Professional Baseball Players Transition from the Sport

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PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL PLAYERS TRANSITION
FROM THE SPORT

by

Amy Moviel

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of

Lynn University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Educational Leadership

Chair: Dean Kathleen Weigel, Ed.D.

May 2015
ABSTRACT

AMY MOVIEL: Professional Baseball Players Transition from the Sport

This phenomenological research study explored the perceptions and lived experiences of professional baseball players related to their level of preparedness for retirement from the sport. The study was guided by three research questions. The data were collected from eight professional baseball players at different stages of their career. Data collection occurred through interviews with four actively playing professional baseball players and four former professional baseball players. The findings of the study reveal that during their careers, professional baseball players typically devote exclusive focus to training and skill development in an effort to remain in the game as long as possible. Professional baseball players often neglect preparation for transition from sport until retirement becomes imminent or has already occurred leaving little to no time to prepare for their next phase of life. The sport career transition often occurs at a time in which same age peers are fully engaged in their post college careers. At the onset of transition from sport the professional baseball player experiences complex feelings of denial, grief, and anger as they find themselves occupationally “starting over”. It has been revealed that it is important for professional baseball players to participate in sport career transition programs to improve the quality of the transition experience and increase their preparation for life after sport.
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Moviel, Amy
Doctor of Education
Lynn University
2015
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the sport-career transition experiences of current and former professional baseball players. In American baseball a professional baseball player is considered one who signs a “professional contract” and is provided monetary compensation for their services to a major or minor league baseball team (Fagan, 2011). Using phenomenological qualitative methodology to guide this study, the researcher will focus on descriptions of what the professional baseball player experiences in regard to their transition from the sport (Patton, 1990).

Statement of the Problem

The problem under investigation is that a large majority of athletes have failed to prepare adequately or not at all for their post-athletic career (Pearson & Pepitas, 1990; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Many individual and situational factors associated with athletic careers may make the transition from professional sports especially problematic, difficult and disruptive (Baille & Danish, 1992). Specific to the sport of professional baseball several mediating factors may impact the player at the time of transition:

1) Transition Programming: Professional baseball players are not offered programs relating to career transitioning or career development from Major League Baseball, the Major League Player’s Association or the Major League Baseball Alumni Association (Knott, 2010). Major League Baseball does allow any interested player to negotiate money into their original signing contract through a Major League Baseball Scholarship. The money designated to the player must
begin to be used within two years of the last game played or it is returned back to the signing organization (Sherman, 2000). Players are also eligible for pension benefits after 43 days on a big league roster but the league and its players’ union, have yet to develop a career transition program (Wallis, 2012). MLB players have voiced their own concerns over the transitional difficulties that they experience once retired from professional sport (Torre, 2009). Concerns include a lack of financial stability and career readiness skills for a secondary occupation post professional sports career (Torre, 2009).

2) Baseball Economics: “Moneyball” is a strategy that places priority on choosing players based on qualified performance measures that contribute to winning games. Teams typically use this approach to identify overvalued and thus overpaid players as well as undervalued and underpaid players (Fagan, 2011). The Moneyball theory places no emphasis on the body of the athlete or the physical tools that the athlete possess (Lewis, 2003). Using a strategy grounded in statistics to select and deselect players may add to the shock that players experience when released from baseball. “For most players being released is totally unexpected. Most had no idea their career was in jeopardy” (Gmelch, 2006, p. 176).

Sherony & Davison (2007) described the ways in which professional baseball teams use this approach to make decisions about individual players:

- Major league teams continuously reload their rosters with players from the minor leagues for brief periods of time, then quickly send them back down to the minors
- Teams invite their “expensive” superstars to leave
• Teams sign young, productive, and usually underrated players to long-term contracts early in their career. These players often go on to be relatively inexpensive and underpaid stars for the teams who sign them.

3) Athletic Identity: "Being released not only means the end of a ballplayer's career, but the end of boyhood dreams and ambition. There is the loss of identity.” (Gmeich, 2006, p. 174). “Because a ball players sense of self is so strongly linked to his ability to play the game, telling him that he is no longer good enough or that he does not have the potential to play in the big leagues is a major blow to his self esteem" (Gmeich, 2006, p. 174). “We have created monsters by making players into idols, into gods so they can’t let go of the game when they have to leave it. They don’t know how to deal with it. You can’t believe what a tragedy it is for some of these guys to be out of baseball” (Gmeich, 2006, p. 184).

4) Age: Upon entry into major league baseball, players who start at age 20 can expect to play 9.1 years. As starting age increases, career expectancy decreases, down to 2.6 years for players who begin at age 28 (Witnauer, Rogers, & Onge, 2007). Frank Robinson, former professional baseball player and former manager of the Cleveland Indians highlights the difficulty of adjusting to life after baseball: “I went through the absolute worst period of my life...I was devastated...completely lost, disoriented. I kept thinking, I was still a young man, forty-one...and I don’t know what I’m going to do with the rest of my life.” (Gmelch, 2006, p. 181).

5) Education and Career Developmental Tasks: Athletes, who have been immersed, typically since childhood, in sport participation are often exempt from other
developmental activities (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). "Baseball is an all-encompassing job. Baseball players are so deeply immersed in their profession that they have little time for other interests" (Gmelch, 2006, p. 174). According to a statement given before the Senate Judiciary Committee on June 17, 1997 by Dan Peltier, former professional baseball player who played in both the minor and major leagues “Many players are out of the game by their mid to late twenties, with a high school degree, a wife, children, and no marketable skills”.

**Research Questions**

This study is using Schlossberg’s (1981, 1995) Model of Human Adaptation as a guide, to develop a better understanding of the sport career transition experience of professional baseball players. The Model of Human Adaptation is a multidimensional model believed to be useful for explaining and understanding the sport-career transition of athletes. In Schlossberg’s (1981) model, three key factors interact during a sport career transition: individual characteristics, perception of the transition, and characteristics of the pre-transition and post transition environment. In the sports career transition literature, several qualitative research studies (Parker, 1994; Swain, 1991) have found evidence to support the efficacy of this model concerning former elite-amateur and professional athletes (Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000). By using the model as a guide this phenomenological exploration seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are professional baseball players’ perceptions about their preparedness for transition from this sport?

2. What are the situational and contextual factors that impact the professional baseball players’ level of preparation for transition?
3. How do situational and contextual factors impact the professional baseball players' perceived level of preparation for transition?

**Background**

A career in sports is much shorter than most other careers, as most athletes retire from professional sport participation in their mid twenties (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). At approximately the same time that these athletes are ending high-level competitive sport, their peers are often beginning careers in other non-sporting domains, getting married, and having children (McKnight, Bernes, Gunn, Chorney, Orr & Bardick, 2009). These comparative situations often add to the already stressful feelings inherent in athletic retirement (McKnight et al., 2009).

Athletes, who aspire to achieve professional status typically devote exclusive attention and focus to their sport careers as they train to reach elite levels of performance. Through this process, education and career planning tend to become relatively unimportant under the pressure to excel athletically (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). These athletes will consequently form a self-identity that is composed almost exclusively of their sport involvement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). The exclusive focus of athletes on their athletic careers may cause considerable personal disruption at the time of retirement. Consequently, many of these athletes are ill prepared (financially, emotionally or both) to handle life without sports, experiencing difficulty adjusting to life after withdraw from professional sport participation, often taking months and in some cases years to make a successful transition (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Torregrosa, Boixados, Valiente & Cruz, 2004).
For the purposes of this research a transition is described as “An event or non-event that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, and thus requires a corresponding change in ones behavior and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1995, p. 5). For athletes who are overly invested in their status and uniqueness as a member of an elite, privileged group of individuals, the end of a sport career may precipitate a range of negative outcomes (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Training and competing at a high level can contribute to an imbalance of other activities in the athletes’ life. This sports only identity may leave some athletes with few skills, resulting in limited opportunities at the end of their sports career, and at risk for experiencing difficulty making the sport career transition (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Lavalle (2005) contends that the pursuit of performance excellence in professional-level sport occurs at the expense of the development of personal excellence by virtue of the demands placed upon athletes during their sporting careers. Van Raalte and Anderson (2007) report that during the course of the professional sports career athletes are often behind in the usual developmental tasks of education, intimate relationships and vocational exploration. Additionally, the National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League (NFL) and Major League Baseball (MLB) are finding that athletes are suffering from a financial pandemic once retired from the game (Torre, 2009). Professional athletes earn an exorbitant amount of money to play their sport (USA Today 6/8/01). Post sports career, athletes no longer command the type of salary that they became accustomed to as professional athletes. In many instances, these athletes fail to prepare for life after sports (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990).
The United States Olympic Committee (USOC) was one of the first professional sports organizations to respond to the growing need for career related programs and transitional services for America’s elite athletes by initiating the Athlete Career Program (ACP). The program aims to assist Olympic athletes in making the transition out of active sport competition (Petitpas, Danish, McKelvain, & Murphy, 1992).

The program is founded on two main principles:

1. Alleviate career or job-related concerns, outside of the field of play, which will allow athletes to perform better while training and competing.

2. Better prepare athletes for the inevitable transition from sport, thus allowing them to be more focused on their sport while they are an active competitor (United States Olympic Committee, 2014).

