio recording was started.

As previously mentioned, phenomenological interviews seek to explore the lived experiences through the examples of the phenomenon of interest (van Manen, 2014). For this project, the experience under investigation was shame. The interview process can be

quite complex since the aim of interview is to have a participant describe the lived experiences rather the interpretation of those experiences. Therefore a semi-structured interview guide was developed to help direct and maintain some focus throughout this process. In particular, a semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the Personal Existential Analysis (PEA) psychotherapeutic method (Kwee & Längle, 2013). PEA is a psychotherapeutic approach, which incorporates person-centered, dialogical and phenomenological tenants emphasizing openness, description and dialogue. The interview guide was designed to allow participant and researcher to seek out the essence of the phenomenon (i.e., that which resonates deeply and personally) together. The interview guide was based on the four steps of PEA, including: (1) a description of the facts of the event (e.g., tell me about a situation or event when you felt deeply moved by shame); (2) the impressions and sensations that arise from the facts (e.g., what are you feeling/how are you moved in your body when connected to your description of shame?); (3) the reached understanding. (e.g., what understanding do you make of this experience of shame?); and (4) a response, action, or positioning (i.e., given the ways in which you experience shame, how do you respond to the message/experience of shame?) (Längle, 2003, p. 44).

Prior to the interviews, I received training in the interview technique and was supported by my supervisors and various colleagues throughout the process. It is important to note that while a semi-structured interview guide was on hand, I as the researcher was responsible for facilitating a receptive and dialogical process intended to feel like an exchange between persons. Therefore, rather than a linear or transactional interaction with my participants, we seemed to enter into a fluid dialogue with each other.

Before interviewing participants, I piloted the interview guide with a colleague and also engaged in an interview myself. Both pilot interviews were beneficial since they helped me get comfortable with the interview process itself. Some modifications were integrated into the interview guide after the pilot interview (See Appendix F for the semi-structured interview guide). Interview lasted between 45 to 110 minutes. Once each interview was concluded, I debriefed the interview (See Appendix G for the debriefing script), shared my contact information with my participants and gave participants a thank you note (See Appendix H) as a token of my appreciation.

After the interview. All individual interviews were audio-recorded using a double encrypted audio recording application. After I interviewed each participant, I moved the recording files onto a password protected USB and deleted the file from the audio recording application on my phone. USB audio files and hard copies of my interview notes were kept in a locked filing cabinet in my locked office.

Data analysis. The analysis of the interviews was a lengthy process that took place over six months (July – December, 2018). This stage consisted of transcribing the audio recordings into written text, personal reflection of the phenomenon, reflection on the phenomenon with a research team, and the phenomenological writing. Each of these stages will be described below.

Transcribing the text. I first transcribed the audio recording of each interview into a written research text. Transcription was a significant part of how I dwelt with the text and phenomenon. As I transcribed each interview, I was reminded of the tone and other non-verbal noises or silences in the interviews and included these non-verbal markers in the transcribed text. Noting these conversational markers, I was able to begin

grappling with the implicit meaning of the text. Furthermore, it was decided that keeping the text intact when conducting the analysis was a crucial part of analyzing the phenomenon, therefore all text was included and remained as part of the analysis.

Phenomenological analysis. The process of analysis was articulated above, in reference to van Manen's (1997; 2014), and Finlay's (2011) methodological guidelines as well as a novel approach of data analysis using the principles of personal phenomenology (Launeanu et al., 2019). The following paragraphs will articulate some of the practical ways I synthesized the essential features of the phenomenon within and between research texts. This process was conducted on my own, as well as with a research team. Both approaches will be described.

First, it is important to note that I made attempts to stay immersed with each research text. I maintained a level of immersion with the text by repeatedly listening to the interview with the research text in front of me. If a particular segment of the interview felt resonant, I would listen and read the section over several times allowing the moment to leave an impression with me. I also made sure to allow for plenty of time to dwell with the lifeworld of my participants (Finaly, 2011), until I was moved by their experiences. On average, I would spend at least a week dwelling with my participant's lifeworld and re-listened to each interview two to three times, allowing for sufficient time to see their experience phenomenologically.

Next, I would write out a phenomenological description pertaining to each participant in a Word document, synthesizing a holistic picture of what seemed to appear in the data. I would often use the sentence stem "the participant appeared…" to avoid interpretations. This step required some discipline, yet helped me remain close to the

description of what was revealed in the research text. Then, I came closer to my own subjectivity and tuned into my emotional experience in relation to my participant's lifeworld and the phenomenological description written. In phenomenological research, "…we are not concerned with feeling for the sake of feelings, but as the best way to create closeness with the lived experience, to 'feel with' and point to what that experience is about" (personal correspondence, M. Launeanu, July 3rd 2018). Therefore I considered my own feelings as relevant and something that could potentially bring me closer to the phenomenon. These feelings were then noted and recorded on a Word document.

Next, given my emotional experience, I started to ask myself what the message of this experience told me and what it might tell my participant. Therefore, I allowed this message reverberate in me and asked myself: what did I hear? I allowed myself to receive what I was being given or what was flowing through me, refraining from making any abstractions or intellectual elaborations. From this position, I began to wonder what was at the heart of this experience. In other words, I started to find words that captured the essence of the experience. This was easier said then done. To help, I would spend time allowing metaphors and images to arise in me connected to each interview. I would write these down and revisit them often.

For the most part, I would work through in this process alone, using reflective writing to engage the analysis. This was a deepening process for me. After I finished analyzing each of my seven research texts, I went back to each text to ensure that my analysis made sense and that everything was well organized and resonant. However, on top of engaging in the analysis by myself, I also invited a research team to accompany me in the analysis. Those invited included my supervisors and the students in my research

lab. Every research assistant was asked to sign an informed consent form agreeing to keep the discussion and information in the interviews confidential (See Appendix I). Dialogical analysis in a research team format was conducted for three of the seven of my interviews.

Inviting a team to engage in the analysis deepened my experience of the data. During group analysis sessions, audio segments of the interview were played and the team quietly listened or followed along with a printed research text. After the interview or a segment was played, the group would share their impressions allowing the conversation to be guided by the stages of phenomenological analysis. What was striking about this stage of the analysis was how each research assistant was moved in a unique way by the interview text and added something deeper to my personal reflections. Our dialogue also evolved over time and our understanding of the research text shifted as we encountered each other's impressions together as a research team. In this sense, these group analysis sessions added something to my understanding of the phenomenon in ways that did not happen on my own. Furthermore, group analysis also seemed to give me greater confidence in taking a position towards what I had seen as the essential to the experience of shame.

Overall, this analysis process happened over four months. Once all seven research texts were analyzed, I wrote a summary document capturing the essential features that were most prominent. I did this by revisiting the prominent metaphors, reverberating themes that were revisited often, and re-reading significant quotes that had resonance. I also detailed my process in a word document (See Appendix A). It is important to note that van Manen, offers no specific criteria of how to combine themes

that emerged between research texts (1997), nor is it required that themes are seen to universally access participants experiences.

Phenomenological writing. The phenomenological text was written over the span of three months. Despite having immersed myself in the data, writing the phenomenological text was the most challenging and time consuming part of the project. At times, I was able to surrender myself to a reflective mood and allowed for a spaciousness to facilitate a generative period of writing. But more often than not, writing phenomenologically was an isolating and arduous task. I seemed to step out of the world of relating with others, into a world of text and language about a topic that felt at times burdensome, painful and saddening. However, I found solace in van Manen's (2014) words when he said, "a peculiar thing takes place in the person who starts to write and enter into the text: the self retreats and steps back, as it were, without completely stepping out of his or her social, historical or biographic being" (p. 359). Retreating, as van Manen puts it, describes what phenomenological writing process felt like for me. This experience will be expanded upon in chapter 6 when I write reflexively about my experiences related to this thesis.

On a more practical note, before engaging in the task of writing, I spent time revisiting the essential features of the phenomenon that were documented, and went back to re-listen to some audio clips to maintain my immersion with the data. I also spent considerable time journaling about some of the resistance and avoidance I experienced. In the end, revisiting pertinent quotes from my participants and sharing my difficulties with my supervisors propelled me into the writing process. Once I began writing, setting aside large chunks of time in a reflective and supportive environment seemed to be most

facilitative. As I wrote, I found myself continually editing the phenomenological text, adding depth and removing unimportant words or phrases that seemed to take away from its resonance. Similar to the analysis stage, new metaphors and came to me, and I included them into the research text, or made note of them in a Word document.

Expressions of Methodological Rigour

To ensure the trustworthiness of findings, this study was designed to employ a variety of strategies to ensure its rigour. In particular, de Witt and Ploeg (2006) have developed a list of criteria to judge the rigour demonstrated in hermeneutic phenomenological research. These expressions of rigour include the following criteria: balance integration, openness, concreteness, resonance and actualization. Below I describe each of these criteria and give examples for how these were addressed in this research project.

Balanced integration. The first proposed expression of rigour, as detailed by de Witt and Ploeg (2006), is balanced integration. Three characteristics define this principle, enabling researchers and those reading the work to recognize its successful assimilation. First, researchers are asked to clearly articulate the general philosophy of the phenomenological research method employed and its fit with the researcher and topic. This was addressed in the present chapter. Secondly, an in-depth account of philosophical concepts used in the research is asked for. As indicated in this chapter, I addressed this criterion by assuming a phenomenological attitude. This included approaching my analysis with a posture of openness, wonder and awe and writing openly about my assumptions, vulnerabilities and opinions in both my data analysis documents and in my reflexive journal (see chapter 5 for my reflexive process). Furthermore, the

analysis and findings were approached with a holistic acknowledgement of the of the inter-subjectivity of both researcher and participant, and made efforts to draw upon this inner knowing throughout. Finally, researchers are asked to balance participant's voiced experiences with the philosophical explanation (interpretation of what was found). I addressed this throughout the analysis by rigorously connecting my interpretations to participant quotes, and ensured that my phenomenological writing included the integration of participant quotes.

Openness. Openness, as defined by de Witt and Ploeg (2006) is the capacity for a researcher to be open to scrutiny throughout the research process. This includes fostering an attitude of openness towards one's biases and assumptions, so as to highlight the complexity of human decision-making (Finlay, 2011). Throughout the research process, I regularly consulted with my research lab and research supervisors when making decisions associated with the project. For instance, after the first round of interviews, I spent time deliberating between conducting follow-up interviews or not. These conversations were critical to the successful completion of this project and have been articulated in this chapter. However, more significantly, I kept a detailed reflexive journal about the research process. In this journal, I wrote about the many research decisions I was faced with, including the opinions and assumptions I carried in relation to the complexities that surfaced completing this project.

Concreteness. Concreteness is when a reader is able to read the researching findings and experience the phenomenon through the description of the researcher. As I wrote my phenomenological text, there were many ways that I worked to produce a concrete piece of writing for my readers. Firstly, I sought to remain connected and

orientated toward the phenomenon through my experience and the experiences of my participants. I did this through reflective journaling, as well as connecting with the lifeworld of my participant thought the lifeworld questions suggested by Finlay (2011). This allowed for greater sensitivity and thoughtfulness as I addressed the relational complexity the phenomenon revealed. As indicated, I also spent a considerable time dwelling with each participant text and used a number of methodological strategies to facilitate this process. The time and thoroughness I spent led to the production of rich descriptions of the phenomenon. Additionally I asked for feedback from research supervisors, two participants, three members of my research lab, and a colleague to ensure that the text was vivid and elicited an understanding of shame in athletic contexts. I also presented some of my research findings at a conference, and received feedback from three audience members. As noted, those that had experience shame as an elite athlete indicated that the text resonated with their experiences. All others who were asked to review the writing shared that the text resonated with their experience of shame.

Resonance. According to de Witt and Ploeg (2006), resonance refers to when a selected passage of the phenomenological text generates a felt experience of the phenomenon. As van Manen (2014) notes, descriptive richness of the text is critical in being able to convey the experiential nature of the phenomenon. As previously discussed, I wrote and re-wrote the phenomenological text several times over the course of three months, rigorously checking if the text was resonant with my experience, and with various readers. I also made efforts to write with interpretive depth by offering insights that went beyond the taken-for-granted understanding of shame. Formatting and designing the phenomenological text to resemble a play, highlighted the relational

dimensions of the phenomenon of shame and was something my participants and other readers noted as particularly resonant.

Actualization. The fifth and final proposed expression of rigour according to de Witt and Ploeg (2006) is actualization. Actualization as an expression of rigour "addresses the future realization of the resonance of the research findings" (p. 226) meaning that a research study is expected to articulate that the process of interpretation is continuous. Hermeneutic phenomenology, as described in this chapter, incorporates continuous interpretation as one of its defining features. I also invite those reading my phenomenological text to engage with the writing honouring their own experiences and questions of the lived experience of shame.

Summary of Methodology

In this chapter I have outlined the philosophical frameworks that undergird hermeneutic phenomenology and offered a detailed outline of the research process used to study the lived experience of shame for elite athletes. Since there is so little research of athletes' experiences of shame, hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me to garner an in-depth understanding of shame as it is lived in athletic contexts. I relied heavily on van Manen's (1990, 2014) research guidelines for hermeneutic phenomenological research while also integrating aspects of personal phenomenology (e.g., personal existential analysis) to bolster the data collection and analysis process. In this chapter I also delineated how I carried out this research. This included a detailed account of how I recruited participants, interviewed and accessed the lived experiences of my participants, analyzed the expressions of shame that were revealed in the interviews, and wrote the phenomenological text. Finally, I concluded this chapter with a description of how this

study met the criteria for rigour as outlined by de Witt and Ploeg (2006). In the chapter that follows, I invite my readers into a dramatic play; a theatrical representation of the findings that emerged from the research process.

CHAPTER 4: PHENOMENOLOGICAL WRITING

In exploring the phenomenon of shame as experienced by elite athletes, I have attempted to open myself up and unveil something of this human experience from the perspective of a researcher and fellow athlete. The process of writing a phenomenological text itself was an arduous one; one that required ongoing curiosity, a sense of wonder and the openness to see beyond that which was plainly revealed in dialogue. As you read these words, I hope they instill a sense of sacredness for what the experience of shame is like, not simply for the purposes of learning how to manage shame, but more so to connect and encounter the persons who experience it. It is important to remind readers that the features of shame that will be described are not structures to be used for generalization purposes, but are provided so guide readers into a depth of understanding. As van Manen (1997) describes, phenomenological features (or themes) are like stars that connect us to the greater whole of the text. In this case, the 'whole' is the embodied experience of shame as lived by elite athletes. Before presenting the phenomenological writing, I want to introduce the participants, and share how they experienced shame. I will then describe how the metaphor of a theatrical play, the style this phenomenological text was written in, came to be.

Introducing the Participants' Experiences of Shame

In this study, participants offered unique perspectives on their experiences of shame. However, according to van Manen's (2014), readers do not need to be able to identify which participant shared what in the phenomenological text. However, I have decided to introduce each participant to illuminate some of the unique personal factors that influenced how shame was experienced by them.

Experiences shared. As described in chapter 3, in each interview I asked participants to describe what it was like to be an athlete, revealing unique relational and contextual factors associated with their experiences of shame. These initial questions aided in building rapport with my participants while also providing the scaffolding in which the experience of shame were shared and understood. Please note that many of the experiences offered by my participants were filled with elements of personal suffering. I invite my readers to approach reading in these accounts with reverence. As I introduce each of my participants, note that each 'name' has been replaced with a pseudonym.

Amy. Amy was a basketball player who described an experience of shame associated with being cut from the UK Olympic basketball team months before the 2012 Olympics games in London. Because of her tall stature and natural talent, Amy excelled at basketball from an early age and dedicated many years to developing her skill as a world-class athlete. Prior to her most significant experience of shame, Amy described having a significant knee injury and enduring ongoing medical procedures to maintain her athletic ability. Furthermore Amy described that she had a bad relationship with her Olympic team coach; he was described to judge Amy's performance and neglected to give her any leeway when it came to participating in practice while nursing her injuries. However, without warning, Amy described being cut from this team in a nonchalant manner. After giving all of her effort, time, and energy over many months and years, being dismissed in such a cold manner crushed Amy. She subsequently left the meeting, hid in her room, flew back to Canada soon after and avoided people and the feelings that day represented for well over a year. This experience was very vivid for Amy because

she felt completely lost and crushed, and described it changing her life in significant ways.

Zoe. Zoe was a rodeo competitor who described her experiences of shame being associated with her perceived poor performance and the subsequent judgment of her coach and father. Similar to Amy, Zoe began riding horses when she was a young girl and was encouraged by her father to start competing. As a teenager, Zoe was recruited by a prestigious American college, and was expected to obtain various state titles despite feeling like this was an unrealistic goal. When she missed achieving these standards, she described experiencing shame. Zoe's understanding of shame was connected to feelings of helplessness and isolation, a sense of feeling flawed and not good enough in a fundamental way. Zoe's experiences appeared to be embodied in the interview itself as she found it difficult to maintain eye contact with me, slumped in her body posture and hesitated in openly sharing about her experiences.

Andrea. Soccer was Andrea's love and life from an early age. Playing on her neighborhood teams was a major part of her upbringing and competing at the university level was one of her dreams. However, when Andrea joined her university soccer team she began to fear the judgment of her head coach. While she had had success, her success was understated and overshadowed by the anticipated fear of being shamed for poor performance. When Andrea perceived her coach's dissatisfaction, Andrea describes 'playing it safe" in her style of play, avoiding the gaze of her coach and shrinking in her stature and presence. Andrea understood shame to be something that hovered over her; almost as if something were haunting her and making her feel less than she knew she was.

Steven. Throughout all of Steven's life, he had been a true sport enthusiast. He excelled at all sports but found his home and developed his talents as successful hockey player. When speaking about his athletic abilities, Steven articulated himself with a sense of integrity and felt connected to his feelings of passion and pride for what he had accomplished. When asked about Steven's experiences of shame, he described a particular instance when he was publicly berated for the way he had left one particular hockey game. His coach yelled at him in front of his teammates while in a locker room and Steven felt deep shame. This experience was described to hold a lot of conflicting feelings; while Steven was frustrated at the way he was treated, he also wondered if his coach was justified. Since Steven believed that some of his personalities traits were 'flawed,' he was uncertain if he could direct too much anger towards his coach. Steven's flawed nature was described to be a 'black mark' on his file, impacting his reputation, but also the source of much of his shame. Therefore Steven understood his shame to be warranted and something that pointed to one of his inherent personal flaws.

Lucy. Lucy was a successful basketball player that competed at the university level. As Lucy shared her experiences of shame, it was apparent that the coaches, teammates and support people in her life had perpetuated her feelings of shame. In particular, Lucy recounted a difficult shame experience she had with family friends while at university. Since Lucy was decided to quit basketball, certain family friends disagreed with her decision and cut themselves off from Lucy in a very abrupt manner. The distance was described to be a very difficult and heart-wrenching experience for Lucy, such that she experienced shame believing that she was a failure in some inherent way.

The relational distance created was never repaired and left Lucy questioning her participation in basketball to begin with.

Hannah. As a volleyball all-star player in high school, it was very natural for Hannah to be recruited to a top volleyball program at an American college. However, as Hannah began to experience life as a college volleyball player, she quickly learned that her hope to enjoy the college experience was conflict with her coach's expectations. Hannah described her most significant experiences of shame to be connected with one female coach who made her feel ostracized and never quite good enough. Hannah responded to this relationship by further rebelling and eventually quitting her volleyball team. However, before taking such a stand, Hannah recalled giving into her coach's demands, and feeling crushed and disconnected from herself. Only until she was given the option to leave (an option she had never entertained) through the kind encouragement of a particular professor, did she realize how deeply depressed and angry she was, and how much she longed for freedom apart from this team and her coach.

Kristin[4]. In my interview, I appeared engaged and passionate, particularly as I shared about the exciting days of just getting acquainted with the sport of rugby. This youthful vitality, however, was overshadowed by particular relationship with one national team coach. The shame I experienced was connected to the disapproving gaze of my coach after one particular game on in Wales. After giving everything I was able too – physically, emotionally, mentally – I believed that my coach's eyes communicated that I

[4] I have opted to use my own name describing my rather than using a pseudonym.

was not good enough as if she was saying that 'you are fundamentally not enough compete at this level – you are weak." While this experience appeared to impact my life in a profound way it was also not fixed and shifted while in the interview. These experiences will be elaborated upon in chapter 6.

A Theatrical Performance

As noted, I interviewed six participants, and was interviewed myself. The intention of these interviews was to answer the question: how is the phenomenon of shame experienced by elite athletes? As I began analysis, it became apparent that experiences of shame were revealed in the dialogue between persons. The essence of this dialogue appeared to be dynamic, such that it changed and shifted overtime, but always tended to be revealed through relationship with others. Since the interview itself was a relational dynamic, shame was embodied throughout the interviews in the ways that the participants connected to their stories and shared them with me. For example, while many participants highlighted the disappointments and pain they experienced in relation to other people, they also brought these feelings of disappointments into the shared relational space we created during the interview. So we encountered something of their history and the sources that initiated their experiences of shame, *but also* encountered the shame they experienced in real time in the space between us.

The style of writing that seemed to capture the essential features of shame as revealed in this research was in the style of a theatrical play. A theatrical play is meant to present a plot, storyline and entertain others with the joys and struggles commonly found in human experiences. What it also captures is the tension, closeness and distance, and communication patterns held between the characters introduced to the audience.

Therefore the imagery or metaphor of a play is used to anchor and immerse the reader into the experience of shame.

Essential Features of the Lived Experience of Shame

Four acts were written as part of this play capturing four features of the phenomenon of shame. The four key thematic features of the phenomenon as revealed in this study include, (a) shame as a dialogical phenomenon revealed in the space between persons, (b) shame as characterized by feeling personally violated and subsequently vulnerable, (c) shame as embodied in acts of hiding from self and others, and (d) shame as a the portal or gateway to encountering a person as they are. Each act in the play incorporates these themes in varying ways and degrees of depth, some more explicit than others. Furthermore, the titles of each act and scene use creative or evocative language common in theatre productions. As such, the four acts of the play titled: "The Space Between Us" include: (a) Two Worlds, (b) Stolen, (c) In Hiding, and (d) The Dance. Each act will be described below, incorporating the four key thematic features of shame.

The first act, *Two Worlds*, explored how participants were situated in relationship with significant others in their sporting context. The participants described the unique dynamics they had with coaches and significant others in the sport world prior to experiencing shame. This highlighted the differences between how the participants were characteristically more vulnerable than those who held power in their world (e.g., coaches, parents, support staff). Moreover, these participants found ways to manage the anxieties these relationships evoked, such as adjusting their performance standards to protect themselves from ridicule and the accompanying shame. Most importantly, this

act anchors readers in the reality that shame is experienced in the space shared between persons.

The second act, *Stolen*, illuminates the pivotal moments of shame described by the participants. These experiences were described as if something was forever stolen or stripped away from the participants because of an interaction with a significant 'other' in their world; tremendous shock and wordlessness, a desire for isolation and deep pain and vulnerability were evoked in a provocative manner. Participants described how these moments marked them in ways that were total and final, impacting them personally and deeply.

The third feature of this research and third act, *In Hiding*, elucidates how shame moved participants into isolation from the world around them. Participants described three essential intrapersonal dialogues they experienced while in hiding: *I am flawed, I am silenced* and *I'm fine, I swear*. All of these dialogues were described highlighting the hidden and isolated experiences that coloured their world. *I am flawed,* describes how participants saw and experienced themselves as if there was something fundamentally wrong with them. This was a deeply painful articulation that captured a sense of finality in how participants related to who they were: tarnished, not enough, and less than what they hoped they would be. Metaphor was often used to capture this inner sense of knowing, as it appeared to be difficult to put into words. *I am silenced,* described how participants seemed to grow sullen and experienced an inability to speak from an authentic place of connection to self and the world. This voicelessness appeared to have extended into dynamics between the participants and other people in their lives, inhibiting them from connecting with others while experiencing discomfort and pain. *I'm*

fine, I swear, illuminates the falsified front many participants carried in relationship with others, outwardly communicating contentment, while inwardly experiencing disconnect from self and others.

The fourth essential feature described in act four, *The Dance*, captures the ways in which the participants dialogued about their shame experiences (i.e., in relationship with others). Though not described directly by the participants, the metaphor of the *dance of shame* emerged throughout the analysis and phenomenological writing. This theme captured something of the meta-communicative dimension of the phenomena, which seemed to involve an ongoing careful discernment of how the participants desired to represent themselves to the world while guarding against potential hurt and pain. Therefore, this essential feature can be understood as a communicative dynamic describing something of the shame in dialogue. The layers of dialogue include: *the approach, the walls that surrounded them, the encounter* and *self-compassion.*

The approach illuminates how participants grew to be suspicious and reacted in fear at the approach of an 'other.' The participants pushed the interviewer away as I neared using a firm response in an effort to evade speaking about shame. Similarly, *the walls that surround them* explicate how participants pushed others away in an effort to manage how they shared about their experiences. Having these boundaries involved discerning if it was safe opening up, and how this would be negotiated in the moment. Furthermore, *the encounter* encompassed the participants' experience of choosing to be open with the interviewer, and therefore allowing themselves to be understood and seen for a moment, as if shame were a portal to seeing the person. This moment was experienced as fleeting, yet essentially sacred. Finally, *self-compassion* captured some

participant's transformative experience as a result of turning towards themselves and offering compassion in the midst of shame. The participants described connecting to their authentic selves more freely, and being able to hold kindness where there was once distain.

Phenomenological Writing: The Space Between Us

The phenomenological writing below aims to encompass the descriptions of participants experiences using direct quotes from interviews, as well as the interpretations of the research teams' understanding of and resonance with how shame was embodied for athletes. I would invite readers to pay particular attention to the production notes offered throughout this play, the style of spacing and fonts and the legend on the first page delineating the characters in the performance. Furthermore, each act starts with a small piece of reflexive writing from the "narrator" which incorporates my personal experiences as an introduction to the phenomenological writing. My invitation is for you as the reader to lean into your own experience and insight as you enter into the phenomenon of shame as presented. Enjoy the show!

THE SPACE BETWEEN US
DRAMATIC PERSONÆ

THE NARRATOR, a person (the principle researcher) who delivers commentary accompanying this theatrical performance.

THE OTHER, a sport coach.
THE ATHLETE, an elite athlete part of a high performance sports team.
THE CHORUS, a large organized group performing together in a supportive role in musical or opera. In this theatrical performance, the Chorus will include quotes from the participants, providing support in the scenes being performed.
TEAMMATES, the athlete's teammates.
FRIENDS, the athlete's friends.
THE LOVING OTHER, a curious loving person.

LEGEND OF FONT STYLES

Italicized font: Director/production notes
Italicized font in parenthesis: {actions, tones, pacing}
Italicized font in brackets: [Dialogue directed to either HIMSELF/HERSELF, the OTHER or ASIDE to the audience]

ACT I: TWO WORLDS

PROLOGUE

THE NARRATOR

[ASIDE] As we lay on the ground, our coach slowly walked us through a visualization exercise that painted a picture of the events that would transpire the following day. We anticipated walking in single file with our red jerseys proudly on our backs, and our eyes looking forward as if our focus was intended to intimidate our opponents. Our visualization led us to picture singing our national anthem, the first whistle that initiated game play and the various set plays that we had practiced time and time again. It was powerful and vivid. A rush of energy filled my body and my muscles twitched as if I was playing the game itself.

However, despite being engaged with the exercise, my mind seemed to wander and was gripped with a longing that seemed both foreign and inviting. In those stilled moments, my heart spoke the gentle and compassionate words of: 'you're tired, it's ok to let this go.' I was being made aware of a deeper desire: a desire for something other than this world of sport.

While I wanted to let go, in reality, I was deeply vulnerable. I needed my coaches. I needed to know that I was enough for them and that my game play was praiseworthy. This was my lifeline. This gave me grounding. This was my life and all that I knew.

And this is where we begin this dramatic play. The Athlete and The Other caught

in a dance of hearts; motivations and longing finding their voice in a world of achievement and athletic performance. Let us join with them and come to understand their worlds.

SCENE I. INNER MOTIVATIONS

Enter THE OTHER. THE OTHER reflects as he watches the ones he oversees.

THE OTHER

[To HIMSELF] This looks good. Everything seems aligned, flowing well; things are functioning as they should.

{pause, evaluative look in his eyes as he observes.} I'm pleased with this. *{nodding, long pause}.*

{spoken in a firm tone} It is good to work with them. Many years of training has formed them well. The thousands of hours of practice they have put in has led to feats of superiority and accuracy. Their execution looks so operationalized and in sync, doing as they have been trained to do *{smiles}.*

THE OTHER pauses and pensively looks out into the distance with an evaluative glance.

[To HIMSELF] What needs improving? What adjustments should be made to advance the end goal? This machine could be easily dissembled if need be *{long pause, pensive}…*

…and what about those who are falling behind…those who need more guidance and motivation? I need to keep them in line, and give them something to improve on. Maybe more practice? Longer hours? Greater expectations for their improvements? I'll hit home the reality that they are good but not good enough. *{pause}*

Ok, we need to make a change. Number 34, she looks about ready. Let's see what she can do.

Enter THE ATHLETE. THE OTHER directs his instructions to THE ATHLETE.

[To THE ATHLETE] Number 34, get ready. You'll go in soon. Get in there. Do your work. Make us proud.

THE ATHLETE

[To THE OTHER] Got it, coach. I'm ready!

[TO HERSELF] {spoken with excitement} I am ready! *{deep sigh}…*here I am world! I will go in, I will play, and I will make this team proud!

{sigh of excitement, spoken quickly} I feel life pulsing through my veins, my hands and joints eager to move freely as they have been made too: in sync and effortlessly! I have purpose here.

{in a reflective tone}…and what luck I've had, too. To be endowed with such an ability. There are moments when my body moves in ways that I can't even anticipate. It feels so freeing!

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "…I loved hitting into other people…I loved hitting into those pads…I loved it! I remember my dad and brother picking me up from my first practice at school…and I was like, 'I love this...' I was almost shocked by [my enthusiasm]."

"There are parts of it that I really loved. The physical part was particularly one of my favourite things…I loved being in contexts where I could put my whole body and my whole self into the physicality of it…[I] was almost gripping more out of life [playing]."

"I remember feeling like I was so good at it. And I would score...I use to score like 40 or 50 point in a game…I felt useful and I felt like this was what I was meant to do."

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF]{spoken with a quickened and excitable pace} What do I need to remember? What attitude should I take in? To push hard, dig deep, and make the sacrifices necessary for the sake of winning. I can hear my coach's voice in my head – "You have been sufficiently prepared, you have put in the work, just play as you have practiced, and we will win."

This has been my dream. I have always wanted to achieve something so great and to contribute something meaningful. This is the life I have always wanted...

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "…it was exciting at the same time, because I knew I was coming in as this sort of… a necessary player, and I would get that opportunity right away and with the projection making it in 4 years and being able to play in the Olympics, that was sort of a dream of mine even from when I was little."

THE ATHLETE looks out to the game field. Excitedly, she prepares to be put in the game.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] What information is important right now? What weakness do I capitalize on? What time do I need to beat? What is my task today?

I will push hard.

I will move and act with intensity and intentionality.
I will give the perfect pass.
I will make the perfect play.

It will be perfection.

THE ATHLETE goes onto the field to play. Game play continues. Exit THE ATHLETE. Exit THE OTHER.

SCENE II: REACHING A LIMIT

Enter THE ATHLETE. Scene set on a practice field two days after the previous game. THE ATHLETE is practicing various drills with her teammates as directed by THE OTHER.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] Here we are again. Practicing hard, practicing together, refining our skills, fine-tuning our game plan. I have pushed so hard lately. But something feels different today.

{spoken with panic} …What could be happening? What needs to be fixed? What needs to be repaired – and how can I go about repairing it?

More medical attention? An attitude adjustment? More grit? I feel frantic and out of control. I am not supposed to have any weaknesses. I am not supposed to show my limits.

Will someone notice? Do I need to improve my fitness level? What is in my control?

I can fix this.
I can manage this.

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "And it ended up being the team doctor that…drained my knee one day and it was like, 44 milli-litres of fluid, and it had turned bloody. It was quite pink. And so he came and went and got one of our assistant coaches…and just said, this is inhumane, like we can't keep doing this. And so they came back to tell me that they couldn't inject me, with the stuff. I was in such denial that I was like, "oh are you busy?" like do you have something to do? Cause I can probably [inject myself] at this point."

Enter THE OTHER, athletes and various coaching staff. There is a transition between drills and THE OTHER offers directives to his team as they start practicing another skill.

THE OTHER
[TO THE ATHLETE and the various other teammates] Ok, this is what I need you to do: Go here…and then there. Move in this way…and execute this plan. Do it with everything you have. Don't leave anything on the field. Show us your intensity and commitment. Remember: it is about excellence. You were made to do this.

THE ATHLETE and her teammates engage in a drill as directed by THE OTHER.

{raising his voice} Come on…push harder…dig deeper. What is wrong with you all…! We need you to be more! And play harder and smarter! Come on!

[TO HIMSELF]…what is wrong with them? There is so much to do, and so much to improve on, and they don't seem to be taking this seriously. We have come so far and have accomplished so much, and this is when I need them to give everything. This is when they will reveal their true character.

And also, others need to see that I am good at what I do…

…but they are going to make me look like a fool.

[TO THE ATHLETE and the various other teammates] {spoken with frustration and anger} Come on! Get your head in the game!

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "No, he didn't care about us…he just cared about if we did good or bad…he made us feel like shit sometimes."

"…there's only a certain number of miles left in my body, and if I am going to be able to play in games I needed to be really smart about how much I was putting out in practice, and even monitoring it [every] 10 minutes. So this new coach came in, and basically said if you can't do everything in practice…then you're useless and you can't play for me."

The practice continues. THE ATHLETE continues to struggle and is caught in an inner battle.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] Why it is that his standards are somehow harder to reach right now? Am I not enough for you? I am grasping at straws…chasing after something I don't even fully understand.

What have I done to disappoint you?
How can I give more?
How do I win back your favor?

I feel somehow incomplete and not enough with the effort I am offering you...

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "I was trying to do more, I was trying to give completely…everything, but that was what brought me to live very un-healthfully at the end…I didn't take my medications, and then I would have to take Zyquil at night to sleep, because my brain at night wouldn't turn off…[my brain] would be going on all about the things that I could be doing better."

"Like I couldn't even go in practice, like I had too, I would practice twice a day and I would try and practice harder…but I could barely get out of bed. Cause I was just like…why? I am not doing good enough. I was doing good…but I still don't feel that like I did good enough."

Exit THE OTHER.
Exit THE ATHLETE.

SCENE III. PLAYING IT SAFE.

Enter THE ATHLETE. THE ATHLETE continues to practice with her teammates. They engage in game like play. THE ATHLETE notices her coach watching intently as they practice.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] I can't stand being watched by him. His evaluative eyes pierce every part of me. His presence makes my stomach turn. What if I screw up? What if I miss? Maybe I should just play it safe today? It feels too risky to put it all out there and fail for everyone to see.

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "Yah, and I think performance-wise, if I was feeling like he was getting mad I would probably play things safer. Like not make a risker pass…it seems so ridiculous because you shouldn't completely change your game due to one person, but it's hard not too, when you're really trying to please that one person."

THE ATHLETE slows down her game play, and regains some focus.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] {quickened pace of speech} I can be so concerned about what he thinks about my shortcomings, that I miss the simplest things. My focus is skewed. I can't even do what I have practiced a hundred times before *{deep sigh}.*

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "I was air-balling shots from three feet away because I was so nervous to miss, because I didn't want…to add that to the pile of reasons why she

shouldn't play me. That was a full mental block. Like I could not make a shot. People were looking at me, like 'what the hell is going on.' I don't know. I was terrified. It basically got me to the point of being too scared to mess up…"

"And I lost confidence, and so I wasn't actually good enough to be there by the end, because I would go on the court and be useless because I would like drop the ball and miss shots, because I was so nervous. Um, I felt like, whenever I missed a shot, it was rare. By the end when I made a shot people were like, holy shit! She made a shot, kind of thing. It changed. I was completely different."

Exit THE ATHLETE

ACT II: STOLEN

PROLOGUE

THE NARRATOR
[ASIDE] The sky was grey that afternoon; the chilled air seemed to foreshadow the events that would transpire that day. We were at the tail end of our trip and about to play our final test match against a worthy and difficult opponent.

Despite the excitement that was carried into that game, I had reached a physical limit earlier that week in practice. In one particular drill I had pushed harder than I had ever pushed before. I dug deeper and drew on strength that I rarely tapped into. But after, I had nothing left to give. You could call it burnout, or hitting the wall; but what it felt like was exposure. I was exposed as "not being at the top of my game." My body subsequently didn't do what it was suppose to do.

So, instead of being worthy of praise, I became a disappointment. I became that which I dreaded I would become: replaceable.

Deep down, I longed to be cared for in those moments of weakness, but my eyes were met with something cold and distant: "you are not enough for me," they said. "You are a disappointment," they said. The coldness shook me at my core; it was stark and final. It was as if I had been proven guilty without a fair trial. It changed me. I lost my bearings. I lost myself, or the only version of myself that I had ever known up until that day.

As we continue in this story of The Athlete and The Other, we come to a crucial moment. A moment that captures something being stolen, and what remained thereafter; someone disoriented and slowly disconnecting from much of what they once knew.

SCENE I. DEATH'S BLOW

Enter THE ATHLETE and THE OTHER. THE ATHLETE has just finished playing in a game.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] {downcast eyes, pacing the space she was in} That really wasn't good. …what will he say?

Shit.

I can't believe I did that.

Am I even good at this?

Why did I screw this up so badly today? I can't even glance in his direction.

I can't imagine the look on his face after all of this.

{panicked and desperate tone} I want to do it over. Maybe if I had somewhere to rest and recuperate, I could get back to full strength, mentally and physically? I think I need that.

{frustrated tone} But honestly, what's wrong with me? I am such an idiot. I always screw everything up. I'm such a f*cking disappointment.

What is it about me?
What makes it so hard to be the athlete I am meant to be?

I hope The Other can see me through this.

THE ATHLETE and THE OTHER meet. Their eyes connect and a chill fills the space. Other teammates and coaching staff are milling around.