The National Football League (NFL) and National Hockey League (NHL) have also responded to the growing need to offer transition programs to their athletes by building partnerships with colleges and universities. This is in an effort to ensure that players are given every opportunity to enhance their education while playing the game and as they retire and continue into life following their playing days. The National Football League launched the NFL Business Management and Entrepreneurial Program in 2005. The goals of the program are met through collaboration between the organization, the NFL Players Association and the business schools of Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, Northwestern, Stanford and Wharton School of Business (Knott, 2010). Retired NFL player Charlie Batch, former Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback expressed support of the program stating that, “The Business Management and
Entrepreneurial Program raises awareness and provides strategic planning as you transition to life after football." The National Hockey League initiated the Breakaway Program, formerly known as the Life After Hockey Program to support the career development of players once their professional sports career has come to an end. The National Hockey League formed a partnership with the Ted Rogers School of Management in Toronto and Ontario, Canada. This program provides players with educational experiences during active play and throughout their retirement from professional hockey (Knott, 2010). Major League Baseball has yet to follow suit after their professional sport counterparts and offer transitional planning to their players (Knott, 2010)

Major League Baseball is divided into two “leagues”, the American League (AL) and the National League (NL). Each league is further split into three divisions: east, central, and west. Every Major League team has a "farm system", a set of lower-league "affiliates" playing in "Minor Leagues," whose job is to provide replacement players, and groom and develop up-and-coming talent into Major League players. Regionally, the state of Florida is home to two Major League Teams and numerous Minor League Affiliates. The Tampa Bay Rays and the Florida Marlins hold an average of 40 players on their Major League rosters during spring training and throughout the season. Fourteen Florida based Minor League Affiliates employ an average of 350 players across the state each season. On average, four hundred-thirty professional major and minor league baseball players will be located in the state of Florida each season. Florida is also home to spring training for fifteen Major League teams, which flood the state each year during
the months of February, March and April for training camps and exhibition games ("Major League Baseball," 2015).

To be employed as a professional baseball player one must be selected and signed by a professional baseball team. The process of draft selection begins each year in early June during the MLB First Year Player Draft. This annual national event consists of thirty baseball teams, forty rounds, and more than 1,200 draft picks. Most recently, 1,215 selections were made for the draft class of 2014. The professional players of this draft who will reach Triple A or the Major Leagues (MLB) will consistently constitute a unique population (McCutcheon, Calicchia, Aruguete, Bridges, & Parker, 2008). The odds of getting there are quite low and the average MLB playing career is short (McCutcheon et al., 2008) and while the wins and losses of a team are unpredictable from season to season one known fact is that retirement and the subsequent transition from professional sport participation is inevitable for each player.

Career transition theories from the counseling psychology literature have been used in several studies to assist in explaining the process of transitioning from professional athlete to other familial, social and professional roles (Stephen, Bilard, Ninot, & Delignieres, 2002). However, a lack of sound theory has hampered research efforts in the field of sport career transition as well as lacking coordination and fragmentation in research approaches, which has led to diversity in research conclusions (Stambulova, 1994). Additionally, many of the sport career transition studies have used athletes from multiple sports (Swain, 1991), therefore, making it difficult to apply the information gleaned from this research to specific populations of athletes. I have yet to review any studies whose main goal was to identify the specific feelings, perceptions and
needs of professional baseball players at the time of their transition from professional sport competition.

Based on the results of this study the researcher intends to, in the future, create a transition plan to assist players retiring from professional baseball. The creation of a transition plan may systematically provide professional baseball players with the skills needed for their transition from professional sport. The intention of the plan will be to provide baseball players with a wide array of objective alternatives, and the fewest self imposed restrictions so that they will be in a better position to deal with the transition than their fellow athletes who have fewer options (Pearson & Petipas, 1990).

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms will guide the study.

**Transitions**

Turning phases that challenge athletes with a variety of demands related to practice, competition, communication, and lifestyle that require effective coping to successfully continue to engage in the sport, or alternatively to end the athletic engagement (Stambulova, 2007). An event or non-event that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, and thus requires a corresponding change in ones behavior and relationships (Schlossberg, 1995, p. 5).

**Retirement**

The process of transitioning from participation in competitive sport to another activity or set of activities (Coakly, 1983).
Crisis transitions

Associated with ineffective coping and a perceived need of psychological assistance or intervention. Potential reasons for ineffective coping with transitions include low awareness of transition demands, lack of resources, and inability to analyze the situation and to make a proper decision. Cases of crisis transitions may be associated with a need for intervention, which in turn, may be effective, or ineffective, in dealing with the transition (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).

Competitive Sport

Any organized sport activity in which training and participation are time consuming and in which the level of performance meets relatively high standards of expectations (Coakley, 1983).

Human Adaptation to Transition Model

Created by Schlossberg, consisting of three components, which provide a framework to help understand how certain features and variables of a transition may interact in a fashion unique to the individual experience. The first component considers the transition in terms of its type, context, and impact. The second component considers the individual’s coping resources, the balance of present and possible assets and liabilities, including variables that characterize the particular transition, individual, and environment. The third component considers the transition as a process, the ways in which the individual reacts to the experience over time, involving phases of assimilation and appraisal (Swain, 1991).
**Enhancement Program**

Enhancement type services emphasize self-exploration and assist athletes in identifying their skills, clarifying values and assessing their interests and needs. Athletes are assisted in preparing for their eventual disengagement from competitive sport by interacting with former athletes who had already transitioned out of competitive sport (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013, p.225).

**Major League Baseball**

Major League Baseball is the professional baseball league in the US with one participating team in Canada. It is made up of the National League and the American League. Currently, there are thirty teams in Major League Baseball, fifteen in each league, each divided into three divisions with five teams per division (“Major League Baseball,” 2010).

**Minor League Affiliate “Affiliated League”**

Affiliated Minor Leagues are divided into a structure that allows players to face increasingly difficult competition as they progress in their development. The Triple-A and Double-A leagues typically feature more experienced and talented players. Class A and Rookie-level leagues usually feature younger, less experienced players like recent Draft picks or players with one or two years of service time. Informally, players often refer to "moving up the ladder" as they progress from lower levels toward the Major Leagues (“Major League Baseball,” 2010).
**Professional Minor League Baseball Player**

In affiliated Minor League Baseball, all players, coaches and athletic trainers are under contract with a major-league organization, also known as a parent club. A minor league class A and a Major League Baseball player are both “professionals” however there is a dramatic differences in the salaries that they earn (“Major League Baseball,” 2010).

**Preventative Interventions**

The perspective that as athletes become better aware of the forthcoming transition demands that they will experience they will develop in a timely manner all necessary resources for effective coping (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).

**Conceptual Rationale**

In this study, the researcher will use The Human Adaptation to Transition model created by Schlossberg (1981) to guide the research questions and interview protocol. This theory consists of three components; a framework to help understand how certain features and variables of a transition may interact in a fashion unique to the individual experience. A transition, as defined by Schlossberg (1981) is an “event or non-event, which results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (p. 5). The first component of the model considers the transition in terms of its type, context, and impact. The second component considers the individual’s coping resources, the balance of present and possible assets and liabilities, including variables that characterize the particular transition, individual, and environment. The third component considers the transition as a process, the ways in which the individual reacts to the experience over time, involving phases of assimilation and appraisal (Schlossberg, 1995). In the sport-career transition
literature, several studies have found that the model is considered helpful in developing an understanding of the process of a transitional experience such as retirement from sport, considering the context in which the experience takes place, the meaning it has for the individual, and how it changes over time (Swain, 1991).

Schlossberg updated her original framework in 1995. The revised framework included four key factors that were believed to be influential during transition.

The four S system of the individual transition:

1. The situation
2. The support
3. The strategies
4. The self

Figure 1 noted below, indicates that, as one approaches a transition, he or she will draw on situational aspects, support from others, coping strategies, and his or her own personal resources to manage the transition over time. Reliance on these resources will change and evolve over time. Transition is viewed as a process during which one approaches the transition and moves through the transition.

Figure 1.
Alfermann and Stambulova (2007) listed a description of perspectives found to be effective in assisting athletes coping with career transitions: (1) preventative, (2) crisis coping, and (3), negative-consequences coping. Preventative interventions help athletes to become better aware of forthcoming transition demands and to develop in a timely manner all necessary resources for effective coping. Crisis-coping interventions help athletes to analyze the crisis situation and find the best available way to turn ineffective coping into more effective strategies. Interventions dealing with negative consequences of not coping with the crisis are problem specific and most often require clinical interventions (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Schlossberg (1995) and Alfermann and Stambulova (1996) offer models that provide important perspectives when examining professional baseball players and their preparedness for retirement from professional sports.

**Significance of Study**

Several professional organizations have acknowledged the importance of implementing programs to support their athletes prior to and throughout their transition from professional sports. Major league baseball has yet to offer such a program to their players (Knott, 2010). Yet, lack of preparation has been identified as one of the primary reasons that a large percentage of athletes experience extreme personal disruption upon termination of their competitive sports careers (Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000; Pearson & Petipas, 1990). The numbers do not show promise for many baseball players to have long and fulfilling careers in professional baseball. Based on the statistics provided by Major
League Baseball, only one in one-hundred of the 1,215 players in the 2014 draft class (twelve players) will have an extended career in the major leagues ("Major League Baseball," 2010). The remaining draftees will eventually be released from the sport for reasons to be determined at the time of their disengagement (i.e. injury, unsatisfactory performance). Often the players’ typical reaction to their release is one of “Disbelief and numbness” (Gmelch, 2006, p. 176).

Professional baseball players struggle to move on after baseball because education and career planning have often been neglected, either intentionally or unintentionally, in favor of and under the pressure to excel (Pearson & Petipas, 1990) as an athlete. With the majority of their lives ahead of them, former baseball players must find something meaningful to do with the remaining years of their lives. “Most players do not think much about what they will do when their careers end” (Gmelch, 2006, p. 180). “Syd Thrift, while serving on Major League Baseball committee concerned with players’ lives, found that most players do not take the time to learn about things that will affect their lives after baseball, such as how to handle their finances, deal with personal problems, or even how to take better care of their bodies” (Gmelch, 2006, p. 180).