THE OTHER
[TO HIMSELF] It has to be communicated. Some have it and some don't. I am making this call for the good of the team.

[TO THE ATHLETE] I think that's it. *{pause, shaking head, looking downwards, quickening his voice}* There is no easy way to communicate this: You simply don't have it. *{pause}* …and I'm not sure if you ever did.

Where is the athlete that you once were?
Where did she go? I miss her; so able, so willing to give a full effort for the sake of the team. But as of right now, you seem done.

There are other talents I am going to pursue instead of you. *{pause, piercing eyes, clearing his throat}.*

[TO HIMSELF]{looking away from The Athlete} Well, there you have it. It's

done. Who's next? What other improvements need to be tackled to keep this machine functioning as it should?

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "And I remember looking at the two coaches [I was] close with, and both of them looking at the floor, and I felt my stomach just drop and then I could feel the tears coming…then the coach said, 'well, sometimes you have shit luck,' or something along those lines…it was so insensitive, [and] made me so angry."

"So…we looked at each other and she didn't say anything, and then, just kind of walked off, and I know that she's the type of person that wouldn't say something if she didn't mean it so she didn't have anything good to say…I broke down. I didn't cry, but I just was internally crushed."

"There were some people, like part of the staff on our team, that said some really disrespectful things about me to other people, and other people caught wind at that. Um and said, like 'yah, he's just playing like shit right now' and stuff like that and I don't know what the hell is wrong with him, and stuff like that. And when I got wind of that, I was upset about it, but then it also made me feel like, shitty, about myself too. Kinda like, crap, maybe this is the end for me. Like, maybe I am not as good as I thought I was."

THE ATHLETE
[To THE OTHER] Of course. I understand. Thank you *{pause}.*

Exit THE OTHER.

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "Um, and, somehow in my sobbing, I said, 'I just want to thank you all for this opportunity' and looking back I'm like, what did my parents instill in me? Like, how is that a moment where I am still being super respectful and this jackass has just ruined my life and that is what I felt. But I still had the wherewithal to thank them for giving me the opportunity to get to that point."

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] What just happened? *{breathless, gasping for air}* Where am I? What can I say?

{long pause, disorientated look in the eyes}

What just happened?

{voice quickens, panicked} And what do I do now? *{pause}*
Where do I go? *{pause}*
I can't be seen like this. *{pause}*
I can't let anyone see me like this. *{pause}*

I don't need this…I am done. F*ck this, and f*ck him.

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "Yah it was like a collapse. I just felt crushed, like that was the last straw. It felt like everything changed after that moment…like, 'well that's it, there is nothing after that.' I can't give you anymore…I cast my eyes down, and I felt dejected, just like so…numbed."

"I felt defeated. Like, I was trying, but I was not doing good enough since someone was always getting mad at me."

"*I feel sick to my stomach, or like really prickly and tight and want to throw up..."*

"I cast my eyes down, and like, the wind was just knocked out of me and I felt dejected, just like so…not sad, but like, numbed, almost. I just wanted to say, ok, I don't know what else to do, and, and, yah…there is nothing left."

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] {depressed tone} How could this have happened? How could he have said that and done this to me?

{clenched fists} To have such coldness; it is just unbelievable to me.

Did he not know what I was trying to do? Did he not notice how much I have put into this and how much his words and presence can have an impact on us? This isn't right.

{depressed tone} And how could I mean so little to him, after everything I have given? How could he move onto the next best thing without even flinching? I don't understand.

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "I didn't want him to see me cry, the head coach, I didn't want him to have that satisfaction. I remember feeling that. And it was, a genuine, 'fuck you' but I don't want you to feel that you are worthy of my tears almost."

"…the quote that he said was…just like 'yah, he's like a really intense player, like in the room like he's very very intense.' And that was really it. And so I thought, you know, like I gave you four years of my time, and I felt like I did everything I could for this organization, and all you really gave me at the end was that."

Exit THE ATHLETE

SCENE II. LEAVE ME ALONE

Enter THE ATHLETE. Sitting alone in her room the evening after her interaction with THE OTHER. Hair disheveled, dried tears on her face, and in a daze. Without warning, two TEAMMATES knock on THE ATHLETE's door.

TEAMMATES
[To THE ATHLETE through the door] Are you there? Do you need anything? Can we come in?

THE ATHLETE
[To HERSELF] Oh shit. There's no way.

TEAMMATES
[To THE ATHLETE] Hello? Anyone there?

THE ATHLETE
[To HERSELF] Nope…I hope they leave.

After knocking another time, the TEAMMATES leave.

Exit THE TEAMMATES.

THE ATHLETE
[To HERSELF] That was close. *{despondent pause}*.

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "I just shut down, like…I locked my door, people tried to come by, some of my teammates were sliding notes underneath the door because I just wouldn't answer…"

"I didn't want people to see me…feel like crap…I put my head down and calmly went and tied up my horse and went back to my horse trailer and cried."

"…I really do want to hide. I really don't want to be seen. Yah. I don't want to be seen, but that makes me sad me a little bit…cause I know that's not really what I want, you know?"

The ATHLETE turns on the TV while sitting alone in her room.

THE ATHLETE
[To HERSELF] So what now? Maybe watch some more TV, get some room service? I am a little hungry.

She slowly drifts off into a semi-conscious state while watching TV, disconnecting from her thoughts and feelings.

ACT III: IN HIDING; THE WALLS THAT SURROUND ME

PROLOGUE

THE NARRATOR
[ASIDE] The walls were painted a slate grey colour. And because the window faced north, sunlight rarely streamed into the room, especially as the days grew shorter at the end of autumn. The space was dim, but it became familiar and comfortable, and offered a sanctuary from the outside world of people flaunting their carefree attitudes.

Hiding felt somehow less threatening and without real responsibility. Gradually, the life I led became unnoticeable; people asked less and less of me and I seemed to take on the characteristics of the space I occupied: small and non-consequential.

One question seemed to haunt me during this time: How could I be so foolish to give my life over to such athletic endeavors and its impossible standards of excellence? How could I have given everything to the pursuit of awards and accolades while all the while neglecting the reality that I was not truly connected to a real desire to play? Or any real desire at all? This baffled me, and drove me into deeper hiding and self-loathing.

"What was wrong with you?" "You can never do that again!" I would say. Demands, ultimatums and harsh language was used in the name of positive change. I built a wall around my heart vowing to never let anyone hurt it again. But in doing so, I lost touch with who I was and what I needed, and the various people who tried to reach out in their concern.

Outwardly, I told the world I was fine. I would say that I had turned a new leaf and was set a new path directed towards bigger and better things. I had also convinced myself of this too. It was much easier to start pursuing something new, rather than looking at what had been lost. The cold, slated walls also became the cold, slated walls built around my heart.

The story of The Athlete brings us into this sacred yet lonely place of hiding and the inner dialogue that accompanied it.

SCENE I. I AM FLAWED

Enter THE ATHLETE. Sitting alone in a dimly lit room.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] How could I let this happen? What's wrong with me? *{pause}*

I really can't stand myself right now. *{pause}*

How could I have screwed up so miserably in his eyes? How could I have had such a lapse in my judgment in those moments? *{pause}*

Maybe I really *am* who he thinks I am: too much, not enough? *{pause}*

Maybe I *am* a disappointment. *{pause}*

It's hard to tell. It's hard to know who or what I can trust.

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "I feel the tension, because of the flaw (that word seems to fit). I still believe with a lot of me that there is something tarnished [about me], you know? That it makes me automatically weaker…and like, a lower class of some sort…it feels intrinsic to me and unchangeable."

"Yah, it confirmed that, maybe he didn't value or respect me that much and it also confirmed that maybe…I actually am kind of intense too. So I was a bit conflicted I guess... But I know for me, like I just wish that I would just like chilled out sometimes. Like I would have taken that approach now. So a lot of regret there. A lot of regret."

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] I feel like a big cloud is hovering over me…like something sticking to me that I can't get rid of, something that feels permanent, long-lasting and unchangeable.

I am hideous here. I am useless now.

Who would want to see me like this?

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "It does feel like there is something inherently flawed that…I can't recover from. You know like, when you think of something shattering, there are just too many pieces. That's what it feels like."

"It's almost like that rat in a cage experiment. What's that called...when it's on a shock panel all the time? And it can't get out of the box? …you develop shame, from not being able to figure out how to get out. Eventually, [you] just shut down, and just get shocked over and over again…the experience feels like [learned helplessness]: it is hurting, it is causing me pain, and then not being able to get out…all these things add up, and you are not able to do anything."

"I think it clouded my vision and sent my thoughts spiralling in a way that wasn't helpful to my performance. Like thinking of all these negative things and how it would reflect on me and in the end that became really distracting."

"Yah, yah, it impedes me. Like it does, so that's why I thought it was inherent, but maybe it is more of a growth. I don't know. Maybe it's more of a cloak. Like it covers me. You know?"

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] And those other people, my other teammates…how did they do it? How were they able to do it and I wasn't able too?

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "…I could see other people who could do it… And I always felt like I didn't quite meet the mark in [comparison]. And it makes me feel emotional to think about that…I just didn't feel like I had the resources to do [it] like other people did…I often think like, what if I was more resourceful, or like, more able, would I have been able to get to the Olympics like my other teammates? [That] was kind of part of the dream too."

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] And I can't believe how much time I am wasting worrying and fussing over this. Why can't I just get over this, already? What is wrong with me?

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "…there is the evaluation of knowing that I shouldn't feel [this] way and [wondering] why do [I] feel that way? It's just this cycle of evaluation of my evaluation…a double arrow."

EXIT THE ATHLETE

SCENE II. I HAVE BEEN SILENCED

Enter THE ATHLETE. Continuing to sit alone, near a window in her room.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] {spoken slowly} Time seems to pass by so slowly...

Sure, *{pause}* there are things to do, and places to go, but I don't really want too.

I feel slowed and quieted…as if I have been muzzled *{pause}*.…And I feel quite comfortable like this, not moving or doing much at all.

{pensive, reflective tone} I use to be so connected and alive. I used to have people who relied on me and needed me. I use to be part of something exciting.

{pause, deep sigh} But now? *{pause}*

What now? What do I have now?

I feel like staying alone in my room forever. *{pause}*

The light in me has dimmed. *{pause}*

What was once wild has been tamed and subdued. *{pause}*

THE ATHLETE looks out the window and notices some birds pecking at the ground for food.

{In a day-dreaming tone} Those birds look pretty determined. Searching for food when there isn't all that much to find. I wish I had what those birds have: a will to go after something with persistence again.

But I can't.

This is all I am now.

CHORUS
[ASIDE] "I don't know, maybe there are other ways of saying it, but it's like a holding back, it's a like…a silencing in a way… I bump up against it…there is something over my eyes and my mouth, like I can't [speak or be seen]… it says 'shut up,' like 'just stand over there' or 'why are you here?' 'what are you doing?' 'You don't add anything here, just get out of the way…' It feels secure, for some reason [though]…it feels more risky to be without it…without the cloaking…[because with the cloaking] you don't really see me, so you don't really get to evaluate me."

Two of THE ATHLETE's friends knock and enter her room. Enter FRIEND 1 and FRIEND 2.

FRIEND 1
[TO THE ATHLETE] {spoken in an upbeat tone} Hey! What are you up too? Interested in doing something tonight? We were thinking of grabbing dinner and checking out to a movie later. You interested?

FRIEND 2
[TO THE ATHLETE] Yah! That new Lady Gaga movie looks amazing.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] What are they doing here? I can't be with anyone right now. I can't have them come near me and see me like this. I can't have them know what

is really going on.

[TO FRIEND 1 & 2] No thanks. I'm good. I should probably stay in stay tonight.

FRIEND 1 & 2

[TO THE ATHLETE] {saddened} Oh ok, too bad. Have a good one, see you later.

Exit FRIEND 1 and FRIEND 2.

THE ATHLETE?

[TO HERSELF] What is wrong with me? Why can't I even go out with my friends? I am so pathetic. Why have changed so much because of this? Why does this still impact me in the way that it does?

THE CHORUS

[ASIDE] I guess I I'm just intrigued by the fact that I'm presently embarrassed by it all. …that it is present and that I am annoyed that it is…there [have been] times when we've been talking where it's like, 'oh man, this is here, and that is pretty, pretty lame.' And I'm not happy that that's there."

Exit THE ATHLETE.

SCENE III. I'M FINE, I SWEAR

Enter THE ATHLETE and TEAMMATES. THE ATHLETE shares with some of her TEAMMATES. The last time they were together was 3 months prior.

THE ATHLETE

[TO TEAMMATES] {spoken in an upbeat tone} I'm fine, I swear. Everything is really great now. Things were pretty rough for a little while, but I am doing much better, and have moved on from that chapter of my life.

[TO HERSELF] Yah, it feels good to have moved on. I feel good about myself now. It's nice to know that I can bounce back from these kinds of experiences. I'm more resilient than I've ever been.

THE CHORUS

[ASIDE] "…the people I work with who know my sports accolades and stuff, and they are like 'man, you never talk about this.' 'I'm your hype man.' Yah, because it's not who I am anymore. It's something that I did a while ago that was cool, but I have moved on, I have a new passion, I'm happy with my life, and I am not going to dwell on what could have been."

THE TEAMMATES
[TO THEMSELVES] Wow! How impressive! Her stature is strong; her shoulder pulled back, her head lifted high; she conveys that she's confidently looking into the future with so much determination and focus. We are captured by her ability to be self-sufficient. We too wish we could have such an impressive track record…

However, something is a little off.

The Athlete seems to be sharing from a some kind of pre-rehearsed story. I wonder how many times she has shared these things with others? Does she want to avoid speaking about parts of her story that are more emotionally intense? Does she have the awareness of how these past events have impacted her? It's hard to tell…

…if anything, it seems as though she has brushed aside the power of her past experiences.

Can we be ourselves with her here?
Can we freely explore?
We don't think so…

It's as if we have been invited into her home, but are being dissuaded from visiting certain rooms. There are strict rules governing how we are to explore and be here…

We feel intentionally re-routed and thwarted.

We thought we had a good relationship with her though. We thought we had some trust between us. Why is she keeping us at a distance? What is *really* going on?

[TO THE ATHLETE] Wow. We are glad that you are doing so well. It's amazing that you have been doing so well. We wonder…*{the Teammates are cut off as they were about to ask another question}*

THE ATHLETE
[TO TEAMMATES] …yah, thanks! I think the whole experience has made me a better person. So even though things didn't work out as I would have hoped, I really believe that I have come full circle and learned from this.

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "I feel like, while that was really tough and frustrating at the time, I think in the long run, it has made me like very good at receiving feedback, so like even when I'm working, doing what I am doing now…like, if I get any amount of feedback, I can pretty much take it."

"When I really think in detail, there were some ups and downs that happen that I know built some serious resiliency in me."

THE TEAMMATES
[TO THEMSELVES] The platitudes she speaks from feel like subtle efforts to push us away and deflect from what is really going on. Does she know that we feel that way? We are not sure. This feels somewhat disappointing. It would've been nice to know more of her honest experience.

Despite how we feel, we need to respect her and keep our distance. I wish it were different, but this is the way it is.

[TO THE ATHLETE] Would there be anything that you would have changed if you could have done it again?

THE ATHLETE
[TO TEAMMATES] No, I don't think so. I wouldn't have changed a thing. It led me to a place of becoming the person that I am today. Sure, there were tough times, but, like they say, everything happens for a reason. I have gotten past those moments and am stronger than ever. I try to live by the motto "live each moment like it is your last" and I think I am hitting the mark.

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "So, yah, at the end of it all, it's because there were so many ups and downs in my career and difficult people and coaches and injury and these things, that I kept bouncing back from, it's all had it's benefits in the long run, and its allowed me to navigate through difficult situations, and work with different people, and come out better for it."

"And I don't think that if I had succeeded in the Olympics, I would have found myself here…so yah, there are moments of: 'well I wonder what would have happened if I had...' but I know that I did everything that I could to get where I wanted to be. It didn't happen and it's ok because I am in a pretty good place right now."

THE TEAMMATES
[TO THEMSELVES] Despite her impressive journey, there seems to be something missing. It is as if there is a chasm between her experiences and the declaration of her resiliency. We remember how impacted she was in those days. We remember how she isolated herself from everyone…something is missing here…

How do we actually get to know her? It's hard to know what to do or say…wish this conversation had turn out differently, but we don't know what more we would have said or asked…we feel muted and stuck here. Could she feel the same?

[TO THE ATHLETE] So, how do you keep yourself busy these days? What are you planning to do this summer?

THE ATHLETE
[TO TEAMMATES] I've planned to wait some things out and put my effort towards the goals I have set, and ultimately, live each moment like it's my last. If sport has taught me anything, it is that hard work pays off. I will work hard, and will achieve was I want to achieve.

THE TEAMMATES
[TO THE ATHLETE] Ok, cool. Thanks for sharing with us. We hope it works out for you.

Exit THE ATHLETE and TEAMMATES

ACT IV: THE DANCE

PROLOGUE

THE NARRATOR
[ASIDE] There is great risk in receiving love from another. It can be wild and dangerous, unleashing longings and realities only known in the authentic experiencing of them.

I have known such a love. It was gentle and curious; it pierced through the smoke screens that I was so accustomed to presenting to the world and began with a simple question: "*how are you <u>really</u> doing?"* As we sat together, and the walls slowing started to come down, I encountered myself as a woman in great pain who had never really taken her pain seriously. But there I was, being taken seriously. My experiences were being taken seriously. I was gradually freed from the chains that kept me barricaded for so long. It was a painful and long process. It required another person (and persons) to help show me that my story mattered and that it was worth attending too. Such kindness and patience was necessary to coax me out of hiding and start revealing myself to the world.

But this "coming out of hiding" was not so easy. It was as if loud sirens would alert me at the approach of another well-intentioned person. It was as if they said, "keep away, there is nothing for you to see here." It is and was a battle of allowing myself to be seen and cared for by another person. Despite the defenses I had built up, a simultaneous desire existed: a desire to be seen and known. And therein exists the paradox: a desire to be seen, but also a similar opposing desire to push away the one who comes close. It is a tug-of-war at times, but more so a dance of closeness and distance, navigating the boundaries that define the encounter.

And that is where we find ourselves in this story; the Athlete and the Loving Other encountering each other. May we join and dance with them.

SCENE I. THE APPROACH

Enter THE ATHLETE and THE LOVING OTHER. THE ATHLETE notices THE LOVING OTHER approaching. THE ATHLETE is disheveled in dress and appearance.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] Lately, I have longed for someone to come near. I have longed for someone to hear me. However, as I see someone approaching, I grow hesitant.

{voice quickening, hyper vigilant} What am I suppose to do? Can I prepare for this?

I want to hold back. What is he looking for? What will this be like? Can I even engage with him? Do I even want too?

> ...maybe it will be ok? It's been so long since I have invited someone to be with me. I want him to come, but then again I don't…

{pause, depressed tone} Maybe this was a huge mistake. I would much rather be alone right now, doing the various other things...it's hard to know how to make sense of my feelings.

THE LOVING OTHER
[TO HIMSELF] I will approach tentatively. Tip-toeing; aware of a particular ambiance, every little noise and movement, every creek and crackle. My heart rate and breathing pick up, and I grow aware of my body existing in ways that seem attune to the environment. There is something precious and holy in this place. Something that draws me, and pulls me in, but I seem to hesitate.

I anticipate a journey, I anticipate something good but something equally difficult to grasp, something illusive, and even dangerous.

My presence seems critical, so much so that I wonder if who I am will be a hindrance in encountering the one I hope to meet.

I turn inward: I want to bring my best, to compensate for any lacking, to arrange things just so. These preoccupations engulf me: will my entry be smooth and uninhibited? Can I prepare for this in some way? But just like that, I begin moving, and the concerns that once engulfed me fade away as my attention requires it to be so.

I turn my awareness to the one I am to meet. *{pause}* And there you are. *{pause}*

{in awe, gasping} I am taken aback by your presence. I innately know, without you saying much, that I should take my time, unhurried and leisurely; to get to know what I can from your initial appearances before I can be with you and know you. My mind goes beyond what I see, and wonders what lies beneath your depths.

But first, I must acknowledge the barricades that surround you.

[TO THE ATHLETE] Thank you for welcoming me here. It is amazing to see you in this place. All of the accolades and awards that surround you are very impressive. You strike me as very accomplished.

How have you been? Tell me about yourself. What can you tell me about being The Athlete?

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] I am nervous. What do I say? Where do I start? Maybe I'll keep it simple and on the surface…

[TO THE LOVING OTHER] {spoken with a semi-engaged tone} I was given a great oppourtunity at the right time, I did my best and I played well.

There were some hard times and there were some good times, but overall, I was driven and went after my goals. I am grateful for the oppourtunities I was given. I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

CHORUS
[ASIDE] "I feel like I was really lucky… I think, my coaches and the other athletes kinda took me under their wing and just gave me a lot of opportunities and gave me good coaching. Right away I tried out for the provincial team…and I ended up making the team."

"And so, I mean, looking back I have no complaints, like, the whole experience was wonderful. When I really think in detail, there were some ups and downs that happened that I know built some serious resiliency in me."

"Um, I guess, I've always been very intrinsically driven. Like even though my parents had high expectations, they were never like, pushy at all about sports. I think they know that, like, I was, like, so driven that they never had to do that."

THE LOVING OTHER
[TO HIMSELF] I notice that The Athlete is being quite modest; I wonder what she actually feels towards herself, her experiences and the people in her life? I wonder more about what kept her competing and what motivates her at a deeper

level?

There seems to be an unspoken reality that we are tip-toeing around. We seem to be entering into territory that has rarely been explored. I will do my best to proceed with gentleness and caution.

[TO THE ATHLETE] That is great. You seemed to be at the right place at the right time and are modest about your accomplishments! What motivated you to play? What was that like for you?

THE ATHLETE
[TO THE LOVING OTHER] I was good at it! And at times, I played with such passion and joy. I was a vital contributor for the teams I was on, and played at high levels. It was really awesome! But it wasn't always like this; there were parts of my experience that were really difficult. Yah, so…it was good and fine, and I'm happy to am on the other end of it now.

THE LOVING OTHER
[TO HIMSELF] It feels although we are stumbling to connect in this conversation; we start and then stop. We seem to be missing each other. There are moments of awkward fumbling: moments of reservation but then also moments of engagement. How do we speak of such things? How do we dance a dance we have never danced before?

> I innately know that I should spend time on the surface, getting to know what is before me. I could get to know what I can from her outer appearances before I can truly encounter her. There is no rush. Only an eager anticipation for what may come of our interactions.

[TO THE ATHLETE] Sounds like a bit of a roller coaster. Do you mind sharing some of experiences with me? What were they like? What was so difficult for you?

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] {spoken with some panic} I could share…but I feel blocked and resistant somehow. I feel angry. I feel irritated. I feel a barrier between us. Can I trust him? My eyes are drawn to other things in the room; my feet feel unable and unwilling to dance the way I am being asked too. Who is the leader here? Who is the follower? What dance are we actually trying to dance?

> I am reminded of The Other in this moment: his face, the look in his eyes, and the way that he glanced at me with such smite and discontent.
>
> It's hard to articulate, but in this moment, I don't want to be seen and I don't know if I want to go there.

Should I try? Should I even bother? I don't know if I can…

What is happening to me?
Why do I feel so over taken by these emotions?

[TO THE LOVING OTHER] I don't know, it was something…it was…a lot of things…let me share with you some of my story…

THE ATHLETE shares her story with THE LOVING OTHER, but does so in a with a lot of distance, giving the impression that she is detached and resistant to connecting with THE LOVING OTHER. THE LOVING OTHER senses that there is more under the surface and is curious about this, but honours the distance that is between them.

THE LOVING OTHER
[TO THE ATHLETE] Wow, what a story, you have such a wonderful and impressive history.

[TO HIMSELF] She has been noticed, and chosen; she has made her mark, developed her skills and is elite. However, my mind goes beyond what I see, and wonders what lies beyond the walls of these stories. I wonder about how I can cross the bridge, how to make my way into her world and meet the one who extended this invitation. Am I pushing too hard? Am I trying to advance too quickly on territory that I shouldn't advance upon? It's hard to know.

[TO THE ATHLETE] But can I ask…how are you *really* doing? There seems to be something more. What is going on for you as we speak of these things?

THE ATHLETE grows silent. THE LOVING OTHER waits for a response.

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "Yah, it's almost like...I'll say little tid bits or something, to people…But um, I never really connect with it emotionally. Because, like, why would I do that? It's just painful. So, I'm an avoider. 100% all the time. That's what I do. Avoid and then sleep."

SCENE II. THE WALL

THE ATHLETE addresses THE LOVING OTHER but keeps distance between them. It is as if there is a physical wall separating them.

THE ATHLETE
[TO THE LOVING OTHER] {voice piercing and focused} Do not come any closer...keep your distance…you shouldn't even be here right now.

Saying NO shakes me...

Saying NO unsettles and even saddens me a little, but it has to be done...

Think of it as a thorny bramble bush surrounding the outside of a home.
Or even a kilometer wide moat surrounding a castle.
These barriers speak firmly: KEEP OUT. STAY AWAY.

But I also wonder, why do you bother?
I've made it clear that you shouldn't approach, and ask these things with such depth, but you are and you have.

And this perplexes me.
I am making efforts to keep you out, but oddly enough, you are persistent. It is as if something draws you, but I don't understand what that could be.

So I ask you:
Why are you here?
...Why do you care?
...What is it about this place?
…What is it about me?

And also, do not these surrounding send you a message? Do you not realize that my appearances are meant to deter you?

Why would anyone want to come near someone like me?
I am deformed…
…flawed...
…hideous.
And will always been this way.
Why would you want to see this?

{pause…}

And before you saying anything…whatever you want from me, know that I can't give it to you...let's just make that clear. There isn't anything I can give you that you will be satisfied with. Nothing will be good enough for you or anyone.

So why don't we just forget all this and not bother getting into it. That would be easier, and save us both from disappointment.

What you want: I don't have. Simple as that.

THE LOVING OTHER
[TO HIMSELF] {pause} Wow. I am speechless right now...as if the air has been knocked out of me. This feels painful. What do I say in reply? What do I do now? I am frozen trying to take this in. A deep pain floods me; is it my pain or The Athlete's pain? I am not sure. But what I do know is that I am not welcomed

here despite a real desire to be. *{sigh}*

…Do I acknowledge and try to honour the boundaries that have been set? *{pause, and nod}* Yes. This seems important...

…But there also seems to be something drawing me near…that despite the boundaries and pain, there is a pull…and invitation to come closer still.

...there is something more, something to discover here, something that I am willing to engage with even in the messiness.

[TO THE ATHLETE] I am touched by your words: so piercing and pointed. I feel put in my place. Pushed away. Impacted by you.

But I wonder…why don't we just try. I am here, we are here, and I am curious about you. I don't want anything from you. I don't need you to do anything for me. That is not why I am here. I am here to understand any part of your world. I am here to come closer and to know the real story that is locked up inside of you. There is no task to accomplish here nor a timeline imposed upon us either. I am with you and am willing to be with you however you invite me.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] {pause, dumbfounded look on her face} Wow, really? What do I do with this? Can I believe the sincerity of these words? Can I trust someone to who doesn't know the undesirable parts of me? I don't know how to respond, but he keeps looking at me as if he wants to continue engaging with me somehow…

[*TO THE LOVING OTHER]*
I don't know what to say.
…I guess…
…I don't know…
…what is there to say?
….what am I suppose to say?…

[TO HERSELF] There seems to be a muzzle over my mouth. Something has muted me in these circumstances. I just can't seem to say anything in particular.

I have blanked and disconnected.
My words feel clumsy.
I can't contribute or do anything of value right now.

What is happening?
Why am I reacting in this way?
I haven't spoken about this for a reason, I think…

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "But I haven't really shared it with anybody, that's the thing…there was just never really any point where could share it with somebody. The only time maybe I shared it was like in a funny tone, like with my current teammates in the beer league that we play in. And then it just is kinda funny, ha ha. Like, that happened to you, kind of thing. Um, but it's not just funny, obviously, it was a bit traumatizing."

"And so for years I didn't talk about my involvement in sport, even thought that was what defined me for so long. And so I jumped into this other world that was like, intense in a different way, and I just kind of denied that part of my life?"

THE LOVING OTHER
[TO THE ATHLETE] {gentle tone} There isn't anything you need to say; there is no right or wrong. Maybe we could remain together for a moment and slow things down.

> ...There is nothing required of us. I am happy to be here with you regardless if anything is said or not.

[TO HIMSELF] This isn't easy. I feel like we are standing on thin ice. I feel like what we have between us is tenuous; it could break so easily. What if I say the wrong thing? She may retreat and we could miss an oppourtunity to know and see one another. She may lash out and continue to push me away.

But if I disengage, things will stay the same and little will be known or understood about her.

> How do I navigate this? I want to offer her my tenderness, but I am not quite sure how to do that without stepping on a landmine…and if she will even receive it.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] I seem to have a choice. I can choose to enter into this dialogue or I can choose to run away from it. I am drawn to this person in a mysterious way; he seems trustworthy, but I also feel quite reserved and uncertain.

Do I say more to him? He is present and willing to listen. Surely this must count for something? But in reality, I can't receive his kindness in its fullness. I feel doubtful that this relationship I could go any further. It is as if I have been hardwired to respond in a way that rejects this type of closeness.

> A wall is up. Many walls are up…and this really pains me.

[TO THE LOVING OTHER] Hmm. Ok thanks. That sounds good to me.

THE LOVING OTHER
[*TO HIMSELF]* She is constricted in her words, as if she was tied up somehow. It is as if something holding her down, like a big weight, or as if something is muffling her voice. There is something holing her back from blossoming, like a handicap of some kind.

> So do I stay or go? It is hard to know how to respond. It is like a game of tug of war; we are pushing and pulling each other to gain ground; we continue to test the waters, rubbing up against each other in somewhat uncomfortable ways.

{pause} It is as if we are dancing an awkward uncoordinated dance, stepping on each other's toes, and trying to find a rhythm but missing it, somehow.

[TO THE ATHLETE] What is it like to be talking about this for you?

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] So I begin to wonder: Why can't I receive this kindness and allow this conversation to flow? Why am I so plagued by the reality that I don't want people to see me this way and be with me? What is wrong with me?

[TO THE LOVING OTHER] It's ok to be talking about it. Just really uncomfortable at times.

[TO HERSELF] I want to say more, but I can't somehow.

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "…it's hard to put words to this right now to be honest, I think…I feel like there's a bit of tension in hearing what you just said…I don't think I have ever been able to receive those words [of kindness]…I feel the tension, because of [my] flaw…I still believe that there is something tarnished [about me], you know…but seeing it as beauty or human, I don't think I have ever really let myself think that."

THE LOVING OTHER
[TO HERSELF] I wonder if things will change as we get to know each other? But for now, I will draw near to what The Athlete has showed me: her wall. This wall seems large and intentionally placed; it covers, it conceals, it is a barricade.

> What is beyond this wall? I am unsure. All I know is that I will stay near and come as close as I can, and as I am motioned too.

However, I also notice that this wall seems to have an opening; a doorway potentially leading somewhere. This is good news! This gives me hope! The fact that there is a door gives indication that there is some openness. However, this passageway seems to be password protected. Not everyone receives the

privileges of being welcomed in.

> *{pause, spoken in a pensive tone}* I wonder what form she takes, what she likes and dislikes, what gets her up in the morning? What lies behind these walls?

But first, I must keep my attention fixated on the wall itself and find someway to access the locked door. What could open this passageway?

THE ATHLETE and THE LOVING OTHER continue to sit with each other awkwardly and engage in some conversation.

SCENE III: THE ENCOUNTER

After some moments of silence THE ATHLETE and THE LOVING OTHER continue to engage with each other.

THE LOVING OTHER
[TO THE ATHLETE]{looking at The Athlete with gentleness, making eye contact, speaking slowly} I know this isn't easy for you, but I'm glad to be here and with you in this *{pause}.* In the short amount of time that we've had together, I see so much goodness in you, and I trust that there is much more I will come to understand. *{gentle smile}.*

And I think the best thing I can do is just be present as a friend would – to listen without evaluating or analyzing or giving any sense of feedback. I just want you to feel understood and valued for all you are: the good and not so good, the beautiful and the not so beautiful, wounds, scripts, triggers and all…It may not feel at times that there is much good, but I know there is.

I have no timeline and no expectations; you are in the lead and I am here to help and support and listen in every way possible. This is motivated by love and concern for you – you are not an experiment to me, this is real.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] {pause, in a flabbergasted tone} How is it that I am in the presence of such unanticipated kindness *{pause}?* What have I done to deserve this *{pause}?*

I have sat in my shame, disgust, and isolation for so long *{pause}.*

But you see me here *{long pause, tears building}.* And you want to know me. You see something in me worth pursuing.

> You see something that somehow draws you, when I only see ugliness and unworthiness *{pause}.*

You see something in me that I have never dared to see *{sighing, pause}*.

How could this be real?
How could this not be for your personal gain?

But oddly enough, I believe you. I believe in the purity of your words and I find myself receiving them for the first time. Maybe this *is* real… *{pause}*

{spoken in a day-dreaming tone} And it all feels so new. It is as if I am stepping into a reality with different dimensions and colours: it is a new way of being.

Things feel more substantial and whole right now. The surroundings are more expansive. I can move, and dance, and be free here in ways that I have never known.

And you came so quietly. You came without making a fuss or drawing attention to yourself. You came in meekness: with strength under control, strength via the power of your kindness, strength in the grounding of how you presented yourself to me.

Your strength seems to be holding me up right now. Your strength seems to be providing the scaffolding to allow for the exploration of the isolation and loneliness that has permeated my life. Your presence is helping me recognize the masks that I didn't know I was hiding behind *{sigh, pause}*.

But, I have tried to push you away! I tried so hard! …but you remained. *{pause, spoken slowly and with an inquisitive tone}* Why is this? Are you not afraid of me? Are you not afraid of the mess I have made out of my life? I am supposed to repel you like the many more that came before you…but you stayed. You remained with me here.

[TO THE LOVING OTHER] Thank you. It feels so odd to be here with you, to be seen in this way and feel ok about it *{pause}*. I am touched that you are here with me, and not forcing me to be anything in these moments.

I don't want to come across as too clingy or needy though. I don't want to over-burden you with my inner battles.

And I am angry, too.

{spoken with frustration} If I could, I would leap across the table and strangle The Other if he was here. How could he treat me this way? He robbed me of my life and took something from me that I can't forgive him for…

> I was never appreciated and seen for the amount of effort, talent and time I put in; I was not recognized for the number of medical procedures I underwent for the sake of the team.
>
> When The Other gave such a nonchalant response, he missed seeing me - he didn't get me, he didn't know me – I was reduced, downgraded and left for dead.

THE LOVING OTHER

[TO HIMSELF] Something has loosened. Something is starting to wiggle free. In a brief moment it was as if I saw a bright light shining through a small opening. There was a glimmer of something magnificent illuminating the space we found ourselves in. I encountered a beauty that I had never anticipated encountering. But in that same moment, it was gone.

These moments seem to be fleeting…and yet so good even in their mysterious brevity.

I will continue to communicate my intentions and allow my heart to be open to the person before me.

[TO THE ATHLETE] I can hear the pain and frustration in your voice. You were treated poorly, and it wasn't right. Know that as long as you have something to share, I am listening. As long as I can be of help as part of your circle of support, I am in this for the long haul. Do not be afraid – at least with me – of ever being too needy or clingy. I won't give up or get annoyed…I consider it an honour to be part of this journey. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to see something beautiful unfold.

It's my hope that in our friendship you can be free to be who you are – wounded, broken, glorious and radiant – all at the same time and without judgement or shame.

I think the main thing you need and want is to be heard and understood – is that true? I certainly feel like I understand you in what you have shared – partly because you communicate so well and partly in that I feel connected in such a way that I understand you right now.

> I also need to confirm that some people will tire of hearing about the ways we have been hurt in the past. Just love those people for free because chances are they have not personally experienced deep healing and thus have no road map to guide them.
>
> And just because some people respond this way doesn't mean everyone will. As for me, I am in it for the long haul.

THE ATHLETE
[TO HERSELF] My heart feels as if it is settling somehow, *{pause}* as if it is loosening its grip, and relaxing the tension it once was unknowingly holding. *{pause}*

It is as if the dry ground of my soul is being watered.

It's as if I can sense the way back to a source of fresh drinking water after being parched for so long.

Something in me is opening and making way for the new. This feels good, but also frightening. I still feel very fragile and weak in the midst of this kindness.

But I can also recognize that this is what I need and want.

What do I do now? How do I hold that which feel so precious? What is the next right step here? Are there steps to this?

[TO THE LOVING OTHER] I am in awe of the awareness in your response to me. And you're right, after looking a little deeper, I seem to need someone who is willing to listen and seek to understand me.

Thank you again! I can't believe how much has been catalyzed in my heart and in my life in such a short amount of time.

Thank you for your willingness to be with and also how you are taking me seriously and giving me the space to express myself.

> As you can tell, there is a lot running through my head and heart – some constructive, some not so much and it looks as if when I share, "freedom" starts to happen, in some way. I'm sure I'll come to understand this more as time passes.

I was worried about what the next step may be and what I need to do in the midst of these changes, but I can see more clearly now, that it is not so much what I need to do next, but rather to allow myself to be, and to be in relationship.

THE ATHLETE and THE LOVING OTHER exit together.

SCENE IV. SELF-COMPASSION

A few years have passed since THE ATHLETE encountered THE LOVING OTHER for the first time. On this day, THE ATHLETE spends time reflecting on the ways in which her life has changed and how she is now relating to herself and others. THE LOVING OTHER sits and listens quietly.

THE ATHLETE
[TO THE LOVING OTHER] {reflective tone} It's hard to believe where things have come *{pause}*. I can still remember those early moments of us sitting together and feeling so gripped by my disparaging thoughts and emotions. All I wanted was to be left alone to disconnect from anything that reminded me of the disappointment I had become, but you remained with me in the midst of my self-loathing.

Through your presence in my life, I have learned how to change my self-loathing into self-compassion. And now it feels like a lifetime ago that I was gripped by such intensity and fear.

I have come to learn that it is ok to feel the way that I do.