The first purpose of this study is to help professional baseball players understand, explore and learn to prepare for their sports career transition. The second goal of this study will be to focus on the necessary components of a transition plan to prepare professional baseball players to move from the sports world to the business world. The researcher intends to determine through the exploration of this phenomenon what is needed by the professional baseball player to prepare for the transition out of professional baseball.
Additionally, for parents and coaches it may be beneficial to have a clearer understanding of the unique developmental, environmental, and social experiences of professional baseball players prior to, during, and after their transition from professional sports. Parents are often faced with the difficult task of helping their student athlete choose between college career and professional sports career. This deeper understanding of the different phases and risks associated with professional baseball may assist parents in weighing the pros and cons of their child choosing professional sports over the typical college track. It may also deepen their level of support for their child both during and after their sports career has ended. Finally, this study may provide useful information for future researchers who wish to study the athletes’ preparation for retirement from professional baseball.

Limitations

The timing of this study will coincide with MLB spring training. For minor league players and others not sure of making the team, spring training results are certainly meaningful to their careers. To veteran players sure of being on the team, their spring training performance might help them in salary negotiations or in their value for trading to another team (Summers, 2012). Spring training performance measures can significantly contribute to the decisions made by owners, managers, players, fans, and fantasy league players (Summers, 2012). Current and former professional baseball players may be impacted during this study based on its’ timing in the calendar year. The significance of this time of year may elicit emotions, experiences and memories that may not have been as relevant and present in the players mind if the study occurred during baseballs “off season”.

Subjetivity Statement

“A subjectivity statement is a summary of who researchers are in relation to what and whom they are studying” (Given, 2008, p. 844). As a researcher engaging in a phenomenological study of professional baseball players’ transition from sport, I have life experiences that have shaped my view of this topic. I married into a family of former professional baseball players. My husband and two of his brothers are all former minor league baseball players. My husband, in particular was drafted in the second round of the 2007 Major League Baseball draft directly out of high school. He made the decision to pursue professional baseball and forgo college in hopes of one day making it to the major leagues. Subsequently, he walked away from a full athletic scholarship to North Carolina State University. He played for five years with the New York Mets before his release in 2011. At the time of his release, my husband was twenty-five years old, with a high school degree and little on his resume outside of baseball related accomplishments. He was blindsided and unprepared for his release from professional baseball. His story is strikingly similar to many of his friends and former teammates, who I have met throughout the years. They share similar stories of hoping to one day “make it” to the big leagues by focusing almost exclusively on baseball at the expense of educational advancement or secondary career planning. Many of the young men were released from baseball in their early to mid twenties and are still struggling to find their “next path” in life. I have witnessed first hand how exclusive focus on baseball and a lack of preparation for transition can influence the professional baseball player as they try to navigate life after sports.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will explore the human experience of transition utilizing social gerontological and thanatological perspectives and multiple transition models such as Schlossberg’s (1981, 1995, 2005) Transition Theory, which was used as a guide for the research design of this study. Specific concern will be given throughout this review to the sport of professional baseball and the variables that impact the transition of these athletes at the conclusion of their playing days.

The sport system in the United States is large and complex with separate governing bodies for professional teams (e.g. Major League Baseball, Major League Soccer, National Basketball Association, National Football League, National Hockey League, Olympic Sports Association) (Stambulova and Ryba, 2013, p. 222). These teams are home to America’s professional athletes who are held in the highest regard for their physical abilities, although, inevitably each one of these individuals will one day go through the process of retiring from professional sports (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Several organizations, including the National Football League, National Hockey League, and United States Olympics Committee, provide career assistance programs to their athletes to assist them as they transition out of professional sports.

Models and Theories for Sport Career Transition of Professional Athletes

The research into sport career transitions provides insight into the retirement process of professional athletes. Early research into this particular field of study was prompted by the growing number of professional athletes who were retiring at young
ages and attempting to transition into secondary occupations and careers which often required them to hold a different skill set than those used during competitive play (Sinclair & Orlick, 1997). Researchers noted that there was an apparent lack of educational achievement and secondary skills readily accessible to these athletes to effectively assist them at the time of their transition (Sinclair & Orlick, 1997).

Mihovilovic (1968) performed one of the first groundbreaking studies on athlete transition analyzing the experiences of 44 former professional Yugoslavian male soccer players. He concluded from his research that the retired soccer player characteristically "hides, escapes, looks for compensation in alcohol, blames others, weaves dreams...deceives himself in regards to his possibilities and grows indifferent to events around him" (p. 81). Showing foresight of future trends, "Mihovilovic concluded that the transition from active sports to other employment was a serious social problem that required recognition and correction" (Fortunato & Gilbert, 2003, p. 25). Awareness and interest for the retirement experiences of professional athletes grew from research in the early 1960's to the 1970's and 1980's during which time researchers often applied non-sport specific models in an attempt to better understand this phenomenon. Early theoretical frameworks were derived from social gerontology (i.e., the study of the aging process) and thanatology (i.e., the study of the process of dying and death) (Wylleman, Lavallee & Alferman, 2000). Social gerontological and thanatological perspectives are grounded in notions that the athlete experiences a serious adjustment dilemma upon leaving their sport role (Blind & Greendorfer, 1985).
**Social – Gerontological Models**

Activity Theory developed by Havighurst & Albrecht, (1953) asserts that remaining active and engaged with society is pivotal to satisfaction in old age. This theory has been used to suggest that the once active role as an athlete should be substituted with new roles after retirement from professional sports in order to maintain a homeostatic level of activity throughout the lifespan. However, an athlete’s dominate background and identity in sports often makes it difficult to seamlessly transition to other areas of societal interest and engagement.

Subculture Theory (Rose, 1962) contends that prolonged social interactions among individuals may cause the retiree to be less active and well adjusted during retirement. Prolonged social interactions between individuals can lead to the development of a group consciousness that presents itself much like a subculture. It is of common belief that professional athletes have almost exclusive focus on socialization that occurs within the athletic environment (Brewer, 1993). Hence, this theory has been used to raise concerns for the athletes’ ability to adjust post sports career.

Continuity Theory also known as the Consolidation Theory holds that, in making adaptive choices, middle aged and older adults attempt to preserve and maintain existing internal and external structures; and they prefer to accomplish this objective by using strategies tied to their past experiences of themselves and their social world (Atchley, 1989, 1993). Atchley (1993) argues that continuity of self and identity tend to persist in the face of change, with new directions closely connected to and embellishing on already formed identity constructs. While this theory has been linked to the transitional
experiences of professional athletes, professional athletes are frequently pursuing sporting careers to the detriment of acquiring any other skills outside of the realm of sports (McGillivray, Fern & McIntosch, 2005).

Activity Theory developed by Havighurst (1972) considers that human development is continuous throughout the entire lifespan, occurring in stages, where the individual moves from one stage to the next by means of successful resolution of problems or performance of developmental tasks. Successful achievement throughout each developmental stage leads to happiness, growth, and success with later tasks. Failure leads to unhappiness, disapproval by society, and difficulty with later tasks. This theory may be applicable to professional baseball players due to their exclusive focus on professional baseball, which may prohibit their development throughout essential stages during adolescence and early adulthood.

Social Breakdown Theory suggests that an individual’s sense of self, his/her abilities to mediate between self and society, and his/her orientation to personal mastery are functions of the kinds of social labeling experienced in life (Kuypers & Bengtson, 1973). The theory contends that the media can be instrumental in creating negative social labels that adversely affect ones self-concept. The result is a downward spiral that finds victims accepting the view that they are incompetent, ailing, and useless to society and subsequently behaving badly (Kuypers & Benstson, 1973). Role loss, especially the loss of ones esteemed role as a professional athlete, has been used in the sports career transition literature. A study using former professional hockey players found significant support for the Social Breakdown Theory and athletic retirement finding that athlete’s
become vulnerable to social opinion upon retirement, particularly unfavorable redefinition (Lavallee, Wylleman, & Alfermann 2000).

**Thanatological Models**

The Kubler – Ross, Stages of Death Theory (1969) applies five stages of grieving: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance as the key emotional reactions to the experience of dying. The theory stems from conversations had between Dr. Kubler – Ross and terminally ill patients. The study, initially, grew from a desire to assist health care providers in better understanding the needs of patients. Rosenberg (1984) used this theory to suggest that athletes may move through stages similar to those experienced by the dying. Blinde & Stratta (1992) have been able to support this theory in relation to sports career termination. Their findings suggest that athletes, who were separating from their participation in sports, faced trauma and disruption in their lives, as well as experienced a number of physical and psychological effects of sport retirement. They also indicated that depression, i.e., stage four in the Kubler-Ross model seemed to be the most prolonged stage experienced by athletes after exiting from professional sports (Blinde & Strata, 1992).

Social Death has also been used to describe the experience of the professional athlete once disengaged from sport. The term “social death” has been used to describe individuals, who are biologically or legally alive, yet, who may be socially isolated or suffering from ostracism (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). Applied to sport retirement, social death has been associated with unconditional release from a team or a downward slide during a sports career (Rosenberg, 1982).
Social gerontological and thanatological perspectives initiated from the belief that athletes experience trauma upon leaving a sport role (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1982). Notions from existing research suggest that once the sport role is lost, the athlete experiences serious life disruption and that the reactions to such feelings may range from disillusionment and emotional or psychological disorders (McPherson, 1977; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985) to more serious disruptions such as alcoholism or drug dependency (Mihovilovic, 1968; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). The models of social gerontology and thanatology were instrumental in stimulating research on career termination issues, however each of these perspectives had their own set of limitations. The above theories stem from research conducted in non-sport related populations. While they have been used to understand the retirement experiences of professional athletes, they did not have a research focus on the development of athletes over the course of lifetime development (Wylleman, Lavallee, & Alfermann, 2000).