It is ok to set boundaries with people that only see me for what I can do rather than for who I am.

It is ok to say no, and to have awareness for what I may need.

It is ok to communicate these needs regardless of what other may think or feel about them.

It is ok that I like what I like, and dislike what I dislike; this makes me unique and allows others to encounter the edges of the "real me."

It is also ok to admit that I am sad that I was treated the way that I was treated.

I have to admit, I am sad recalling how long I had been under the influence of The Other: the one who saw me as a cog in a machine rather than a person to be cared for and understood.

I am sad that I am still held back and influenced by this relationship. I may never be what I could have been or who I thought I was going to be.

THE CHORUS
[ASIDE] "I'm just sad because I am not fully me, because I am not fully able to give in relationships or feel totally safe in certain contexts or certain places where, I want to give everything, you know?"

THE ATHLETE
[TO THE LOVING OTHER] So be it. It isn't easy to accept this…but it is ok.

THE LOVING OTHER
[TO THE ATHLETE] Yes, it is. It is a great joy to have been with you in this; to come to know you, and your dreams and longings. May our friendship continue to be a place where you can bring yourself as you are. Veiled or unveiled.

Exit THE ATHLETE and THE LOVING OTHER.

THE END

EPIOLOGUE

Dear Athlete,

I'm sorry for forgetting about you so easily. For the ways I fixated on what needed to be accomplished at the expense of your wants and desires. I reduced you, and used any means necessary to train you to become super human.

I'm sorry that I didn't listen to you when you were hurting. I'm sorry for the ways I pushed you harder and further when you were saying no. I told myself that your weaknesses were not valid or important, and in doing so, I silenced you and kept you at a cool distance.

I'm sorry for the ways that I limited how I celebrated you. When you ran faster, hit harder and gave a more, I loved you more. But when you missed a pass, or lost your hustle, I withheld my care and affection. You deserved more.

I'm sorry for keeping you small. Despite how outwardly strong and powerful you appeared, when you wanted to explore other avenues to develop yourself, I wouldn't let you. I made you believe that if you were not an athlete, you would not be good for anything.

I'm sorry for the constant…incessant…ridicule. You didn't deserve that. I am sorry.

I love how passionately you played. You gave your heart to your teammates, to your coaches, and for the love of the game. When it seemed impossible, you seemed to dig a little deeper and gave from a place of generosity.

I love how you brought your tenderness even when it may have felt like you were rebelling against the spirit of the sport. You inspired so many people to become better versions of themselves especially when you lived and played from that deeper place.

You were and are *good*. *Good* not because of how well you played, but rather because goodness flows in and from you. Regardless of the roles you took on, the plays or tasks you were asked to do, you are and were good. This is something you can trust, lean into and give from.

You are loved as you are.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Throughout this thesis my intention has been to understand and describe how elite athletes experience shame. The phenomenological account was written in the style of a theatrical play, and highlighted four key thematic features of the phenomenon of shame; namely (a) shame as a dialogical phenomenon revealed in the space between persons, (b) shame as characterized by feeling personally violated and subsequently vulnerable, (c) shame as embodied in acts of hiding from self and others, and (d) shame as a the portal or gateway to encountering a person as they are. Though each of the participants' experiences was uniquely theirs, common threads wove the experiences together into rich tapestry of meaning, forming a dynamic and relational understanding of the phenomenon. In this section I will discuss how these findings fit with previous research, explore novel contributions and examine the theoretical and clinical implications that have emerged from this research. To conclude, I will discuss the strengths and limitations of this thesis and the future directions this research could have within the field of sport and counselling psychology.

Discussion of Findings

The intention of this next section aims to compare findings of this thesis with the extant empirical shame literature in psychology. I will first explore similar findings between this research and the existing literature by drawing upon specific components of the participants' lived experiences that fit well with previous studies conducted on shame. I will then consider novel contributions these findings offer to the existing literature.

Similar findings. Several findings that emerged from this study harmonize with previous perspectives on shame. These findings include: (a) shame as an

interpersonal/relational experience; (b) shame as affect; (c) shame as a painful self-conscious emotional experience. Several findings also complement the sport psychology literature on shame, which suggests that (d) distressing emotions, such as shame, impact athletic performance.

Shame as an interpersonal, relational experience. This study shed further light on the relational dimensions of shame as experienced by elite athletes. This was central to how shame was presented in a 'play' format in the phenomenological writing. The participants spoke of shame being experienced in the relationship they had with teammates, coaches, family, friends and opponents; they felt a sense of unworthiness to be in connection with them, and described a sense of hopelessness for the connection they had longed for, particularly in relationship with those who had shamed them (e.g., coaches, family friends). For instance, when Amy was cut from the Olympic team, her impulse was to retreat from her coaches and teammates and sever relational ties with them. However, she also described a longing to be seen and understood in a deeper and truer way: "I just wanted to be treated like a human being." Therefore, when considering an interpersonal perspective on shame, the present study supports the Jordon's (1997) notion that shame is "a deep sense of unloveability, with an ongoing awareness of how very much one wants to connect with others…there is a loss of the sense of empathic possibility and, others are not experienced as empathic" (p. 147).

Furthermore, in this study, Zoe described how her struggle to remain optimistic and functional in times of athletic disappointment was particularly difficult because she was unable to rely on the consistent support of her coach and father. It was as if Zoe needed a healthy relationship to help manage the emotional distress (i.e., shame) her poor

performance catalyzed, but she was met with a lack of understanding from those that whom she expected it to come from. For myself, I also turned to my head coach and looked for some support in a time of physical and emotional exhaustion, but was met with a lack attunement, which left me feeling confused, hurt and ashamed. These experiences are consistent with DeYoung's (2015) definition of shame, where shame is the experience of one's felt sense of self-disintegrating in relation to some dysregulating other (p. 18). Instead of feeling connected to someone calm and collected, participants felt alone and overwhelmed. Therefore, in this study, shame was revealed as a relational phenomenon.

Affects responses and shame. Each participant described particular somatic responses when experiencing shame. These responses included a slouched body posture, downcast eyes, and a sense of confusion. For example, when Steven was being yelled at by his coach, he recalled wanting to hide and recalled looking down at the floor as he was being spoken too. For Amy, she also averted her eyes, but also recalled her heart rate increasing, a sense of disorientation, and an urge to remove herself from the coach's meeting room. This was described as an impulsive response to her coach's lack of attunement to her obvious disappointment. Lucy, too, described a desire to slump away, most notably in how she described hanging her head and shoulders when her head coach reprimanded her. In line with affect theorists, shame has been referred to as a painful mechanism that limits positive affect, resulting in an array of visceral responses (Nathanson, 1992; Tomkins, 1963). In experiencing shame, participants in this study responded in a powerful and primitive manner highlighting shame to be an overwhelming physical experience.

Furthermore, shame was also difficult to describe as if words were hard to select by many of the participants. This too is captured in the current literature as shame has been described non-verbal, and visceral (DeYoung, 2015). For instance, at times, participants struggled to choose words for their experience of shame, as if one word could not suffice. As an example, Zoe would often struggle with knowing how to start explaining how she felt, but embodied defeat in her posture towards me as the interviewer. This wordlessness captures something of the phenomenological experience of shame.

This study is also in unison with the understanding of shame from an affect regulation theory perspective. As noted in DeYoung's (2015) definition (which incorporates research on affect regulation), shame is not seen as an individual's response to a painful stimulus sequence, but as what happens in the interaction between one person's affective relational need and another person's response to that need. All participants in this study described their responses (i.e., downcast eyes, body posture changes) in relation to some other person. For example, for Andrea, when she noticed her coach glaring at her in a pensive and disapproving manner, she described averting her eyes, and changing the way that she played in an effort to shift the interaction between them. Three other participants also indicated that feeling ashamed meant that they averted their eyes from a particular person in an effort to shied themselves from a potential fall-out with them.

Shame as a painful self-conscious emotion. Current emotion-related descriptions of shame were supported this study (DeYoung, 2015; Nathanson, 1992; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tompkins, 1963). Some participants described shame to feel

deeply painful, as if they had been tarnished or perceived themselves as forever flawed. Others described experiences of feeling naked, alienated, and lacking dignity or worth as compared to the others in their world. Many of these descriptions were captured in metaphors to further elaborate experiences. For instance, Zoe described feeling like a drugged lab rat, unable to escape her hopeless circumstances of defeat. Both Steven and Andrea described feeling tarnished or black marked, as if the mistakes they made were constantly hovering over them as a reminder of their flawed nature. And finally, in my interview, I described feeling diminished and 'less than I ought to be' whenever my coach would direct her gaze towards me. Shame felt as though there was no way I could relieve or restore what was damaged in our relationship and with the relationship I had with myself.

Distressing emotions (e.g., shame) impact performance outcomes. Researchers in sport psychology have largely focused on the implications of emotions at the individual level, where positive or pleasant emotions are generally associated with adaptive performance outcomes, while negative or unpleasant emotions are generally associated with maladaptive performance outcomes (e.g., Cerin, 2003; Conroy & Elliot, 2004; McGregor, & Elliot, 2005). Similar to previous research, participants spoke of how their experience of distressing emotions, particularly shame, influenced their ability to cope with stress and negatively impacted their ability to perform athletically. Andrea, for example, reflected on how her experience of shame was something that led her to 'play it safe' on the soccer pitch; she adjusted her play (i.e., made easier passes) in fear of judgment from her coach. Hannah recounted how she would miss her lay-ups during basketball games when she was experiencing shame, stating that the shame she

experienced impacted her ability to concentrate on a seemingly rudimentary play. Shame, thus was a powerful experience that seemed to impact these participants' performance outcomes.

Additionally, similar to the research conducted by Conroy and Elliot (2004), this study also found that athletes experienced shame when they perceived that they had failed in some capacity. Conroy and Elliot's (2004) work on fear of failure, mentioned that one reason athletes developed a fear of failure was due to a fear of shame and embarrassment. This fear was connected to athletes' perception of performing poorly and disappointing fellow teammates, coaches and other significant people. Similar to these studies, participants spoke of their fear of failure and the subsequent fear of shame they carried. This was described as a motivating factor in participant's lives to perform more optimally. For instance, all participants recounted experiences of fear based thoughts in regards to disappointing their coaches.

Novel contributions. Along with findings that support other studies and perspectives on shame, new findings also emerged. To the best of my knowledge, the findings presented in this section are new to empirical research. This study builds on the current understanding of shame as depicted in the research literature, particularly the interpersonal theoretical framework of understanding (DeYoung, 2015) as well as the self-revelatory personal (Längle, 2003; Steinbock, 2014) dimensions of the experience.

From an interpersonal stance, shame was described as "an experience of one's felt sense of self disintegrating in relation to some dysregulating other" (DeYoung, 2015, p. 18). This approach highlights the importance of the relationship with the other in experiencing shame. However, it does not provide the experiential account of how shame

emerges from the interpersonal dynamic, and, particularly, how this experience is changing in and through relationships. Furthermore, the self-revelatory personal understanding of shame, acknowledges shame as a gateway to understanding the mystery of a person, but does not expand on how shame might be protective and how this protective action is enacted in an experiential manner in an through the dynamics of a relational exchange. The following paragraphs aim to expand on this.

The space between us. The findings of this study resonate with this interpersonal understanding of shame in the sense that all participants experienced shame in relationship with a 'dysregulating other.' For instance, Amy experienced shame when her coach cut her from the UK national basketball team. She expected him to provide her with emotional support, however, he responded coldly and appeared to be unconcerned with her evident disappointment. This, too, was my experience as an athlete. I expected my coach to provide support after I had given my full effort at the end of a tournament, however, I was met with disappointment and disgust by my coach. However, the findings of this study move beyond this and illuminate how shame emerges as an embodied experience and transforms in the space between persons (e.g., participant and researcher; coach and athlete). This in-between space represents a dynamic, ever-shifting relational space permeated by a distinct dialogical rhythm set in motion by the encounter of two persons. A metaphorical, embodied and dynamic way to capture this relational dynamism is the choreographic image of a dance. This primary metaphor offers a depiction of the motion, space and dynamism of this dialogical experience.

This in-between space was experienced in the interviews I had with my participants as a sort of tug of war, start and stop dynamic. For instance, when I would

invite my participants to share about their experience of shame, the space between us would feel both tense and tentative, as if we were both testing the waters as to where to move and how to best reveal ourselves to each other. In my interview with Zoe, there were many moments when I felt compelled to take my time and not push her to reveal the understanding she had about shame. I would hang back, wait, and observe her willingness to engage with me. I also sensed there were moments when I conveyed a sense of understanding to Zoe, and it was as if something would change in a moment and her posture seemed to invite me to come closer and understand her more deeply. However, this was tentative and arduous process. In these moments I sensed that something about shame was both painful and not something Zoe wanted to speak about yet also the place where she wanted to reveal something profoundly personal about herself to me in interview with me. Thus, the phenomenological exploration of shame revealed shame as a phenomenon changing over time within the in-between relational space rather than an individual, static emotion.

Furthermore, in my interview, the moments when I was willing to reveal the tender and seemingly tarnished parts of myself to my supervisor, I was able to bring a true version of myself into relationship with another person. It was as if the longing I had to be seen by my coach was being recreated and actualized in the safety of a relationship in the interview. As I opened up, and allowed myself to be seen, my shame seemed to transform. Things felt lighter, as if the load I was carrying was somehow shared with my supervisor for the moments we were together. Therefore, this in-between space was not only the birthplace of the shame experience but also the crucible of transforming the relational disruption represented by shame into reconnecting. This invites us to ponder

on the relational personal nature of shame not only at its origin but also as an unfolding, dynamic phenomenon.

A gateway to the person. Another contribution of this research is how engaging in the dialogical dance of shame was also the avenue through which participants' revealed something about the essence of their person that may have been unacceptable or unseen otherwise. Therefore, the space between participant and interviewer also facilitated an encounter of something hidden and potentially revelatory between persons. For instance, while participants typically remained in a guarded posture throughout the interview, there were moments that seemed to reveal something distinctly different, authentic and whole. When Steven shared openly about being 'too intense' of a hockey player, he spoke with sincerity. He was no longer reporting on his experiences as he had been doing but rather, was connected with an awareness of his perceived flaw, and was able to maintain connection with me as the interviewer and himself as he shared. This felt real, and without pretense, thus revealing something about Steven. In this sense, the space that was created between participant and interviewer was also the grounds through which something of the person of the participant was revealed and subsequently encountered. The importance of this was intuited during the design of this research project and reflected in choosing a person-focused research methodology to allow for this more personal encounter. This highlights the potential benefit of integrating a person-centered approach to research (i.e., personal phenomenology), especially when exploring human experiences that are personal and sensitive like shame.

It should also be mentioned that while shame appeared to be the gateway or indicator of something essential about my participants, it also appeared to have a

protective quality. During the interviews, my participants would pull away, create distance, and seemingly protect themselves by keeping parts of themselves hidden when speaking about their experiences of shame. For instance, when Zoe was speaking about a her experience of shame, while she was being somewhat transparent, she also held herself back from sharing the entirety of her experience with me. The boundary enacted between us felt important and necessary to honour (as the interviewer), and also a way that the Zoe asserted herself in a concrete way in the midst of her sharing. As the interview progressed this boundary appeared to shift and change as our rapport developed, but the protective quality of was revealed to be an essential part of 'the dance' between us. Moreover, the protective quality of shame was not something that was explicitly articulated, but was intuited through tone, body posture and speech intonation. These findings suggest that while shame might point to something essential about the person, there are also boundaries or protective layers that are part of the encounter between persons when speaking about shame.

Furthermore, this relational space was also found to have restorative and corrective potential. As persons we are oriented and flow towards the other(ness). Our person is endowed with relational capacity or relationality and we desire to be encountered, seen and appreciated. This study shows that when this desire is thwarted and our person is not received by the other, shame disrupts the relational flow. However, the experiences shared by the participants in this study revealed that shame is not only generated in the in-between space of relationships but it is also transformed and healed through personal encounter. Allowing for the encounter between persons simultaneously allowed for the vulnerable nature of one person to be received by another. This

receptivity appeared to thaw or soften the one who had experienced some relational rupture or injury, such that a more genuine and vulnerable version of their current self could be seen, known and responded too. In this sense, if one 'dancer' was lovingly attuned to the other, the space between persons could offer a potential healing and corrective experience. For example, when Steven voiced his experience of shame and wondered if his flaws were truly shameful and unworthy of relationship and care, the presence of myself as the interviewer seemed to transform the understanding he was able to have with himself about his perceived flaw. In this example, exposing that which has been hidden to and with another person seemed to transform the dialogue Steven had with himself.

Implications and Recommendations

Theoretical implications. These findings offer a new perspective on shame contributing to both the shame literature and the sport psychology literature. Overall, this research suggest that shame could be understood as a complex relational process set into motion by the encounter of two persons. As explained, a metaphoric way to capture this relational dynamism is through the metaphor of a dance, depicting the motion and space of a dialogical exchange. Perspective of shame could account for this and be expanded to describe the relational, reciprocal and dynamic aspects of shame experienced between people. Findings will be explored in consideration of the interpersonal theoretical framework and definitions of shame (DeYoung, 2015), the cognitive models of coping in sport (Hanin, 2000, 2004; Lazarus, 2000). Finally, I will conclude this section with a brief discussion of possible future directions of theory in sport psychology.

Interpersonal perspectives of shame. These findings are point to the way the phenomenon of shame is a relational phenomenon with potential for a corrective experience. DeYoung (2015) suggests that shame is "the experience of one's felt sense of self disintegrating in relation to some dysregulating other" (p. 18). This definition assumes that the experience of shame is a relational encounter between two persons that has negative consequences. This encounter is assumed to be a disintegrating experience. However, expanding upon DeYoung's definition, it could be said that shame is both an experience of one's felt sense of self disintegrating in relation to some dysregulating other and/or one's disintegrated self being received and integrated in relation to some loving other. This addition suggests a *both/and* perspective of understanding shame. This perspective expands the relational understanding of shame, suggesting that the relational space held between people engaging can either be healing and corrective and/or could perpetuate shame. The primary difference here can be understood in the attitude or posture towards shame. If we can allow and understand shame and give voice to the experience, this can facilitate deeper connection and thus potential healing. Therefore, according to the results of this thesis, shame is experienced not only in relation to a dysregulated other, but also in relationship with those that are present and receptive to the person in spite of the shame they carry.

Cognitive models in sport psychology. In sport psychology, shame is primarily understood as part of a cognitive appraisal process (Hanin, 2000; Lazarus, 1991), which aims to evaluate emotional experiences to determine their functionality in relation to sport performance. However, this research suggests that the experience of shame is not simply an individual experience that needs to be controlled, but rather a part of an

intricate dynamic between individuals, such as teammates, coaches and other sport staff. Furthermore, since sport is a social/relational experience, it is crucial to begin conceptualizing shame to include a more holistic understanding acknowledging the interpersonal intricacies present in the dynamics between persons. This perspective highlights that understanding shame in sport psychology may require a broadening of the cognitive models to include a more relational and dialogical perspective.

It is important to note that while this study suggests the incorporation of a more holistic and relational understanding of shame (and emotion in general), the various coping models commonly used offer some benefit for the purpose they have been created for: to help athletes cope with difficult emotional experiences. However, the encouragement this study suggests is to consider the models of coping in light of the phenomenological understanding of shame from the outset. From this perspective, what could be added to these models is a broadened understanding that shame as not simply and individualistic experience but experienced in relation to others, as well as the importance of accepting and understanding shame, rather than simply ridding ourselves of it.

Future directions for theory in sport. The design and subsequent discussion of the theoretical implications of this study has aimed to embrace a holistic perspective of athletes. While sport and exercise literature does evidence cases of embracing such a perspective (Coulter, Mallett, & Singer, 2018; Coulter, Mallett, Singer, & Gucciardi, 2016; Dale, 1996) it is not widely accepted in the field as a common approach. Some trends have prevented this goal. An attraction to cognitive explanations of behavioural tendencies has led to reluctance to embrace theoretical frameworks that understand

athletes through a humanistic, existential or transpersonal lens. Additionally, scholars have become accustomed to dismantling athletes into a series of detached and testable constructs. As Coulter et al. (2015), purports, "disconnected constructs tell us little about the conceptual whole [of the athlete] or how different theories might be integrated to provide a holistic concept of the individual" (p. 7) thus perpetuating a fragmented understanding athletic experiences, and the person of the athlete on the whole. However, this study reveals that exploring the experiences of athletes in a holistic manner can add theoretical depth and understanding to current models. In this case, the suggestion that expanding coping models in sport psychology to include a relational dimension acknowledges a more expansive understanding of the experiences that athletes are being taught to cope with. Going forward, I am encouraged by the movement towards advocating for the holistic understanding of athletic experiences. By connecting with the complexity and mystery of the athlete as a person, we are able to acknowledge a far more representative reality of the nature of *being* an athlete in the world. I hope this study can encourage that crucial conversation.

Clinical implications. In this section I aim to highlight the central aspects of the present study that offer certain clinical implications for practice. These implications include (a) acknowledging that shame is a dynamic, dialogical and experience, (b) acknowledging that shame as protective of the person, and (c) acknowledging shame-based power-dynamics in sport.

Acknowledging shame as dynamic, dialogical and relational. The primary metaphor that emerged from this research was that of two dancers, dancing together. The metaphor of a dance complements the participants' experiences of shame as it captures

the dynamic, relational, and sometimes-awkward nature of how two people dialogue about and in shame. Participants and researcher alike struggled at times to maintain the flow of connectedness while in the interviews; a push and pull, hide and seek flow was characteristic of the interaction. This dynamic appeared to shift unpredictably as the relational distance was adjusted for and personal boundaries were rigidly enacted or relaxed. Based on these findings, clinicians may want to openly acknowledge the awkwardness and clumsiness of the interaction as a way to diffuse the frustration and embarrassment that could be experienced while together. In other words, when a clinician notices dynamics characteristic of shame, naming the illusive and awkward nature of the space being shared may help diffuse the awkwardness being experiences and could help move the interaction forward.

Clinicians may also be encouraged to remember that shame, when brought into the interpersonal space and out of an intrapsychic one, may change the nature of the shame experienced for a client. The added space, and self-distance, as well as the presence of another person, may help clients view their circumstances, and themselves with added freshness and less criticism. In this interpersonal space, a person can be seen, appreciated and affirmed as they are, possibly laying the groundwork for how boundaries could be enacted (i.e., position taking). This opens up the possibility for shame-informed assessments and dialogical related interventions while working with clients, such as developing awareness of personal boundaries (e.g., what part belongs to me and what part belongs to the other?).

Furthermore, in his work, Welwood (2006), suggests that while there could be fear in letting a client "be the being that [they] are…including the messy, raw, and

wounded parts" while in the presence of another person, engaging with clinician who models acceptance (i.e., letting be) and genuine affirmation, can lead to the transformation of shame into personal appreciation (pp. 101-102). Since athletes typically gain assurance and approvable by trying to prove their worth or hide their flaws while on engaging in sport activities, what is needed instead is a way for athletes-clients to discover that their core nature as intrinsically good apart from their performance. Modelling this may carry the potential to free an athlete from seeing themselves as inherently bad due to performance flaws, and open them up to meet and accept life as it is for them (Welwood, 2006).

Acknowledging shame as protective of the person. As previous described, the experience of shame is a painful and heavy intrapersonal experience, but also inherently protective. In this sense, if shame aims to protect the person from further harm, our stance towards it can be one of gratitude and curiosity, similar to other coping reactions (e.g., avoidance, aggression). For instance, when clients experiences shame, I can assume that there is a good reason for the experience, and allow for the experience to exist in the space between us. The tendency may be for clinicians and clients to engage in avoidance strategies to manage shame simply in an effort to bypass the discomfort. However, while it may be experienced as uncomfortable in the moment, clients would benefit from being reminded that their shame does not harm them, but rather protects them. Moreover, according to the findings of this study, since shame is inherently protective of the vulnerability of the person, clinicians can make attempts to affirm clients in their experiences of shame so as to acknowledge and be open to the goodness associated with our innate capacity to protect. This re-conceptualization of shame could

shift the way that clients have typically engaged with their experiences of shame (and other intrapersonal experiences) from one of criticism to a posture of curiosity and openness, potentially offering a more spacious and less critical stance towards themselves.

Acknowledging shame-based power-dynamics in sport. Lastly, it is important for clinicians to acknowledge the power-dynamics that exist in a sport and how this may perpetuate shame in sport. Performance based evaluative ties lay the groundwork for functional relationships in a sport context. When functionality is central to relationships, athletes could be reduced and their person missed. In light of this, clinicians could acknowledge that athletes experience shame in relation to their coaches (and other staff) due to performance-orientated values. Since clinicians who are immersed in sport culture are intricately woven into athletic systems motivated by performance outcomes, it is important to acknowledge that these clinicians are at risk of forgetting the personal dimensions of the athlete's experience thus potentially perpetuating shame. Allowing for space to distinguish oneself apart from the sport culture is important, and could provide a rich depth of support.

Secondly, when an athlete is connected to their coach, by the virtue of the coach-athlete power dynamic, athletes look to coaches for affirmation. If they are missed (intentionally or unintentionally), there is potential for the athlete to be hurt. Since there can tend to be a hope for connection and affirmation in sport based relationships, and when this is not realized, shame could be a likely outcome. Put another way, the more an athlete is connected to their coach, the more vulnerable they are, and the more hurt they could experience when they there are not noticed or affirmed. When a person longs for

affirmation and needs to be seen, this presupposes some vulnerability. This thesis suggests that coaches and others supporting athletes should be acutely aware of the power they hold in these relationships and make efforts to not only interact with their athletes on a functional level, but also at a personal level.

Methodological reflections. Since personal phenomenology (Launeanu, et al., 2018) was a novel methodological addition to the process of research process, it is important that I offer some reflections lending support for and challenging the application of the said framework. The reflections will consider, (a) conducting research with the person in mind, and (b) the experience of accessing one's 'inner knowing' as a researcher.

Conducting research with the person in mind. As described in chapter 3, personal phenomenology is a person-centered, dialogical and phenomenological research framework adapted from existential analysis (EA). One reason why I choose to pilot this research using personal phenomenology was because I was confident that this method would be well suited for deepening an understanding of the lived experience of the phenomenon of shame due to its acknowledgement of the person as mystery, gift and someone to be encountered. As such, uncovering the lived experience of shame was done by activating the personal capacities of the researcher and participant, and thus privileged the encounter between persons as the grounds for how and where the essential features of shame would emerge.

As I conducted the research, I made efforts to maintain a perpetual openness to new understandings of the phenomenon while simultaneously maintaining openness to my participants, and also myself. This multi-layered openness to myself, my participants,

and to how the phenomenon emerged in the relational space created in our interaction allowed for a deeper understanding of shame as it appeared. The posture of inner sensitivity and receptivity that my research team and I were able to embody throughout the research process took precedent and lead us through the systematic frameworks of this research method, not the other way around. This came as a surprise to me. As someone who can default to relying on systematic frameworks such as recipes or steps to move through challenging tasks, I found that the success of this method relied heavily on the inner compass or inner knowing of the researchers. This will be expanded upon in the next section.

Upon reflection, I would suggest using personal phenomenology as a research method when researching personal phenomena (such as shame) to maintain the person as a central focus on the research. The crucial connection with the self, the participants and the researched phenomenon throughout the process can add layers of depth and naturally preserves the dignity of the persons involved.

Accessing one's 'inner knowing.' One unique aspect of this research method is the engagement of the subjective experience of both the researcher and participants' in order to understand the lived experience of the researched phenomenon. Seeking to sense the essence of the phenomenon with my participants (that which resonated deeply and personally for both of us) simultaneously included an integrated sensing based our capacity for 'inner knowing', and a perpetual openness to new understandings. Inner knowing, in this case, refers to the ability to remain connected to one's feelings, impulses, and authentic orientations or position towards that which was being revealed, as described in chapter 3.

Since this research method draws on the personal dimensions of those involved, and demands researcher as well as participants to engage deeply and personally, I would suggest that it is crucial for the researchers involved to be thorough in their preparation, assessing one's prior biases, and orientation towards the phenomenon. While this typical for those engaging in phenomenological research, personal phenomenology requires a unique depth of involvement that draws upon inner resources as well as one's ability to communicate and be surprised by what is being revealed. Simply put, research on the basis of inter-subjectivity is demanding; it demands that all involved reveal themselves and this requires a certain groundedness and connection to one's personal sense of themselves, others and the world. While this framework was undoubtedly suited to study the phenomenon of shame, I was challenged to show up in ways that were stretching and akin to how I have learned to show up for my clients in clinical practice.

Strengths and Limitations

The following section will aim to discuss the strengths and limitations of the present study. I consider each in relation to the present literature and then how specifically this research was carried out.

Strengths. Firstly, using a qualitative method enabled a more in-depth understanding of the experience of shame for athletes, as compared to the more predominant quantitative and survey-based research in sport psychology. Instead of simply looking for a particular response from my participants, I was able to assume a posture of openness and help deepen participants' experience of shame on many levels. Thus, participants were able describe their experiences in detail, referring to their experiences as it was felt in their bodies, minds, and while in relationship with others,

This research offered a deeper and richer exploration and understanding into the experience of shame for athletes, addressing a gap in the sport psychology literature.

Additionally, the research methodology of personal phenomenology (Launeanu et al., 2019) helped deepen and explore the construct of shame. Instead of focusing on the intrapersonal dimensions of shame (i.e. what shame is to the individual) or the interpersonal dimensions of shame (i.e., the gaze of the dysregulated other, DeYoung, 2015), the person-centeredness of personal phenomenology allowed me to understand and explicate deeper understandings of shame as experienced between persons. In doing so, the dialogical aspects of shame, often left out in quantitative research, were illuminated. Furthermore, since personal phenomenology is a dialogical and reflexive approach to research, the ways in which my research team (i.e., supervisors and research assistants) were touched by shame as it was revealed in the interviews also further illuminated the phenomenon itself. Thus, complementary modes of analysis (individual and group analysis) were integrated into the analysis stage of the project and have been understood as a strength of the present study.

Akin to hermeneutic phenomenology principles of rigour (van Manen, 2014), I, as the researcher, made considerable efforts to conduct 'good' phenomenological research and strived to approach the phenomenon and the entire research process with an attitude of openness and honesty. As I designed this research project, I remained open to my personal experiences of shame, and made considerable efforts to bracket these experiences through writing and openly dialoguing with others (e.g., supervisors, peers). I also assumed the position of the participant and was interviewed by one of my a supervisors in an effort to both engage more deeply with my reflexive process and to

prepare myself for what it might be like to participate in my study. During the data collection and analysis stage, I avoided the temptation to engage with the theoretical or clinical understandings of shame in the literature. This helped ensure that the phenomenological text was written without being contaminated by outside perspectives. Finally, I think it is important to note that I spent considerable time and effort cultivating depth and insight in preparation to write the phenomenological text. I transcribed all of my interviews, immersed myself fully in all of the interview texts, and presented some of the initial finding at a conference and received feedback. All of these efforts helped me write a text that was evocative and resonate with participants' experiences.

Limitations. I would also like to delineate a number of limitations of this study. Firstly, I had anticipated meeting with participants for 2 or 3 follow-up interviews. Since experiences of shame are difficult to share with another person (Morrison, 2011), let alone a stranger in a researcher role, additional interviews were deemed important to facilitate researcher-participant rapport. However, due to the time-limited nature of the study, additional interviews were cut from the research design. Having more time to build relational safety in the context of an interview may have revealed additional dimensions of shame. Furthermore, recruiting participants to describe their experiences of shame was difficult, simply because participants had trouble differentiating between their experiences of humiliation, embarrassment, guilt and shame. A more thorough screening interview may have helped find participants who were more familiar with their shame experience.

While the sample of participants represented a diverse array of sport expertise, most participants (apart from Zoe) recounted experiences that were connected to the

context of team sport. It is possible that different experiences of shame may have emerged with a more diverse sample, particularly including individual sport participants. Indeed, some research (Nixdorf, Frank & Beckmann, 2016) points to the fact that individual sport experiences differ from that of team experiences. Furthermore, the sample itself was comprised of competitive elite athletes (Swann et al., 2015), who had all retired from their participation in elite level sport. Future research may benefit from a sample of elite athletes who were currently competing.

Areas for Future Research

Based on the findings of the present study, there are many possible avenues for future research. From my perspective, a more in-depth understanding of shame can be garnered from qualitative research methodologies and mixed method designs, where shame experiences can be explicitly described and encountered rather than studied in a numerical sense. Because there is a limited theoretical understanding of shame in sport psychology, more nuanced research may help build theory in a more holistic sense. Moreover, since the phenomenological research in the area of sport psychology has tended to focus on the lived experience of a particular sport activity (rather than a particular emotional experience), any purposeful seeking out of athlete populations with the explicit intention of studying emotional experiences, may benefit the literature overall. This could include the qualitative study of other self-conscious or difficult emotions such as humiliation, embarrassment, grief and guilt.

The present study also adopted a philosophical stance towards the person as dignified entity capable of choosing their position in the world. In my opinion, continued efforts to design research with the person in mind would benefit the sport psychology

community by counteracting the ethnocentric context in which elite athletes live, play and function. For instance, if researchers integrate a desire to empathize with the experience of the athlete, research problems, research designs, and subsequent theories and clinical applications may be infused with a richer integration of athlete voices and experiences. Integrating athlete voices (when they can tend to be lost or filtered through performance orientated perspectives) may shed light on deeper realities of athletic experiences, and thus extend our ability to support athletes in their psychosocial realities.

I am also interested in how future research may deepen the study of shame in athlete populations. Therefore I am curious how shame may change or be different with: (a) athletes competing individually (e.g., swimmers, gymnasts, figure skaters), (b) athletes currently competing at their highest level of performance, and, (c) athletes competing in sports which include explicit objectification of body weight or size (e.g., dancing, boxing, wrestling). This sub-set of athletes have been suggested to be those who tend to experience more stress, and have been deemed as populations requiring rigorous coping strategies to manage. Studying the lived experience shame as experienced by these athletes may propel future research and subsequent theoretical models targeting a more accurate picture of their experiences.

One of the findings highlighted in this chapter was how shame is experienced between people as a dynamic dance. This dance was experienced in the re-telling of shame experiences in the interview, as well as in the retrospective retelling of athlete experiences (i.e., past experiences) as they recalled their shame in the interviews. To my knowledge there is no research on how shame is experienced in the present moment between athletes and coaches or other supporting staff (i.e., managing staff, assistant

coaches, medical staff). Similarly, I was unable to find any psychological research revealing the essence of shame in the space between people, apart from the acknowledgment that shame can be experienced between therapist and client when memories of shame are evoked (Steele, Boon, & van der Hart, 2016). These would be interesting avenues for future research and would enhance and deepen the understanding of shame as experienced by athletes and the people that support them.

Another finding supported in this research was the experience of shame being manifest through bodily expressiveness. Some participants appeared nervous and were unable to make eye contact with me in the interviews, others started sinking into their chairs as if they were becoming smaller when describing their experiences of shame. As noted in the literature review, shame is manifest in physical expression of hiding from the other and is essentially non-verbal (Tomkins, 1963). As such, I would suggest that future research aimed at studying shame would benefit from integrating a form of data collection and analysis which accounts for the moment by moment bodily changes of the participant and interviewer as they engage in the shame dialogue or 'dance.' A study which incorporates and analyzes data from video recordings and physiological tracking markers, for example, may widen and deepen the theoretical understanding of shame experienced between persons. This would therefore acknowledge the verbal exchanges as well as the non-verbal.

In the research design phase of this project it was suggested that shame be studied using a group-based data collection strategy to capture something of the essence of shame as experienced between people in a group context. While this was a novel and fitting idea, it was decided to be outside the scope of this particular project. However, it is my

opinion that incorporating more group-based data collection elements to the research design may help deepen our understanding of shame. Since shame is an emotion that requires it to be "aired out" for it to be known and healed (Brown, Hernandez, & Villarreal, 2011), efforts to study shame with another person or people in dialogues could pose an interesting perspective in the literature. Therefore, in line with the suggestion made by Park, Lavallee & Tod (2013) for more creativity in sport psychology research, I also suggest more group-based study of shame, such as the incorporating of re-enactments.

CHAPTER 6: REFLEXIVITY

> The pot carries its maker's thoughts, feelings, and spirit. To overlook this fact is to miss a crucial truth, whether in clay, story, or science. (Susan Krieger, 1991, p. 89, as cited in Finlay, 2002).

Before describing the reflexive practices I engaged in for this project, it is important to delineate what reflexivity is and outline the purpose and place it has in this research. As noted, hermeneutic phenomenological researchers strive to be open to new understandings of experiences as they are lived, while accounting for the various sources which influence the research process. Openness in this sense is defined as, "being surprised – even awed – by the research; prepared for preconceptions to be shredded; open to the possibility in the shift of understanding" (Finlay, 2011, p. 77). Furthermore, within hermeneutic phenomenology it is important to acknowledge and accept that the researcher involvement is central (Finlay, 2011). As such, it is imperative that the researchers' own understanding and assumptions are not naively applied to the data analysis process but be openly acknowledged. Reflexivity, therefore, is the process of explicating the researcher's pre-understandings and assumptions so that he or she can move beyond their own context, beliefs and prior experiences so as to encounter the phenomenon with a spirit of openness (Finlay, 2011). Therefore, acknowledging these pre-understandings is the intention of this chapter.

How This Thesis Came to Be

van Manen (1997) suggests that researchers reflect on the following question prior to phenomenological inquiry: "what human experience do I feel called upon to make topical for my investigation? (p. 41). With this in mind, it seems fitting to mention

how this research came to be. My inspiration was initially catalyzed watching a fellow student defend her thesis in the fall of 2016. This particular student captured her research beautifully and passionately, but most significantly, she shared openly about the personal suffering she had endured in her life. This presentation felt like an invitation to turn towards myself and ask: what was similarly impactful in my own life. With a spirit of curiosity, I was led to spend time journaling about a particular season of my life that still held significant unanswered questions: my experience as an athlete.