**Transition Models**

Transition models differ in their perspective from social gerontological models and thanatological models in that the latter considers the transition to be a single event while the former views the sport career transition as a process that occurs over time. Coakly (1983) defines athletic retirement as the process of transitioning from participation in competitive sport to another activity or set of activities. The use of the term process is essential in this definition to delineate that the transition is not based on one single event but rather a series of steps. Schlossberg (1995) explains that while the onset of transition may be linked to one particular event or non-event, transitions are really processes that evolve over time – sometimes taking six months, a year or even
longer before an individual navigates fully through a major transition. Research into the career development of athletes has evolved in recent decades to include a holistic, lifespan, multi-level approach to the sport career and post-sports careers of professional athletes (Wylleman, Theeboom, & Lavallee, 2004).

Theories of Transition

Bridges (1980) proposes that the transition process has three phases: endings, neutral zones, and beginnings. People intuitively like to begin at the beginning—that is the new job, the new baby, the new relationship. Bridges makes a persuasive case that every beginning, every transition, starts with an ending writing, “Endings are the first phase of a transition. The second phase is a time of lost ness and emptiness before life resumes an intelligible pattern and direction, while the third phase is that of beginning anew” (Bridges, 1980, p. 17). Endings can be a period of disenchantment and disorientation, which Bridges describes people as floating free in a kind of limbo between two worlds. Bridges describes the next phase, the neutral zone as a period of emptiness, almost like being suspended in time between the old life and the new life. During this period a person is left with old roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions but not yet in a new life with new roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. The final stage, beginnings, occurs when the other stages are finished and often presents itself in the form of an external career change.

Role Exit Theory Ebaugh (1988) describes the process that individuals go through as they try to exit one role and enter another. Ebaugh defines role exit as the process of disengagement from a role that is central to one’s self identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account ones ex-role (Ebaugh, 1988, p. 1).
Each of these transition theories highlights the importance of one's self-identity in relation to their experience of transition. Professional athletes typically place exclusive focus on their sporting careers leaving little time for future transition planning or alternate self-identities (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). These men and women are often ill prepared for alternate careers after sport (Lavalle, 2005), which inhibits their ability to create a new non-sports related identity.

Model of Human Adaptation

Schlossberg’s Model of Human Adaptation (1981) views transitions not only as obvious or predictable life events, but also as subtle changes, such as the loss of career aspirations, and the nonoccurrence of anticipated events (e.g., not winning a competition after a long period of preparation). Transitions occur when people’s assumptions about themselves and the world change, fueling a need to alter behavior and relationships. Schlossberg (1981) emphasizes that it is not so much the transition or change producing event that matters but the person’s perception of the situation. People are affected differently by their perception of transitional experience for example; one person might view marriage as similar to what most people consider a date (especially if that individual has been married multiple times in the past). According to Schlossberg, it is the persons’ perception of what constitutes a change significant enough to make a transition.

The model for analyzing human adaptation to transition is presented by Schlossberg (1981) as incorporating three indicators of adaptation. A person’s perception of the transition such as onset, duration, degree of stress and source interacts with the second indicator, the characteristics of the pre transition/post transition environments. Third, characteristics of the individual, such as gender, age, race, state of health,
socioeconomic status, and previous experience with a transition of a similar nature. These three indicators are assessed in terms of the individual’s resource-deficits balance or in terms of degree of similarity and difference between the pre and post transition environment (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 15).

Accounting for the individual, Schlossberg developed the Human Adaptation to Transitions model to assess the factors affecting the individual’s adjustment to transition. The model assesses the individual’s perception of the transition, the environmental characteristics, and the characteristics of the individual as factors affecting the adaption to the transition. The individual and the transition, itself, determine the relative salience of these variables; hence a phenomenological perspective is required (Warriner & Lavallee, 2008). Schlossberg’s multidimensional approach has been widely extrapolated to sport career termination research (Swain, 1991).

Schlossberg (1995) revised her initial framework to include four key factors believed to influence an individual’s ability to cope during a transition: (1) The situation (2) The self (3) The support (4) The strategies. The transition model provides a systematic framework for counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other helpers as they listen to the many stories – each one unique – of colleagues, friends, and clients. The transitions differ, but the structure for understanding individual transition is stable.
Career retirement in regards to transition may be a worry that supersedes all other issues in which it is not the transition that determines the meaning for the individual; rather it is whether the transition is expected, unexpected, or never occurring.

Schlossberg (2005) summarizes:

To understand the meaning a transition has for a particular individual, we need to examine the type of transition (anticipated, unanticipated, or non-event), the context of the transition (relationship of person to the transition, setting in which the transition occurs), and the impact of the transition on the individual’s life (on relationships, routines, assumptions, roles). Often people in the midst of one transition experience other transitions, which make coping especially difficult.
Career and Educational Complexities

To expand upon the difficulties facing athletes at the time of career termination, The Association for Career and Technical Education has deemed that economical and social changes in the United States are requiring higher levels of achievement and preparation for the emerging workforce (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2006, p.1). Future employees will require an education that provides them with academic, career and technical skills as well as guidance and counseling knowledge to be career ready (Gysbers, 2013). The call for an increase of skills in the labor force puts athletes at a unique disadvantage as many of them leave college early when drafted or entirely forgo college and/or technical schools to pursue extended careers in professional sports. Education and career planning can be neglected either intentionally or unintentionally, in favor of and under the pressure to excel (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). In addition to a broader set of skills, the typical career ready individual knows how to anticipate the possible impact that planned and unplanned events may have on them and their career planning (Gysbers, 2013). A secondary component of an individual’s career readiness is the ability to plan and prepare for career related changes and transition. Essentially, the career ready individual knows how to plan as well as take advantage of any unplanned events (opportunities) that may arise (Gysbers, 2013).

Research has shown that many individuals, who undergo career retirement, do not experience the same disruption to their identity as do athletes (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Because athletes spend much of their time dedicated to their sport at an early age, this creates a situation in which time has not been allocated to acquiring interests in other areas making them more “career ready”. The loss of experience in other areas of interest
may result in a disruption to normal developmental events such as identity development, and young athletes may form a foreclosed identity (McKnight et al., 2009).

Research has made evident the difficulties of transitioning out of professional sports although athletes do hold transferable skills gained through their professional sports experience that can be applied in secondary occupations. The difficulty in this notion is that athletes often fail to give credit to the lessons and skills acquired through their sporting careers. This may result from a tunneled vision and foreclosed identity in which athletes are incapable of seeing how the same skills that made them successful in sport will make them successful in other career pathways (Mcknight et al., 2009).

**Career Assistance Programs**

Sport organizations in the United States have recognized that athletes transitioning out of competitive sport benefit from career assistance services. Many organizations offering such services have adopted the Life Development Intervention model (LDI) as a helpful format for planning multipurpose support programs. The LDI perspective views transitions as a process rather than a discrete event. Sport career termination starts when athletes begin thinking about their careers coming to an end, continues through the process of retirement, and persists during the aftermath of adjusting to life without competitive sport (Stambulova and Ryba, 2013, p.224). Wylleman and Lavellee (2004) found that athletes, who take advantage of services that assist in creating a plan for their retirement from a sport, are better able to anticipate some of the changes that they might experience and gain confidence in their ability to cope with these changes.
Athletes who participated in the United States Olympic Committees CAPA program reported, that activities in which they identified their transferable skills, enabled them to gain confidence in their abilities and to experience less anxiety when confronting their retirement from professional sport (Petipas, Danish, McKelvain, & Murphy, 1992).

**National Football League.**

Football players who reach elite levels of play are offered entrance into the NFL Business Management and Entrepreneurial Program presented in conjunction with the NFL’s player association. This program run through Harvard University and Wharton School of Business provides the opportunity for players to learn how properly evaluate business opportunities ("National Football League,” 2013).

**National Hockey League.**

The NHL Alumni Association partners with the Professional Athletes Transition Institute (PATI) to develop and implement programs to assist with career development and transition services for all former and current NHL athletes. The Breakaway Program provides players with entrepreneurial services, educational services, career exploration and transition, one on one business and life coaching, business skills development and work-study programs (“National Hockey League,” 2015).

Comprehensive career assistance programs such as those listed above meet the needs of athletes at different stages of their sports career by providing components that are available before, during and after the career has ended. Programs, which take place concurrently while an athlete is engaged with a professional team, are known to provide enhancement strategies to prepare the athlete for the future event of retirement (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013, p.224). They provide athletes with information on the steps
to become career ready for their secondary occupation post professional sports career. Athletes learn that they are able to take advantage of the possible future opportunities available to them, such as going directly into the labor force, obtaining an apprenticeship, selecting a certificate program, attending a two year technical school, community college, or four year college or university (Gysbers, 2013). Programming which takes place during the retirement event can also assist in buffering the impact of the transition through supportive strategies (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013, p.224).

**Professional Baseball**

Minor league baseball is organized through a hierarchal system which players often refer to as “moving up the ladder” as they progress from lower levels towards the major leagues. The dream of making it to the big leagues is more than just the love of the game and playing baseball in the majors, it’s also about money. The average salary of a major league baseball player is $1,983,849 but before baseball players hit the jackpot, they often have to follow an arduous route (Casey, 2000). These players typically move up the ranks through minor league baseball before being “called up” to play on a major league team for a major league salary. Being signed to a minor league team holds no guarantee that the player will one day benefit from the financial stability of a major league team (Casey, 2000). There are approximately 3,200 minor league players and only 650 major league roster spots. Therefore, baseball organizations are backlogged with talent at almost every level. There are too many people for too few jobs. For every player on a minor league team there are four or five each year that return to life without baseball (Casey, 2000).
Summary

Athletes, who have not prepared for the emotional, psychological and social changes that may occur as part of the process of disengagement from their sport, are unlikely to be in a position to begin planning for their future (Petitpas & France, 2010). To offset the difficulties athletes were having with their retirement from professional sports, career assistance programs for athletes began to develop in the early 1980s (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013, p.222). The focus of these programs were to aid elite athletes in managing their transitions out of professional sports and focus on traditional life-work planning skills, namely self-exploration, career exploration, and career implementation (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013, p.222). Continued research into the field of athlete retirement has found that sports career retirement is typically a salient event that can be highly distressing for the athlete as they learn to independently manage and structure their whole lives (Cosh, Crabb, & LaCouteur, 2013). A strong predictor of an athlete’s success in transitioning from professional sports is their preparedness for retirement (Cosh, Crabb, & LaCouteur, 2013).