Athletic history. Outwardly, it would be difficult to guess that I played rugby throughout my adolescence and young adulthood. My stature and overall demeanor may not seem initially congruent with the rough and tumble nature the sport has a reputation for. However, this was my reality for many years. I started playing rugby in high school at the age of 15 and hung up my cleats for good after my 27th birthday. The most focused time of my competitive rugby career was between the ages of 15 to 21 when I successfully competed at the university, provincial and national team levels. My crowning achievement was being selected to represent Canada at the under-19 and under-23 level, as well as being long-listed for the senior national team, a team preparing for the World Cup in 2006 at the time.

This experience of athletic excellence was something that I took considerable pride in during the years I played. Women's rugby in the early 2000's was an up incoming sport in Ontario. Considerable funding and specialized coaching was abundant particularly leading up to World Cup in 2006. Therefore, I found myself in a unique time in history; there were opportunities to work with excellent coaches and talented

teammates, and an overall desire throughout the country to see women's rugby develop into something world class.

Being part of this community of athletes shifted my life and how I related to myself in significant ways. Spring, summer and fall months were dedicated to practicing and playing rugby, the friends I developed and cherished were also rugby players who could understand the rigorous nature of the training schedule, and my future was pre-determined; academic, personal and professional interests were either put on hold or molded to make space for the eventual full-time dedication for the sport I had envisioned. While I do not regret the time spent, it is apparent now how full and incubated my life was in pursuit of athletic excellence.

Presently, I would not consider myself an athlete, nor would I be considered an elite athlete by current definitions (Swann et al., 2015). However my experience of once being an athlete has significantly influenced how I relate in the world. The way I approach tasks with a rigorous work ethic, how I turn to coaches and authority figures for guidance and the ways in which I have come to trust the movement and strength of my body, all bear resemblance to my athletic history. Despite the appreciation and pride I carry for what once was, the memories from that time have not been without embarrassment, struggle and shame.

The shame I carry. Over the past 12 years, I have tried hard to downplay some of my athletic experiences, particularly the ways in which I disappointed my coaches. A part of the sport I played was to receive (or endure) ongoing feedback from coaches, and often times, this feedback would be delivered with harshness in the pursuit of motivating us to perform well. The memory of particular experiences replays haunting and relentless

words of criticism: 'you all are such a disappointment,' 'what the hell do you think you are doing?' Over time, these words were internalized and I began to believe that there was something inherently wrong with me. In a metaphorical sense, my response to carrying this criticism can be likened to carrying dead weight on my body. My desire to get rid of this dead weight may be similar to someone who desires to amputate one of their limbs because of the chronic pain they endure. In this sense, my experience of shame felt akin to wanting to completely disconnect from a part of myself; that part that was seen as disappointing to the eyes of my coach. While this might seem like an extreme metaphor, the avoidance, self-inflicted criticism and desire to disconnect captured my experience well.

In many ways, I did an excellent job avoiding and disconnecting from this area of my life. After I finished playing rugby, I dedicated myself into a community of people who held different values. I intentionally avoided sharing about my athletic history. Over time, this pattern of distance became the way that I related to myself. However, this began to change when I started studying counselling psychology at Trinity Western University. This new community was filled with individuals who challenged me to be curious and open to my experiences, including the painful ones. As described earlier, the classmate who modeled this openness defended her thesis on the topic of grief. Her academic excellence was apparent, but was enriched by the connection she had with herself, and an intimate knowledge of her experience of grief. This juxtaposed my way of approaching my perceived weaknesses and challenged me to design this research. I had learned that my weaknesses should remain hidden, but Tammy turned towards her grief and was curious about it. The ways in which I avoided my suffering were being

challenged: could I engage with my experiences in a more self-compassionate and curious way? My life seemed to be inviting me to do so.

Actively Turning Towards my Shame

The act of making space and turning towards my experience of shame yielded some profound personal insights relevant to how I conducted this thesis. Since it is important that I make explicit my personal biases, experiences and prior knowledge (Finlay, 2011; van Manen, 1997), I believe it to be important to share some of the activities I engaged in and the insights garnered from them as it relates to my evolving understanding of the experience of shame. Actively exploring my pre-understandings occurred in dialogue; dialogue with others and with myself. The following paragraphs detail some of the overarching themes associated with the insights I garnered from these dialogues regarding my pre-understanding of shame.

Reflexivity: pilot interview. I was fortunate to have had one of my supervisors conduct a phenomenological interview with me where I was in the role of a participant. The intention of conducting this interview was to experience a phenomenological interview prior to interviewing participants, as well as to actively reflect on my experience of shame in a purposeful and deepened way. As described in chapter 3, this interview was subsequently included in the analysis. Taking part in the phenomenological interview was a deeply profound and meaningful experience for me. Not only was the descriptive content meaningful, but also the relational dynamics experienced before, during and after the interview revealed something of my evolving understanding of shame.

This interview was conducted at the Trinity Western University campus in my supervisor, Mihaela's, office. Mihaela's office was comfortable and familiar; we engaged in some enjoyable small talk prior to the interview, which was a nice way to ease into the interview itself. As we chatted, I remember feeling quite nervous, but also secure in allowing Mihaela to accompany me as I described my experiences. Furthermore, since I had been trained for what to expect in the phenomenological interviewing process, I allowed myself to assume an open posture towards my experiences so as to remain curious even as a participant.

As the interview started and I shared some of my athletic history, I was filled with joy and vitality connecting with my early experiences of playing rugby. I hadn't recalled these experiences for some time and was shocked how happy I was to speak of the physical nature of the sport, as if I was connecting to the energy of the movements as I spoke of them. However, as I began to share about some of the more difficult parts of my athletic experience (i.e., experiences of shame), I noticed significant shift: I was filled with anger and frustration directed at my coaches (and eventually towards myself). Furthermore, I also re-experienced some feelings of shame during the interview. I shielded my face and body from Mihaela and felt particularly disconnected from her, especially in the moments I felt ashamed about my stories, behaviours and emotional expressiveness. Despite this, the space between us felt rich, yet also infused with a longing for something closer and less strained or complicated.

Furthermore, in the days following the interview, I experienced what Brene Brown (2010) has coined as a vulnerability hangover. I felt confused, worried and continued to feel shame for what I had revealed about myself in the interview. It was gut-

wrenching feeling to know that I had exposed some of my more undesirable parts to another person. A day after the phenomenological interview, I wrote in my journal:

> Was there something off between us? Did the interview go as it should have? It felt normal to engage as we did, but I wonder if we did something wrong, or if I did something wrong? How was this interview for Mihaela? Did it impact her in a negative way, a positive way - in what kind of way? It is likely normal to be wondering about these questions, but I hope it doesn't impact our relationship too significantly.
>
> I wonder too, am I enough? Can I actually do this project and these interviews? I don't think I can bring this question to my professors or expect this research to answer this question, but I can't help but to ask it in these moments.
>
> I also wonder: was I too much? Did I expose too much that crossed a boundary that I should have been more aware of? I want to hide, and to cut everyone off in these moments; to not let my face be seen. But at the same time, I don't want to jump to conclusions, and should wait and see what happens. *(Excerpt from November 13th, 2017 Thesis Journal).*

Furthermore, a metaphor came to mind after this interview that seemed to capture something of my understanding of shame. The metaphor was of a double locked door common in hotels rooms or homes requiring extra security. See Figure 3 below for a stock image of this locked door.

Figure 3. Double locked door image.

This image came to represent something of the experience of shame after the pilot interview. Despite my prior relationship with my supervisor, coming close to my experience of shame with her was difficult and had many moments of active decision-making (e.g., do I open up or not). Opening the first lock seemed to represent my ability to turn towards and enter into my experience of shame. This required an active willingness to acknowledge my experiences, instead of disconnecting from my shame. The second lock seemed to represent my willingness to invite another person to see my shame with me. Unlike opening a single locked door, opening a double locked door implies that there are more steps to enter the home, and is in some ways more arduous.

Doing this interview also revealed to me some of my pre-understandings about shame. I noticed that I felt deep pain and anger towards those who hurt me; I noticed that it was difficult to remain connected with my experiences, especially in the presence of another person, and I noticed that the interview held a lot of meaning, depth, and even healing potential. I was also left with a deep sense of awe and surprise by how intensely my emotions were stirred up. So many questions and curiosities arose that continued to accompany me throughout the research project after this interview. Looking back, this

experience was a major turning point in this thesis; my eyes were opened to the depth of this experience. It was as if I had been invited into a new way of looking at my self and shame in general; it provided deepened intuitive template of how I might encounter my participants as they shared their experiences. Moreover, I realized that researching shame was synonymous with researching something deeply personal. As such, I began to acknowledge that my presence as the interviewer was not simply ornamental but crucial to the understanding of shame.

Reflexivity about the Research Process

Above I detailed some of my vulnerabilities and experiences that influenced how I approached the research process and uncovered my prior understandings of shame through the pilot interview. In this section, I want to briefly mention of some of the reflexivity practices I engaged in during the thesis as I interviewed my participants, conducted data analysis, and wrote my phenomenological text. I quote sections of my research journal to demonstrate how I engaged in my reflexive process. What is included below is merely a sample of some of my reflections.

Interviewing. I interviewed six participants between January 2018 and June 2018. While I conducted a pilot interview in November 2017, I still had some trepidation about the interview process with my participants. I wanted to make sure my approach conveyed a sense of openness, respect and care for my participants and their experiences. As the interviews began, I experienced them as challenging. After each interview I wondered if I had done a sufficient job connecting with my participant and if I had conducted a 'rich enough' phenomenological interview. I often reflected on three areas: (a) whether my participants were comforted by my presence during our interview, (b)

how I may have contributed to inhibiting my participants' openness and, c) the debate of whether or not I should follow-up with my participants to have them deepen their descriptions shame or not. In my journal entries I also tried to coach and encourage myself to keep trying even when these questions felt difficult. In May of 2017 I wrote in my journal on a few occasions about this:

> I think I wanted to her (i.e., a participant) to like me… I think I wanted her to trust me and talk to me about what she was going through. But I don't know if she really wanted to go there. I spent so much time on the context, and missed little hints and clues along the way.
>
> I also spent so much time occupied with myself. We eventually got to her experiences, but not until 40 minutes into the interview. The beginning of the interview was difficult; it felt like I wasn't approaching the interview with phenomenological openness, or a desire to dwell with the phenomenon…all I wanted to do was to invite my participant to slow down.
>
> Overall, I want to avoid this interview. I don't want to listen to it again…it makes me feel like I am so incompetent. Maybe I need to do this interview again? I don't know…should probably consult about that.
>
> Why don't I ask more directly about shame? Is it ok that I ask about the emotions that seem to be surrounding the shame? How do these emotions work together? Stay with the participant…you don't have to say everything perfectly, but track with what they are saying with great curiosity. I could I have said - ok, let's go back to that emotion of shame, what was that like for you? Can you describe it? What was that like…who was there, what did it feel like in the room,

how did time move, who was near you - what did they look like? *(Excerpt from May 17th, 2018 Thesis Journal).*

I also started acknowledging my some of my deeper emotions and wondered what might transcend the barriers of connection that seemed to define my interviews:

Where I am at in this process, I need to meet myself there. Where I am at is at a place where I feel quite alone and broken, truly. I feel like I am not really good enough in comparison to the other students around me.

Am I a good interviewer? Should I be a good interviewer? What does it mean to be a good interviewer in phenomenology? To be open to be orientated to the phenomena, to the person; to dwell with the other person and what they are sharing. The essence of this is allowing myself to be with the other person - learning about their shame is a learning about how to be with the other - to transcend many barriers that have been put up. What might transcends these barriers? Softness, gentleness, a tenderness... *(Excerpt from May 18th, 2018 Thesis Journal).*

In these reflections, I made efforts to continually check in with myself about how the interview process was unfolding. It was important to continually check in my supervisors at this point in the process to ensure that I was on the right track with my interview style. Despite feeling insecure about my approach to interviewing at times my supervisors and research team assured me that I was on the right track and that my interviews had garnered sufficient phenomenological content to proceed.

Transcription, analysis and phenomenological writing. It was a crucial decision to transcribe all of the interview texts after each of my interviews. Each

transcription invited me to re-experience the interview and provided momentum for the analysis. My biggest regret in the transcription and analysis phases of this project was not being more rigorous in sharing my reflections with others. While I met with my supervisors on occasion, more frequent dialogues with colleagues could have facilitated deeper reflections. Instead, I kept the majority of my emerging reflections to myself. Despite isolating myself during this phase, I was able to continue my reflexivity activities in the form of written journal entries. I began to wonder about the dynamics of close relationships, as I had been made aware of how my participants had battled with their shame in relationship with coaches and other significant people in their athletic lives:

> Do I back away from those people who know me most deeply? Is there something about the people closest to us that make us want to stay away from them when we are in pain? Maybe it is too painful to receive empathy sometimes…isolation could be easier than the possibility of rejection? Only being known on the surface can be easier than disclosing at how we really feel. Hiding from ourselves, not wanting to be seen even by those who care about us could be easier…but it is what we actually long for? *(Excerpt from June 10th, 2018 Thesis Journal).*

As I began the analysis of the research text, and then started the phenomenological writing, I began to notice a strong desire to avoid entering into reflections about the experience of shame. It felt as if I needed to endure the experience of writing, rather than it being an activity that I enjoyed. I also recall feeling quite frustrated at how my energy levels had started to shift and that my productivity reflected

this. Being able to capture something about shame in a creative manner seemed to feel like an impossible task:

> There is a sense of avoidance I have for this project. The task seems so great. As if I am at the bottom of a mountain getting ready to start up the hill, vaguely aware of the journey and how arduous it will be. I am also aware of my lack of perfection engaging with this topic and this research project in general. I find that I am bumping up against my level of expertise (and lack thereof), and the expectations to meet a level of performance of those that came before me. This makes me feel quite frozen and incapable, not unlike my experience as an athlete. *(Excerpt from August 8th, 2018 Thesis Journal).*

Interestingly, during this phase of the project, I also returned to Ontario to visit friends and family. This experience was an immensely positive and seemed to impact my attitude towards this thesis project. It was if going home to visit people who knew me and cared for me reminded me of some essential realities about who I was, and the support I needed to continue engaging with this project:

> I am also aware that I bring something different, and that my strengths with this project are going to be different than someone else. Today, for the first time in a long time, I feel as if this is ok. I am not on a scale of bad or good. The criticism has been so thick in the past, but today there is something gentle and more kind directed at my heart. Going home to Ontario reminded me that I have a place in a family, that I have played a role in people's lives that was meaningful and long-lasting.

> Being present to Christiane was so meaningful. Being a part of her family was so moving…doing the dishes, being present and available to her. My ability to love and give to someone else was so healing for me and also healing for those that received it. I am appreciated and wanted. My relationship with certain people has been received and it is good. It was as if I played an irreplaceable role in her life. I often see myself as replaceable and dispensable; that my efforts will be replicated and are essential unimportant. I was giving in a self-less way, and this giving did in fact show me my heart.
>
> So how does this project fit into the grand scheme of things? It is an invitation of sorts: an invitation to grow in kindness towards myself. It is an invitation to be gentle and kind when the berating and rumination starts. Something is shifting in me: to be kind towards myself means that I begin to believe that my intuition is good. And how I connect with others is ok too. *(Excerpt from August 12th, 2018 Thesis Journal).*

Phenomenological writing was the most difficult part of this project. After completing the analysis, I would make time to sit down with the research text and analysis documents only be feel empty handed and without the capacity to write phenomenologically. I also seemed to isolate myself during this phase of the project and regret not reaching out for more support from colleagues and supervisors. However, I noticed that I too was engaging in a dance with my thesis. A journal entry from September 2018 capture this well:

> What is it about this process that feels like such a push and pull within myself? There are moments when I can come closer and draw near to my flaws,

> idiosyncrasies and shame, and other moments when I completely detach and dissociate from them and from myself, and this project. It all feels so intertwined. The closer I get to my perceived flaws, the longer the vulnerability hangover is…or it is as if there is an acclimatization process that happens. As if I am ascending a mountain, get closer to the summit but need to return back to base camp to where I can breath. Every time I get closer to myself (closer to the summit) I need to retreat. It is as if the closer I get to myself, and allow others to get closer to me, there needs to be a "retreating" to lower grounds where the oxygen is thicker, and things are more familiar.
>
> Everyone adjusts differently to hiking a summit…some get sick sooner, others don't get sick at all…it doesn't matter how much you prepare. It is in your DNA. *(Excerpt from September 26th, 2018 Thesis Journal).*

Avoidance, lacking motivation and feelings of defeat all pointed to the fact that I was in a relational dance with myself and with this thesis:

> My project is a constant battle – a battle of engagement verse disengagement. I feel stuck. I feel unable. I feel confronted with my own fears and worries of being exposed in front of an audience that I am beginning to grow in suspicion of. The power of the other and the power of their judgment consumes me at times. The power of my professor's judgment consumes me. The power of my friend's judgment consumes me. It is as if other people can determine my mood, my worthiness, my joy, my day to day experience at times. Can I trust myself? Can I trust that my person is likeable? Is worthy to be here? Can I trust my own ideas to be worthy and interesting to be shared? I have this image of a biker chick in

> my head. A rough around the edges kind of girl. A person who pushes everyone away, but in reality wants to draw near. Who am I really? Who am I becoming? What path am I on? I lack motivation for everything. *(Excerpt from October 17th, 2018 Thesis Journal).*

My feelings also translated into grief. As I have watched my classmates and colleagues complete their theses with highest honours and graduate, I subconsciously developed a list of expectations I had for myself. One of these expectations was to finish this thesis enlightened by my analysis of shame such that I would not struggle with the intensity of it in my own life. However, as I pressed into this realization, I also noticed my tendency to villainize my experience of shame. The idea of shame being a valued experience, as highlighted in EA's understanding, challenged my view of shame as something to be avoided, suppressed or to be defended against altogether, and opened up my curiosity for what (or who) could be understood and encountered. The battle was not *against* shame as something to banish, but rather it was a challenge to dance *with* shame as something to notice and learn from. And as I dance with my shame, and acknowledge and discover certain emotional pain that has been hidden so long, I seem to be reconnecting with something quite essential: myself. One of my journal entries reflects on the early moments of this reflection:

> I am feeling quite defeated these days. I look at where I am on the map, and notice that I haven't progressed, as I would have liked. I haven't "integrated" or become "whole" as I would have wanted to at this point in the process of doing this thesis. I am sad that at the end of this program, and at the end of many things, I look back and wonder - what could I have done more of? What could I have

been? How could I have taken this opportunity for what it was and given more of myself to it?

There is a desire to have this project be something amazing; to come out the other end and have my supervisors be proud of what has been accomplished…but I guess what I have come to see yesterday is that "arriving" at this place of "wholeness" or "integration" or "having voice" is not something that I have accomplished, nor should be the goal or expectation I have for myself. The real victory seems to be actually engaging and asking the question, and being present with myself as I do that.

Maybe I will finish this project and still be in a process of engaging with my shame. Is this ok? Will this be ok? Is it ok that I haven't "arrived"…that I haven't quite figured it out…that I may have been asleep, or missed a few things here and there? Yes, anyone can see that it is ok…but internally, I feel this pressure…

In this moment, I find myself ashamed. Ashamed at myself - curled up in a ball, sheltering my eyes from the other people I am around. Why can't I engage in a boisterous way? Why can't I be more, why can't I produce more, why can't I impress others more? I want to be more, to give more, to have more of an impact.