Traditional approaches to transitions have suggested that all people endure a similar sequence of experiences (Swain, 1991). Various phase and stage models have proposed the markers of an individual’s progress through transition, these effects included loss of appetite, weight fluctuation, skipped menstrual cycles, insomnia, mood changes, a sense of being out of control, sadness about the loss of teammates, decline in motivation, and a lack of trust in others (Stankovich, Meeker, & Henderson, 2001). Contemporary research has rejected the exclusivity of stages and effects of such models
determining that such models often end up categorizing the human experience into
compartmentsofinwhichpeoplemustsomehowbemade to fit (Swain, 1991). Researchers
of unemployment have also concluded that it will not be possible to find simple
generalizations that apply to all people, given the range of variables that may mediate the
asaseries of events that are perceived as either negative or positive to the individual.
Alfermann and Stambulova (2007) view transitions as turning phases that challenge
athleteswithavariety of demands related to practice, competition, communication, and
lifestyle that require effective coping to successfully continue to engage in the sport, or
alternatively to end the athletic engagement. At the time of athletic disengagement the
athlete must make a decision as to their next steps in career readiness. However, noting
the challenges that athletes face at the end of their sporting careers this task can be
daunting.

The literature review presented in this document discussed the distinct
disadvantages, which professional athletes experience due to exclusive focus on their
sporting careers. Often it is at the cost of preparing long-term plans and engaging in
secondary career development activities. Several organizations such as the National
Football League, National Hockey League and United States Olympic Committee have
developed programs to assist their professional athletes with the transition out of sport.
Chapter two contained information, which supported the research study and provided an
overview of the literature, maintaining the notion that Major League Baseball should
offer a similar type of assistance program to their athletes. This study will provide insight
for future and current professional baseball players, their families, coaches and agents as
they navigate the field of professional sports. This study calls attention to the need for career and educational assistance, which will support both on field performance and off field development. This study will not provide insight into the experiences and beliefs of the athletes who have established themselves as permanent fixtures on a major league baseball team with the benefits of both long-term career and financial stability. Chapter three contains the methodology of the phenomenological study. In chapter three information related to the selected method, the design of the study, process for selecting participants, the researcher’s role, data collection procedure, data analysis, trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations are provided.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine and describe the sports career transition through the shared experiences of eight professional baseball players. A secondary purpose for conducting this study is to develop an understanding/framework in contemplation of creating a plan to assist professional baseball players during their transition from professional baseball. The researcher used a qualitative approach grounded in phenomenology to gain insight into professional baseball players’ behavior and experience. To describe the approach used in phenomenology Moustakas (1994) illustrates that a phenomenon can be an emotion, relationship, or an entity such as a program, an organization, or a culture. It is the search for the “essence of things” that cannot be revealed by ordinary observation.

Using the empirically supported belief that withdrawal from sport is a process rather than a single event, the researcher investigated professional baseball players who are actively involved in competitive play and professional baseball players who are no longer actively involved in competitive play. The intent of this phenomenological investigation was to gain an understanding of the transition process throughout the different phases of a career in professional baseball. This study used the four S system of the Human Adaptation to Transition Model (Schlossberg, 1995) as a guide. The four S system (Schlossberg, 1995) is a multidimensional model that has been found to be useful for the explanation and understanding of the sport career transition. The researcher used this model as a framework for inquiry into the shared experiences of professional
baseball players to help inform the research questions and develop the interview protocol. Schlossberg (1995) identifies four key factors believed to influence an individuals’ ability to cope during a transition that will be used to understand the transitional experiences of professional baseball players:

1. The situation – What are the contextual factors surrounding the players’ transition from professional baseball (age, de-selection/release, injury, free choice)?
2. The self – How does the player feel about transitioning from professional baseball (personal characteristics, background, psychological resources)?
3. The support – What types of support and alternative career options does the professional baseball player have (family, friends, institutional connections)?
4. The strategies – What strategies does the professional baseball player have to help him cope with the transition from professional baseball?

Research Questions

The research questions that were used to guide this phenomenological investigation are as follows:

1. What are professional baseball players’ perceptions about their preparedness for transition from this sport?
2. What are the situational and contextual factors that impact the professional baseball players’ level of preparation for transition?
3. How do situational and contextual factors impact the professional baseball players’ perceived level of preparation for transition?
Setting

The study protocol for the setting included both in person and phone interviews. Table 1 below provides information on the setting in which the instruments were administered.

Table 1.

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Subjects

Noting that withdrawal from sport is a process that begins soon after the athlete becomes engaged in their athletic career (Swain, 1991) this researcher chose to group the participants into two different phases of career status (current professional baseball player and former professional baseball player). Professional baseball is organized through a hierarchal system which players often refer to as “moving up the ladder” as they progress from lower levels towards the major leagues. Class A and Rookie level leagues typically feature younger, less experienced players like recent draft picks or players with one or two years of service time. The Triple A and Double A leagues typically feature more experienced and talented players. Players typically spend several years in the Minor Leagues gaining knowledge and sharpening their skills and are not typically called up to the Major Leagues until they have reached Double-A or Triple-A. Players in affiliated leagues sign a contract with a Major League Baseball organization and are subsequently assigned to one of the organization’s Minor League Baseball affiliates and work their way “up” to the Major Leagues based on their knowledge and skills (“Major League
Baseball, 2010"). A total of eight participants from affiliated minor league Triple A, Double A or Major League teams participated in this study.

As a basis for exploration into the transitional experience of professional baseball players, the criterion used to group the participants is as follows:

- **Group 1**: Four professional baseball players who are currently playing with a Major League team or an affiliated Triple A, Double A team
- **Group 2**: Four former professional baseball players who played with a Major League team, or an affiliated Triple A or Double A team

The two participant groups are the primary source of data and an essential part of the research process as the informants on the phenomenon under exploration (Moustakas, 1994, p. 108). A brief biography for each participant is available in the appendices to include the player’s demographic information (age, race, ethnicity, level of education, marital status) as well as voluntarily provided information specific to the player’s professional baseball career (team affiliation, player position, years played, years retired).

**Sampling Procedure**

The research participants for this study were chosen using criterion sampling. Criterion driven selections involve meeting predetermined criteria prior to being considered for the study (Patton, 2001). The researcher is married to a former professional baseball player who provided names and contact information for individuals meeting the criteria who might be interested in participating.

Criterion for inclusion in this study sample are:

1. Men currently competing with a Major League team or an affiliated Minor League baseball team at the Triple A or Double A level
2. Men retired from competition who formerly played with a Major League team or with an affiliated Minor League baseball team at the Triple A or Double A level

Criterion for exclusion in this study sample are:

1. Men currently playing at the Class A/Rookie level
2. Men who’s highest level of play prior to retirement was at the Class A/Rookie level

Tradition of Inquiry - Qualitative

This research study attempted to answer questions related to a persons lived experience facilitated through the use of qualitative research methods grounded in phenomenology. Qualitative research methods are well suited for this person-centered approach by humanizing the problem of study and giving greater meaning to the data that extends beyond numeric interpretations. Krathwohl (1997) finds that qualitative methods help people, problems, and situations come to life using context and situation to describe the internal emotions and feelings related to the phenomena under investigation. Qualitative research methods allow the researcher to “discover rather than verify, to identity more than a cause – effect, but instead an explanation with understanding that gives us insight into individuals’ behavior and experiences” (Georgi, 1985, p 14). The type of problem that is best suited for phenomenological research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals common or shared experiences of a phenomenon in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon (Creswell, 1997).
Instruments

Research participants first completed a brief demographic questionnaire. The questionnaires were used to capture basic demographic information (age, race/ethnicity, level of education, marital status) about the sample of current and former professional minor league baseball players who participated in this study.

In phase one of the interview process the researcher asked five broad, general questions (Moustakas, 1994). These five questions focused attention on gathering information to determine common themes among research participants. The following five questions were asked in phase one of open ended questioning:

1. How do current and former professional baseball players prepare to make the sport career transition?
2. In what ways can preparation for retirement affect the player during and/or after their playing days?
3. How do athletes learn to cope with the sports career transition?
4. What resources and social supports do athletes have available to assist with the transition from professional baseball?
5. How does the attainment of educational advancement and alternative career skills affect the players’ perception of transition?

Phase two of the data collection process involved conducting one semi-structured interview with each participant that was held in person or via phone depending on geographical and logistical factors. Questions in the phase two interview protocol were
developed after phase one questioning was completed to further probe players’ based on their answers given during the phase one open ended questioning.

In order to prepare the data for analysis, this researcher listened to and transcribed verbal descriptions and interviews (Wertz, 2005). Once the data was in written form, each participant was sent, via email, a copy of their transcribed interview and asked to make any changes that they felt necessary. The participants were given two weeks to make changes and confirm the accuracy and validity of the data collected.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Participants received a letter from this researcher explaining the purpose of the study, and respectfully requesting their confidential participation in the project. Each individual received follow-up phone calls, again respectfully requesting their confidential participation in the study. A mutually convenient interview time was scheduled with the individuals who agree to participate in this study. Interviews were recorded using OLYMPUS brand recording devices. Field notes were taken with the intent of recording non-verbal behavior, interviewer reactions, and other meaningful information that was used during data analysis.