But as I slow my motions, as I look more closely, and quietly, I see something frantic and busied. I see something trying so hard to be something, to prove something, to amount to something, that I miss what is actually happening within my heart and soul.

> I am sad. I'm sad that I couldn't be more for you. That I couldn't amount to more for you. I'm grieved that my efforts, albeit the best I could have done in the circumstances that I found myself in, were not what you were looking for. I'm sad that I was a disappointment to you.
>
> I feel like the central part of my heart - my person - is speaking to the frantic part of me who has been trying to manage my inner world for so long.
>
> Thank you for protecting me for so long. For doing what you knew how to do - to DO. Maybe it is time to be. *(Excerpt from November 7th, 2018 Thesis Journal).*

In conclusion, practicing phenomenology and reflexivity has often led me to places of deep internal questions – questions pertaining to the quality of the relationality I have with self and others, acceptance of realities that are not easily accepted, and questions pertaining to the worthiness and goodness of who am I in the world and in relationship. All of these questions were not straightforward, nor were they particularly easy to engage with and arrive at some conclusion about. It has been difficult to find an end point to this chapter, since the process of engaging with shame and the questions that have arisen in this reflexive process seems to be infused with a complexity that has no ending. However, what I can conclude, is that turning towards my experiences of shame and opening myself to engage with this project has led me to both soften my gaze towards myself and others. It also reminds me of a line from a poem called "I sing of a maiden" by Rev. John Duffy C.S.S.R. I will paste a section of the poem below and comment on a particular line following the poem:

> And was it true,
> The stranger standing so,

And saying things that lifted her in two,
And put her back before the world's beginning?
Her eyes filled slowly with the morning glow.
Her drowsy ear drank in a first sweet dubious bird.
Her cheek against the pillow woke and stirred
To gales enriched by passage over dew,
And friendly fields and slopes of Galilee
Arose in tremulous intermixture with her dreams,
Till she remembered suddenly...

Although the morning beams
Came spilling in the gradual rubric known to every day,
And hills stood ruinous, as an eclipse,
Against the softly spreading ray,
Not touched by any strange apocalypse
Like that which yesterday had lifted her sublime,
And put her back before the first grey morn of Time --
Though nothing was disturbed from where she lay and saw,
Now she remembered with a quick and panting awe
That someone came, and took in hand her heart,
And broke irresistibly apart,
With what he said, and how in tall suspense
He lingered, while the white celestial inference,
Pushing her fears apart, went softly home.

Then she had faltered her reply,
And felt a sudden burden of eternal years,
And shamed by the angelic stranger standing by
Had bowed her head to hide her human tears.
Never again would she awake
And find herself the buoyant Galilean lass,
But into her dissolving dreams would break
A hovering consciousness too terrible to pass --
A new awareness in her body when she stirred,
A sense of Light within her virgin gloom:
She was the Mother of the wandering Word,
Little and terrifying in her laboring womb.
And nothing would again be casual and small,
But everything with light invested, overspilled
With terror and divinity, the dawn, the first bird's call,
The silhouetted pitcher waiting to be filled.

The line that often grabs my attention is the line "and nothing would again be casual or small" as if the experiences we have mark and change us in ways that we may

not have imagined. This thesis and encountering the phenomenon of shame was much like this. Nothing again about the space between my clients and my friends, my family, my mentors and even with myself will be causal or small, but everything with light invested, as if to say, there is something meaningful in the space between us and about the experience of shame itself.

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APPENDIX A:

EXAMPLE OF DATA ANALYSIS NOTES

The notes pasted below are intended to give an example of a part of the data analysis for one participant. Certain details have been changed or redacted to maintain the confidentiality of participants and research assistants. Also, a short-hard writing style is used in certain places. Be aware that this analysis was not a linear process. Headings and questions were visited and re-visited therefore consider the notes taken as part of an ongoing iterative process in preparation for the phenomenological writing.

Summary:

This participant appeared engaged and confident. When speaking about his/her athletic abilities/experiences he/she articulated himself/herself with a sense of integrity and connected with feelings of passion and pride for what was accomplished. It seemed foreign for this participant to describe shame experiences as an athlete: "I haven't told [these experiences] to really anybody which maybe shows I guess, like how ashamed I was of that moment." However, despite this, he/she spoke with openness while remaining cognitive/logical in the description of his/her experiences. The openness this participant conveyed, led the researcher to feel quite engaged with this participant, characterizing this interview as one that seemed to "flow."

When asked about experiences of shame, participant 4 appeared to have conflicting feelings. On the one hand, he/she appeared to feel angry and upset at his/she coaches for the ways that he was treated (verbally abused in front of teammates, not recognized for the effort put into athletic efforts) but on the other hand, he/she appeared to emphasize that his/her "intensity" was "flawed" and a "good reason" for why

his/her coaches had treated him/her the way that they had. The analogy of having a "black mark on the front of his/her file" was used to describe how his/her athletic career had been tainted by these experiences. This conflict continues to perplex this participant, such that he/she described holding back intensity in other areas of his/her life (academic) as well as getting frustrated at others who were similarly intense. When describing how he understands these experiences, he/she said he/she wanted to "treat" his/her shame through acceptance.

The interviewer felt engaged and impressed by this participant's sense of presence and likability. When participant 4 shared his/her sense of personal frustration at his/her trait of "intensity," the interviewer felt shocked that this perceived flaw had impacted this participant so thoroughly. The interviewer did not see this trait as negative, but rather an endearing part of his/her personality. The interviewer developed frustration towards this participant's coaches and the sport culture in general for leaving this participant in the dark about the goodness of his/her personality, and longed for him/her to realize that his/her intensity was good.

Description Notes:

- He appeared confident and self-assured in himself and his athletic abilities.
- He appeared to communicate about his athletic accomplishments with enjoyment and modesty.
- He appeared to speak quickly and logically, at times minimizing emotional content, especially when speaking to his athletic experiences. However, when speaking about his experienced, it appeared as though he was authentically connected to what he was saying.

- He appeared to be sacrificial in his relationships, putting others before himself. Therefore he appeared to be a man of integrity.
- When describing his childhood, he conveyed a significant giftedness and connectedness to many types of sport, sampling baseball, golf, eventually choosing hockey as his speciality.
- He appeared to be driven to show his coaches that he was a tenacious player who was not afraid of physical and mental challenges.
- His father appeared to play the role of 'encourager' as he became an elite athlete.
- He appeared grounded and able to make decisions with inner conviction (with an inner knowing that it was the right decision for him).
- He appeared to be in conflict about how to communicate his level of 'elite-ness' as an athlete (what to emphasize, what not to emphasize); moreover, it appeared as if he was straddling the position of remaining private vs. disclosing his experiences in fear of sounding as if he were bragging.
- He appeared have kept his shameful experiences private, rarely speaking about them prior to the interview.
- He appeared to view himself as an intense hockey player. This level of intensity appeared to be understood as a negative personality trait, such that the expression of his intensity would be disproportionately expressed in relation to what was appropriate to the circumstances he was in.
- This participant appears to be quick to evaluate himself harshly.
- This participant appears to speak of himself as a commodity being used/bought/sold as an athlete.

- He uses functional language to describe himself, particularly as he speaks of himself in relation to his coach.
- He appears to have given "everything" (physical/athletic, emotional, social recourses) to his Junior A team.
- He appeared to be conflicted in his understanding of whether or not his intensity as an athlete was a good thing. His coach's opinion of him appeared to be the source of this participant's conflicting feelings.
- The junior A coach appeared to hold power in this participant's life; his evaluation appeared to be connected to this participant's view of himself and his reality.
- He appeared to be left questioning how he stood in the eyes of his Junior A coach. This uncertainty appeared to lead to some emotional distress and frustration.
- This participant appeared to long for more opportunities to genuinely dialogue with his coach about his athletic play, their conflicts and his life in general. He appeared to long for his coach to understand him more deeply apart from his role as an athlete.
- He appeared frustrated when reminded of how someone from his coaching spoke poorly about his performance behind his back.
- This participant appeared to set aside his emotional self when playing hockey. This seemed to be connected to the unwritten rules of the hockey culture which aim to bypass the emotional wellbeing and focus on outcome goals and performance.
- He appeared to disagree with the coaching philosophy of his Junior A & NCAA coaches.

- He appeared to be embarrassed and frustrated by how his NCAA coach verbally ripped into him after that one game. He appeared to have desired to resolve the dispute privately to avoid public scrutiny.
- He appeared have kept his difficult experiences as an athlete private and had not spoken about them with anyone prior to the interview.
- Artifacts associated with his experiences playing hockey appeared to be "tainted" because of the conflicts he had with his coaches.
- He appeared to relate to his experiences with his coach as layered and complex, thus difficult to articulate within the interview.
- It appeared as though this participant believed that there was a "black mark on his file" for the intensity he played with.

APPENDIX B:

ONLINE ADVERTISEMENT

Hello! For my Masters in Counselling Psychology thesis, I am looking to meet with elite level athletes (current or retired) who have experienced shame/who have had a shaming experience as an athlete. I am looking for people who…

- Have competed and have had success at an elite of sport participation (individual or team) for at least 2 years.
- Have identified with the athlete role (currently or in the past).
- Have experienced shame as an elite athlete.
- Are older than 19 years of age.
- Live in the lower mainland, Fraser Valley or Vancouver Island in British Columbia
- Are willing to share their experience!

If you are interested in participating please contact me by email at kristin.konieczny@gmail.com or by phone (778-580-7034).

If you know of anyone who would be interested in this study, please share this post or give them my contact information.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

APPENDIX C:

ADVERTISING POSTER

APPENDIX D:

SCREENING INTERVIEW

Date of Screening Interview:

Introduction:

- Thank you for contacting me about participating in this study! Great to hear from you. The purpose of this phone-call is to see if your experiences fit with the purposes of this research project. Our conversation may take about half an hour - does that work with your schedule? (If no, ask for a better time to call).

Introduce myself:

- Masters student studying the experience of shame for elite athletes; comment on why I am drawn to this research.
- Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary—if you do not want to answer any questions you have the right to refuse to do so. If, at any point, you have any additional questions please let me know.

Interview Questions:

Overview of Study:

- How did you hear about the study? What drew you to contacting me?

Sport Involvement:

- In the flyer (or other source) you may have saw that I am looking to meet with elite athletes. What has been your level of involvement in sport? At what level have you competed?

Shame Questions:

- You also may have noticed that I am interested in understanding experiences of shame. How have you come to understand experiences of shame in your life, and in your athletic life in particular?
- Do you struggle with any other unresolved experiences/feelings connected with your athletic career (e.g., anger, resentment, loss).
- Do you feel these feelings would get in the way of exploring shame?
- How important is shame in the context of all the other experiences/feelings?
- Did you have the chance to talk about your shame with someone else already (friend, counsellor)? Have you had a chance to reflect on that experience? Journal about it? How was that?

- How much is shame still impacting your current life?
- You could also ask for a very brief description of the main situation in which they experienced shame- without asking for the feelings/experience but just for a simplified version of facts.
- (This will help you clarify if they suffered shame in the context of a traumatic event (e.g., assault) or major loss- these situations would definitely complicate this research so you may want to think whether these situations should qualify for your study.)

Timing:

- Are you willing / able to commit 1-2 hours for an individual interview?

Suicidal Screening:

- Do you think the interview will be a difficult experience for you? If yes…How come?
- During/since your participation in sport have you gone through any psychiatric crisis (like phoning a crisis line, considering suicide)?
- Do you ever see, hear, or believe things that other people don't? Does this impact your ability to talk with others?

If yes…when did this take place? How are you now?

Should the participant indicate that she or he is currently suicidal, screening will stop as the participant will not meet the criteria for inclusion in this study. The interviewer will then complete a suicide risk assessment:

- Have you ever hurt or attempted to kill yourself in the past?

If yes… When / how?

- Do you know family members or friends that have killed themselves?
- How often do you think of suicide/ harming yourself?
- Have you made a plan?

If yes…

- How do you plan on killing yourself? Do you have access to ____? When do you plan to kill yourself?

If the potential participant indicates that they are at a high risk of suicide (suicide history, set time and access to means, constant thoughts about suicide), they will be urged to call a suicide hotline (1-800-SUICIDE [784-2433]) and to talk with/ contact their therapist. If potential participant actively plans to kill themselves, they will be instructed to phone their therapist/ doctor / 911 immediately.

Closing:

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in this study and taking the time to talk with me today.

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

I will contact you in the near future about your participation in this study.

If you have any questions/concerns come up, please feel free to e-mail me at Kristin.konieczny@gmail.com or phone me at 778-580-xxxx.

Should you notice that you have experienced any undesirable responses today, or at some point in the future as a result of theses interviews, I have a list of free or low cost counselling services that you can access. (Read names and numbers of Counselling services)

Fraser River Counselling
7600 Glover Rd, Langley, BC V2Y 1Y1
(604) 513-2113

Brookswood Community Counselling
#107- 20103 40 Ave Belmont Centre,
Langley, BC V3A 2W3
(778) 278-3411

APPENDIX E:

INFORMED CONSENT: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

Principal Investigator: Kristin Konieczny, M.A. Student in Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University. Contact number 778-580-xxxx. Contact email address: kristin.konieczny@gmail.com

Supervisor: Derrick Klaassen, Ph.D., Faculty of Graduate Studies, Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University. E-mail contact: derrick.klaassen@twu.ca.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand the stories of shame experienced by elite level athletes. Researchers will seek to construct insightful descriptions and interpretations of what the experience of shame is like for athletes. **This study was designed to inform the academic community, clinicians, and most importantly athletes, with the purpose of helping men and women understand the experience of shame in athletic contexts.**

Procedures: The method chosen to conduct this research values the unique input of each athlete and the way each individual experiences shame. To be able to participate in the interview portion of this study, you must be a current or retired elite athlete who has competed at an elite level for two years or more and have completed the screening phase of the study.

For the individual interview portion of this study, you will participate in a semi-structured interview where the researcher will ask you questions about your experiences, with a special focus on understanding your experiences of shame. This interview will take place in a location where you feel most comfortable sharing about these aspects of your life. This interview will last anywhere between 1 and 1.5 hours and will be audio-recorded for transcription at a later time.

Potential Risks & Discomforts: Participating in this study may be challenging for you for a number of reasons. Although the study is about something meaningful, you may experience some emotional discomfort while sharing about your life, particularly if your experience of shame has been difficult. All interviews are conducted by the primary researcher who has training is counselling psychology. The primary researcher will not provide counselling herself, but her training will enable her to create a safe place for you to share your experience. The researcher will also provide you with a referral to clinical counselling services should any emotional distress arise.

Potential Benefits to Participants: Participating in this study will assist the researchers to better understand the lived experience of shame for elite level athletes, and what meanings are made about these experiences. This will help to better inform other clinicians and researchers about emotional experiences associated with sport participation, particularly related to the experience of shame. In addition, it is an opportunity for you to share about your involvement with sport sport and to discuss how

you've made meaning of this experience. Our hope is that this interview is a valuable way for you to explore the story of your athletic experiences.

Confidentiality: Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. For example, audio/visual-tapes and transcripts will be kept in an encrypted, password protected folder on the researcher's laptop computer. If paper copies of transcripts are made, they will be kept in a locked filing cabinet, which is located within the researcher's locked office. Audio-recordings and transcripts will be kept until the completion of the research. Following completion of this project, all such data will be deleted from the computer, or will be shredded, by the researcher. Confidentiality of information shared through participation in this research will be maintained under every circumstance, with exception only in the following situations:

- When there is a clear risk of substantial harm to yourself or threat of harm towards another person.
- When there is reason to believe that a child or a vulnerable adult is as risk of harm, including physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or exploitation.
- When a court-of-law requires the release of personal information.

Consent: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time (in person, via email or telephone). Your withdrawal from this study is not possible after the researcher has integrated your story into the dataset. You will also be given a pseudonym to protect your identity.

Contact for information about the study: If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Kristin Konieczny, kristin.konieczny@gmail.com or her research supervisor, Derrick Klaassen, derrick.Klaassen@twu.ca

Contact for concerns about the rights of research participants: If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact Elizabeth Kreiter in the Office of Research, Trinity Western University at 604-513-2167 or researchethicsboard@twu.ca.

Signatures

Your signature below indicates that you have had your questions about the study answered to your satisfaction and have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study and that your responses may be put in anonymous form and kept for further use after the completion of this study.

_____

Research Participant Signature Date

_____

Printed Name of the Research Participant signing above

APPENDIX F:

SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Please tell me little about your history as an athlete/athletic career.
Please describe an experience of shame as an athlete.

Description
What happened in this experience?

If you take us back into this experience, try to replay with as much detail as possible as if we were watching a film being played back.

Prompts:
- What happened? When? Where? How?
- Who was there?
- Who did what?
- For how long?
- What exactly was said/done, with whom, when?
- What happened next?
- Was there anything else that happened?

Impression
How did you feel during this experience?

Was there anything you wanted to do?

What was that like for you? What does it tell you?

Prompts:
- What feelings do you have looking at this situation?
- How did you feel in your body? What did you see? What did you hear?
- How do you feel with that?
- Multi-sensory expansion
- What message came along with what happened?
- What does this experience it mean to you?

Inner Positioning
How did you/do you understand this experience?

Do you understand why you feel this way?

Do you understand why the other acted this way?

Is there anything you did not understand?

Expression
What did/do you say (or wish to say) to the message of shame? Or circumstances/people involved?

Prompts:
- What do you really want to do?
- What will you/have you done?
- What was this like for you?

APPENDIX G:

DEBRIEFING SCRIPT

Thank you very much for your participation in this study!

What was this experience like for you?
Was there a part of the study that was difficult?
Do you have any questions or comments about what it was like participating in the study?

Should you notice that you have experienced any undesirable responses today, or at some point in the future as a result of theses interviews, I have a list of free or low cost counselling services that you can access. (Read names and numbers of Counselling services)

Fraser River Counselling
7600 Glover Rd, Langley, BC V2Y 1Y1
(604) 513-2113

Brookswood Community Counselling
#107- 20103 40 Ave Belmont Centre,
Langley, BC V3A 2W3
(778) 278-3411

Just a reminder, if you would like me send you the results of this study, I can send you the completed project. Please feel free to contact me at kristin.konieczny@gmail.com.

Thank you again for your participation in this study. I am really grateful for you time and contribution to this research!

APPENDIX H:

THANK YOU SCRIPT

Dear [Participant's Name],

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences with me. Your willingness to participate is much appreciated and I hope it has been a mutually beneficial experience for you! I anticipate that your experiences will help inform future counselling professionals about the importance of acknowledging shame in athletic contexts. With this letter, is a small token to show my appreciation for the time and resources you have shared with me today. If you have any additional questions or concerns about your participation in this study, please don't hesitate to get in contact with me.

Sincerely,

Kristin Konieczny

APPENDIX I:

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT: RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

I, _____, research assistant, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all documentation received from Kristin Konieczny. Furthermore, I agree:

a. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed in any associated documents;
b. To not make copies of any computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Kristin Konieczny;
c. To store all study related materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
d. To return all study related documents (e.g., transcribed interviews and research journal) to Kristin Konieczny in a complete and timely manner.
e. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the files to which I will have access.

Research Assistant's name (printed): _____

Research Assistant's signature: _____

Date: _____