Informed consent was requested of all study participants. All study participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and that each interview will be tape-recorded.

A pilot study was conducted to check the reliability of the open-ended interview protocol. Pilot interviews were conducted with one current professional baseball player, one former professional baseball player and one doctoral candidate student who provided feedback and clarification of interview questions.
Data Analysis Procedures

Once all of the information was gathered and verified by study participants, this researcher prepared the data for analysis. In preparing the data, this researcher eliminated redundant statements if they did not appear to contribute to the meaning of the description, as well as any other incidental and irrelevant information (Wertz, 2005). Phenomenological data analysis proceeded with a systematic identification of specific statements made by participants that directly related to the research question (Creswell, 1997). This researcher then named themes found in the descriptions to better organize lengthy and complex material (Wertz, 2005). The significant statements and themes were used to write a description of what the participants experienced in regards to their preparedness for the transition out of professional baseball (Creswell, 1997).

Ethical Considerations

The information obtained in this study was provided voluntarily with the participant's informed consent for research purposes. This study was of minimal risk; the probability of physical, psychological, social, or economic harm or discomfort occurring as a result of this study was minimal and no greater than "risks" encountered in participant's typical daily life (Wada, 2011). To ensure that interview data does not cause any psychological or social harm to participants, all information collected throughout the course of the study remains anonymous and confidential. Participants were not identified by name, but rather by pseudonyms and assigned identification numbers. Corresponding identification numbers were used on consent forms, demographic surveys and player biographies. All records that were obtained during the research process were kept
securely on the researchers password protected computer. Participants were contacted after each interview by email to thank them for participation in this study.

**Trustworthiness of Findings**

Every effort was made to ensure that the data reduction and analysis was authentic. This researcher consulted with a reviewer to check for accuracy of interview transcripts. This researcher asked the reviewer to go through the data to review highlighted “significant statements”, sentences, or quotes that were selected to provide an understanding of how participants experience the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 1997). The role of the external researcher was to “keep the researcher honest” by asking difficult questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations of data (Creswell, 1997).

Chapter four provides the phase two interview questions which were derived from the five opened ended questions asked in phase one, it also reports the findings of this study. Chapter five provides conclusions and makes recommendations for future study. Additionally, this researcher intends to create a transition plan for professional baseball players based on the research findings of this study.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Summary of Analyses

The purpose of this chapter is to detail the results of the dissertation research and report on the findings. This chapter begins with participant profiles and then presents the major findings in three distinct sections. Each section addresses a particular component of the phenomenon – sport career transition from professional baseball. Data were collected by the following means:

1. Demographic Survey (Appendix A)
2. Open ended interview (Appendix B)
3. One semi structured interview (Appendix C)

The demographic survey was given to each participant to complete prior to the open-ended interview. Following the open-ended interview, one semi-structured interview was conducted to further probe the participants on their perceptions and experiences of the transition from professional baseball. The following profiles were constructed from the responses provided on the demographic survey to provide familiarity with each individual who shared their “lived experiences” (Creswell, 1998, p. 52).

Findings of the Study – Part One

Summary of Individual Participant Profiles.

All participants in this study have one common denominator – the dream of one day becoming a Major League baseball player. The decisions made to facilitate this
dream and the results of their efforts are quite diverse. Noted below is a summary account of what the players have experienced on their path to reach the highest level of competition in American baseball.

Participant 1 is a 29 year-old white male. He was drafted in 2003 out of high school but made the choice to attend college. He played three seasons of college baseball and was then drafted in the fourth round of the 2006 Major League Baseball Draft. He has spent time in both the minor and the major leagues. He is currently signed to a one-year pitching contract in the major leagues. He has completed three years of college; he is currently not enrolled in college classes. He is married.

Participant 2 is a 27 year-old white male. He was drafted in 2005 out of high school but choose to attend college. He played one season of college baseball and was then drafted in the fourth round of the 2006 Major League Draft. He was released from his contract with a major league affiliate in 2012. He played independent league baseball until he was acquired in 2014 by another major league affiliate. He ended the season prior to his interview as a player pitching in the major leagues. He has completed one year of college, he is currently not enrolled in college classes. He is single.

Participant 3 is a 24 year-old white male. He was drafted out of high school in the second round of the 2009 Major League Draft. He spent the first two years of his career not playing due to an injury. He is currently playing Triple A baseball and is considered a top major league prospect for his organization holding a place on their forty-man roster. He holds a high school degree and is currently not enrolled in college classes. He is single.
Participant 4 is a 26 year-old white male. He was drafted out of high school in 2007 in the thirty-fourth round but did not sign and in 2008 in the twenty-third round after his sophomore year of college but did not sign. He attended two years of junior college and one year at a four-year university. He signed as a free agent after his junior year of college out of a collegiate summer league. He is currently playing Double A baseball and has played in several major league games during spring training. He has completed three years of college; he is currently not enrolled in classes. He is single.

Participant 5 is a 47 year-old white male. He was drafted out of high school in the first round of the 1985 Major League Draft. He played eight years in the minor leagues before deciding that he was not going to go back for his ninth season of spring training. He is currently employed as the president of a general air and plumbing business in his hometown. He has taken some college classes but is not a degree-seeking student at this time. He is married.

Participant 6 is a 32 year-old white male. He was drafted after his freshman year of junior college in the thirty-sixth round of the 2003 Major League Draft. He played five years in the minor leagues before his release in 2007. He is currently employed as the Director of Operations for a full service security and event related company operating within close proximity of his hometown. He is married.

Participant 7 is a 24 year-old white male. He was drafted after completing college earning both his bachelors and masters degree. He was drafted in the twenty-ninth round of the 2014 Major League Baseball draft. He is currently in process of obtaining employment with Major League Baseball Europe.
Participant 8 is a 28 year white male. He was drafted after his junior year of college in the ninth round of the 2008 Major League Baseball draft. He spent time on the forty-man roster with a major league team before he was released. He played several years of independent baseball. He is now living in Florida and gives private baseball lessons to youth in the Tampa Bay area.

Table 2 illustrates the demographic data variables of the study participants. In this research, demographic data variables that have specific application to the transition from professional baseball such as age, race/ethnicity, length of baseball career (amateur and professional), and time spent in college are highlighted.

Table 2.

<table>
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<th>Participant</th>
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<th>College Baseball (# of years)</th>
<th>Professional Baseball (# of years)</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Current or Former Player</th>
<th>Years of college</th>
<th>Graduated college</th>
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Findings of the Study – Part Two

Discussion

The following section presents the main findings on the phenomenon – sports career transition from professional baseball. Section one includes a detailed discussion of
interview data. Section two provides the questions posed to the baseball players who participated in this study with the identification of core themes, supporting categories, and units of meaning generated from the perceptions and experiences of four current and four former professional baseball players. Section three presents the results for the research questions and participant recommendations for a sports-career transition plan for professional baseball players.

Section 1: Current and Former Players Perception of their Preparedness for the Sports Career Transition.

Participants involved in this study were asked to be as transparent as possible about their perceptions and experiences of transition with regard to their personal backgrounds and the challenges faced due to their decision to become a professional baseball player. In addition to the challenges, participants were also asked to disclose several positive transferable skills gained through professional baseball.

Individual Descriptions Provided During Participant Interviews.

The study sample included four current professional baseball players and four former professional baseball players. Two of the four currently playing professional baseball players spent some time after high school attending college, while two went directly from high school to professional baseball. Of the former players only one went directly from high school to professional baseball, while the remaining three spent time as a college student post high school.

Due to study-specific IRB concerns regarding participant confidentiality, a detailed description of the teams at which the study participants play or have played is
not included. However, individual descriptions of experience for each of the athletes in this study do follow and serve a dual purpose. First, the narratives provide the researcher with detailed information on each participant and help provide critical context for his experience. Second, these narratives serve as a data analysis tool, consistent with the steps of phenomenological inquiry. The purpose of the narratives is to help explore the individual experiences of the professional baseball players; as such, they provide critical information for the development of textural and structural description of experience as well as the invariant structure. The names provided for each of the professional baseball players are pseudonyms.

Larson. Larson was a reference given by one of the research participants. Upon meeting Larson, I immediately noticed there was a kindness and maturity to him. Of all the current baseball players I interviewed, Larson seemed to have the most perspective on life outside of baseball. Larson had several life experiences that made it possible for him to see the world from a different perspective; he was in his late twenties, married, has spent some time in college and believes strongly in his faith. Larson himself listed these items as contributing factors to his level of maturity. He said that he understood that eventually, he will make the sports career transition. When this time comes he plans to find strength and support from his family and faith. He is mindful of the fact that family and god come before baseball.

Larson told me about his experiences as a professional baseball player. He explained that he previously believed it was “his time” to leave the sport. He said he knew that he was playing poorly and that it was only a matter of time before he was released. Due to his prediction of release Larson started planning for what he was going
to do after baseball. He consulted with his wife and began looking into college to finish his degree. Interestingly, as soon as he started looking into classes and how to enroll he had the best three months of his playing career and was called up to the major leagues. He said that it was when he finally let go of the reins that he no longer felt constant stress on the field because he had a plan for what he would do after baseball. He explained that a contributing cause for his constant stress on the field was that he worried “If I do terribly and get released then I won’t make the money that I was supposed to make this year.” He believes that most professional baseball players feel the constant stress of job security while playing because “You could be gone tomorrow or in ten years and you just don’t know”. Either way he stated, “Perspective helps your competition.” If you have an idea and plan for what you are going to do after baseball you are less stressed while you are playing.

Larson said that professional baseball does nothing that he is aware of to provide players with a plan for transition. He believes the MLB has a relationship with the University of Phoenix and recalled attending one meeting two years ago with a representative from the University who spoke for about forty-five minutes to the players about going back to college. Larson said that he did follow up with the rep but did not feel that the program was a good fit for him. Larson would love more than anything to have his college degree and listed this as his main regret outside of wishing he had played the game better in previous seasons. Larson said that he would have been more inclined to take classes in the off-season if his team had told him to do so because “You want to impress your employer.”
Larson thinks that a program to help players learn skills outside of baseball would “Be huge and gather a lot of interest among players.” He also thought that the team he was playing for would be interested in helping their players gain skills outside of the game. Larson said that they spend lots of time as a team taking classes with their mental skills coach to increase their ability to focus and play well on the field so why not add in additional life skill classes. He said there are also English classes provided to players who are non-English speaking so he knows there is time in the schedule for additional classes. In regards to the schedule, Larson does have time both in the season to attend life skills classes and in the off-season to earn college credits. A reputable college that was tailored to a baseball players’ off-season schedule is something that he would love more than anything.

It was touching to hear Larson explain what he would do to help educate and prepare baseball players for life after the game. He hears of too many guys who get released and just “Go off the radar” and then he hears about them again and they are “Down and out.” He would like for each team to offer supports to their minor league players, he chose the minor leagues because he feels that these are the players with the least job security and those making the lowest income from professional baseball. He listed several components that he believed would make an effective transition plan:

- Career Coach – help the player find colleges/online programs and internship opportunities that fit their needs and interests
- Finance class – how to budget, do your taxes, open savings accounts
- Life skills class – how to stay organized, and effectively obtain needed items like rental cars, plane tickets
What I found compelling about Larson is that even though he seems on the right track for transitioning out of baseball, he still has major concerns about going into the next phase of his life. He is mainly concerned about starting over, because he will need to get his degree and then he will need to find a job but knows that he has very little outside of baseball on his resume. He worries that the guys who he went to high school and college with will be well into established careers by the time he leaves baseball and he will be all the way back at the starting line. Although he has these concerns he still feels like he must put all of his efforts right now into being the best baseball player he can be. He did wish that people from his team would encourage him to do more. He felt that he would be more inclined to get an internship or take classes in the off-season if his bosses from the baseball organization were encouraging him to do so.

Donahue. I was introduced to Donahue on the day of our interview. I had received some background information from a mutual friend about Donahue’s playing career in professional baseball, including the teams that he had played for and how long he had played the sport at the professional level. Donahue was drafted out of junior college, played in the minor leagues on several different teams and was then released. He made the conscious decision to play baseball for as long as he could and spent time with multiple independent baseball teams in the United States and abroad. He was picked up again by an affiliated MLB team out of an independent league and quickly made his way through the minors and into the major leagues. He had a much different perspective than all of the other currently playing participants because he had once been on the other side of the fence as a former player. He was the most indifferent of all the currently playing participants in regards to his plan for transition. He said that he does not think about
leaving baseball and does not plan to think about leaving baseball right now. He likes to take it day by day and will not worry about his future until he needs to.

Donahue believes that talking to guys about their plan after baseball might be upsetting because nobody wants to think about leaving “It's not fun, its depressing.” Donahue could think of a few times when a player has said something about their next phase of life but it is always a quick comment that receives few replies or feedback from teammates. Donahue could not think of anything outside of a representative from the University of Phoenix that has ever been provided by the league for players to use when considering options for college or non-baseball employment. Donahue did not have any interest in speaking with the University of Phoenix representative, stating “He’s a joke, just some suit and tie who tries to come in and talk to us like he knows us.” He would prefer for anyone who does come in to discuss future college and employment opportunities to be someone who had once been a professional baseball player. He felt that a former player would really understand the baseball life such as the schedule, stresses, and financial aspects that guys in the minor and major leagues deal with.

Donahue seemed to be the most critical and skeptical consumer of the research I was doing. He had a hard time wrapping his head around the idea of preparing to leave baseball while you were still playing baseball. However, he had already left baseball and had seen the rewards of never giving up. He was now playing in the major leagues because of his perseverance and refusal to accept that he would need to make a “new” plan for the second phase of his life.
Ryan. Ryan and I had been introduced prior to our interview by mutual friends but had never discussed his baseball career or his perspective on transition. I was aware during our interview that I was speaking with Ryan at an important and promising time in his professional baseball career. Prior to the 2014 season Ryan had been plagued by injuries and worried that he may eventually be released due to his injuries. However, at the time of our interview Ryan was healthy and listed as a player on his teams’ forty-man major league roster. Ryan is extremely hopeful that he will continue to ward off any injuries and secure a spot in the big leagues. Since Ryan was on the cusp of fulfilling his dream of becoming a major league baseball player I wondered how he would feel about our interview. I was initially worried about offending him or prompting negative thoughts that may carry over to the field and affect his abilities. I was pleasantly surprised by Ryan’s ability to see past the world of baseball and have a “real” conversation about the transition from professional baseball. Ryan noted that he had loving and supportive parents and also believed strongly in his faith and felt that these support networks would help carry him through when he does eventually transition out of baseball.

Ryan had two options when he graduated high school, he could go directly into the minor leagues or he could play Division One baseball in college. He said that he ultimately chose baseball over college because of the money that he was offered in his signing bonus. Ryan did negotiate money into his signing bonus that could be used only to pay for college, interestingly he did not know if he would ever use it. Ryan mentioned the man from the University of Phoenix who comes in each year to talk to players about college but said that him and most of his teammates “blow off” what he tells them. He said that the guy is just a “pop in, pop out” person that nobody takes seriously. He would
prefer to have a hands on person working for the team “like a guidance counselor.” He said that he is unaware of any other supports from the organization that helps players’ transition out of professional baseball.

Ryan reported that he only completed “time filler, put gas in the tank” kind of jobs in the offseason and wished that his team provided connections to people who could help players obtain internships to careers that they might be interested in after they are done playing. He said that one of the biggest things for him would be the ability to make connections and network. He knows that people in all types of industries love the game of baseball and he would love the opportunity to go work for these people in the off-season to gain real world resume building experience.

Ryan felt opportunities that would provide players with a back up plan for life outside of baseball would be greatly beneficial to guys while they are playing. He explained, “When you are playing, you have a lot of stress thinking that baseball is all I’ve got but if you knew what you were going to do after you wouldn’t feel so panicked to make it.” Ryan talked about one of his close friends who was released from baseball and described his transition as an unsuccessful experience thus far. The friend was not prepared for his release and had been bouncing around from industry to industry first trying to become a football player, then a boxer, next flipping houses and bartending and now trying to start a hat making business. Ryan spoke lovingly of his friend and said that he wished he were given internship opportunities during his playing days to try other fields so that he would have a better idea of what to do after baseball. He said that his friends’ story is all too common and knows of too many guys who get lost after baseball because “You just get so caught up in it and think its never going to end.” Ryan felt that
the benefits of a plan to help players learn about fields outside of baseball to better prepare them for their second career would greatly outweigh any risks.

*Rick.* Rick is the participant who I felt I was most acquainted. We had mutual friends and had spent time together in social situations. Although I had never talked to Rick about his baseball career or his plans for life after baseball I realized immediately that he had a very compelling story to tell about his decision to become a professional baseball player. He grew up playing baseball with his father and attributed his above average skill set for the game of baseball to his fathers coaching. He explained that his dad had the opportunity to play professional baseball out of high school but did not take it and never got the chance again. Rick's father passed away several years ago but remains a constant influence in his life. Rick carries on the dream that his father had of himself becoming a professional baseball player and has now adopted this dream as his own.

Rick attended college but said school was never his first priority. College was a time for him to continue growing his baseball skills and try to get drafted at a low round. Rick was drafted out of high school and after his sophomore year and finally signed as a free agent after his junior year of college because he didn’t want to keep waiting. Rick hopes to make it to the big leagues and is currently not thinking about his transition out of baseball because he feels like thinking about it means that he must be getting ready to leave.

Ricks’ perspective on his transition out of baseball seemed to change as we went on with our interview. He was the one player who seemed to reflect throughout the interview process and think about what he could do to improve his eventual transition.
This came about after we discussed the support that he has within the organization. He mentioned the representative with the University of Phoenix and did not seem interested in the services he could provide because he did not want to attend the University of Phoenix. Rick did not think Major League Baseball would help him with his transition out of professional baseball but said that he had a coach who was from his home state and he thought that he could be a source of support when he leaves the game. Rick thinks that he wants to teach and coach baseball in his future and would like to attend a teacher prep college. The change in Ricks’ perspective occurred about fifteen minutes into the interview after we had talked about the lack of MLB support provided to released players. I asked, “When do you think you should start preparing to leave baseball?” Rick replied “Its funny because now that we are talking about it, ideas are popping into my head and I wonder if I should start preparing. I feel like the clock is ticking down and I’m going to start thinking about it harder and making decision at the end of this season.”

I inquired about the conversations among players and asked Rick if guys ever talk about leaving baseball. He said sometimes players’ talk about it but it never gets into a deep conversation because guys don’t want to talk about it. It’s usually just one or two sentences and then the topic changes to something else. His reasoning for this is that professional baseball players believe if you start talking about life after baseball then you have already given up. Rick again changed his opinion about his ability to think about life after baseball. He initially began the interview stating, “If I start to think about life after baseball, I’ve already put myself on the path to leaving.” Later in the interview Rick hypothesized that making a plan for his life after baseball may actually make him a better player right now because the anxiousness and worry that he feels to “make it” would be
off his back. If he had a plan he would know what he was going to do after the game lifting the stress and pressure. Ideally, Rick would love to have the opportunity to intern in the off-season with teachers or coaches to gain real world, resume-building experience.

Rick thought about the support that he would have when his time does come to leave baseball. He knows that he will rely on his mom and his girlfriend and hopefully one of his former coaches and he also mentioned his faith. Rick believes that when he leaves baseball he will rely on his faith more than anything because “Baseball is such a tough life and different than anything else but when I get back into the “real world” that is going to be really hard too.”

*Peter.* Peter was the first of the former baseball players that I interviewed. Peter and I were introduced by a mutual friend but had not met each other prior to our interview. Peter had been away from the game the longest of all the former players and was very open and honest about his transition out of baseball. He described his time spent in professional baseball as fun until it wasn’t. He was drafted as a first round pick out of high school and was considered a top prospect by the major leagues but throughout his professional career he was continuously hurt or in pain due to his injuries. Peter had an interesting transition out of baseball. He was scheduled to go back for his ninth season of spring training, he knew his report date and was ready to leave but he just couldn’t get in the car and go. He said the day came and went and he just never showed up. He assumed that he probably called someone on the team at some point to let him or her know that he wasn’t coming but he couldn’t recall exactly who that person would have been.
After baseball Peter began working for a family real estate business in his hometown, but said that he was not happy with his job and only did it “To put food on the table”. Peter wanted to find a career that inspired him and gave his life meaning but just wasn’t sure what that was. Instead, he ended up finding pleasure in his love of competition. He became heavily involved in the game of golf. Initially, he thought golf sounded like a nice way for a former athlete to keep some form of competition in his life but realized that his drive to compete was stronger than the average person’s. Peter explained that he was leaving work early or skipping work to play golf because everyone wanted to play against “The former first rounder.” He was lying to his wife about how much time he spent on the golf course and working late into the night to get his work done so that his days could be spent playing. He also dabbled in the stock market, taking financial risks to give himself the thrill that he once felt as a professional baseball player. Eventually, these behaviors although initially innocent began to take over his life and cause serious problems both at work and home. I asked Peter if anyone from the organization had ever reached out to him to see how he was doing after he left professional baseball, he replied “No, never.” Peter would have liked to have kept contact with his former team and would have accessed their support and assistance as he transitioned out if it had been provided to him. He believes that some sort of program should be made available to guys so that they have some work related skills when they leave baseball.

Peter believes that he simply got lucky to have the right connections at the right time to get him where he is today. He works as the president of an air conditioning and plumbing business in his hometown. Interestingly, Peter does not hate his job, he is
satisfied but he said that nothing would ever compare to playing professional baseball. This he said is the hard part. Guys don’t think it is ever going to end and then when it does they don’t know what to do. Some guys never seem to make a successful transition because they spend all of their time trying to figure out ways to get back into baseball and for some it just isn’t in the cards. I told Peter about participant two and his Cinderella story of getting released and picked back up out of independent ball to play in the major leagues. Peter thought the story was great but felt that most guys just don’t get that lucky. Usually when its over, its over and guys don’t know how to cope. He said that he really didn’t know how to cope until many years after he left he game, he attributed his acceptance of life after baseball first and foremost to his faith and then to his parents, wife and kids.

Peter would like to see Major League Baseball offer transition services to players because he thinks it is truly needed. He said that he was never a drinker but knows that many guys end up at the bar instead of back in school or at work. He would like baseball to talk to their players about the pitfalls of life after professional baseball so that they are more prepared to make the transition. He would also like players to have the opportunity to take college classes, complete internships and obtain networking contacts while they are playing. Peter proposed that there would have to be a shift in the mindset of professional baseball, which included acceptance of transition. He thinks the culture of professional baseball views conversations outside of the baseball world as a negative and taboo.

Kip. Kip had been away from baseball for almost eight years when I interviewed him and has a much different life than when he was playing. He is now married with a
child and one on the way. He had been employed by the Secret Service and is now the
Director of Operations for a security and event related company. Kip did not take his
release from baseball well, he had no idea what to do next and felt quite lost in the “real
world”. He was at a loss for what type of job he wanted and never felt that school was his
thing. He did not know if he would want to enter back into college. He was also irritated
by his post baseball living situation. He immediately went from living on his own as a
baseball player to living back at his parents’ house. He was well aware that most of his
same age peers had graduated college by this time and were heading out on their own to
start their careers and begin their adult lives. Kip did rely on his faith during this difficult
time and believed that his grandmother was watching over him and would make sure that
everything worked out. I asked if he received any support from baseball at the time of his
release, Kip replied “No, nothing.” He wished that baseball had helped him; he would
have taken any guidance that he was giving either while playing or after to try to make
the most of his transition but felt like support off the field was non-existent. Finally, he
was giving an opportunity out of baseball and believes that he was lucky enough to be in
the right place at the right time to make a connection that helped him on the path to a
successful post baseball life. Kip was at his uncles’ house when a man who was an avid
baseball lover and affiliated with the secret service stopped by. He liked that Kip had
played professional baseball and thought that he could help him find a new career. Within
weeks of this initial meeting Kip was taking the necessary steps to become employed by
the United States Secret Service. Kip was employed by the Secret Service for several
years and used this experience to obtain a job with a security company near his
hometown.
Kip regrets how unprepared he was for life after baseball and wished now that he had done more in the off-season to get ready for the next phase of his life. He said that it is simply difficult to change your mode of thought to leaving baseball when there is constant pressure from the organization to stay in baseball and "make it." Kip also mentioned the social pros that come with being a professional athlete and said that the people around you think that it is "cool" that you play baseball and make you feel like you shouldn’t be looking into any other careers because if you do then you must not really take your job as a baseball player seriously. Kip would like to see this mindset change. He said that all guys know that you can’t play baseball forever but nobody talks about it. He would like for this to change so that guys felt comfortable opening up and speaking with someone who could act as a guidance counselor for baseball players and to assist them in making the transition out of baseball. Kip said that he may have been a better baseball player if he had, had an idea of what he was going to do when he left the game. He thought it could have changed his perspective so that baseball wasn’t the end all be all. He felt the constant stress and panic of performing well and believed that it was "baseball or bust." That kind of attitude, he explained messes with your head. Every decision, every play becomes so much bigger when you think everything you’ve worked for your entire life is relying on it.

Leo. Leo and I were introduced through a mutual friend and had not met each other prior to our interview. Leo was the most recently released professional baseball player and was still exhibiting raw emotions about his transition out of baseball. It was evident that Leo was upset about his release, he said that he knew it would come eventually but never expected it to happen so soon. Interestingly, Leo is the only person
of all the participants to hold a college degree. He actually had both a bachelors and a
masters degree and had spent time interning with a non-baseball related company. If
anyone should have been able to quickly transition past baseball I would have assumed it
would be Leo. However, Leo said that the time since his relief had been the worst few
weeks of his entire life and he was currently planning to join MLB Europe to try to get
back into the game. Leo explained that he had been around the game his entire life. His
dad was a coach in the Major Leagues and he had been playing baseball for as long as he
could remember, he played all through college and was not ready to give up the dream.
He also knew that he wanted to stay in baseball forever, if he wasn’t playing he wanted to
be on the other side coaching or working on the business end with Major League
Baseball. I asked Leo if his team did anything to prepare him for his release or provided
him with any supports when he was cut from the team. He answered, “All I got was a
handshake and a piece of paper saying I was released, wait I got two pieces of paper, the
other said that my health insurance was getting canceled.” He did not believe he would
hear further from his team and felt that any support he got from Major League baseball
would be through contacts that he made on his own. Leo said the majority of his support
currently came from his parents who understood his passion to stay in the game and his
internship which allowed him to work remotely when he went away for spring training
this season.

Leo felt that a program for minor league players would be an incredible asset to
professional baseball. He believes that too many guys get caught up in the game and
don’t think about life after baseball. He explained that this is the culture of professional
baseball. He explained that every player knows that they may not make it but they have
to act as if they are going to be in the big leagues. At the start of spring training his team was brought into a meeting and asked, “Who here is going to be in the big leagues?” Anyone who didn’t raise their hand would have been asked to leave – everyone raised their hand. He also recalled a story of a teammate who was credits away from earning his degree. This teammate asked permission from his baseball team to finish his final credits during the season and was explicitly told “No.” Leo thought there was a missing component to life as a professional baseball player. He said that players should be encouraged to seek additional information about educational advancement and career/internships opportunities to allow them to be well-rounded people when they leave the game of baseball. Leo advised that a program best suited for helping baseball players transition should be led by guys who have walked in their shoes. He thinks players would benefit from hearing from former players who have made both successful and unsuccessful transitions that could give current players advice on what to do and what not to do when leaving the game.

_Brad_. Brad and I were introduced by a mutual friend and had spent some time together in social situations. I had met Brad on several occasions both during his playing days and after his release. Brad was the participant who I was most interested in speaking with. He was the only participant who I had known both as a current player and as a retired player. Although I had never talked to Brad about his experience transitioning from Major League Baseball I had often wondered how he felt about it.

Brad immediately spoke of other players and the ways that he has seen them struggle with their transition out of professional baseball. He believes that it is truly up to the player to make the best of his transition. He said that he couldn’t really qualify what
is meant by “best” but basically thinks that it is the baseball players’ choice if they want to try to find a new type of satisfaction and happiness in life without baseball. He said that he knows of a lot of guys who just give up and those are the ones that aren’t really trying. A former baseball player just needs to keep going and keep trying to make something else work after his time in baseball has ended. Brad thinks the ones who have a “keep going” attitude are the people who end up most satisfied in life after their playing careers have ended. Brad continued talking about the experience of others until I brought up the Stages of Grieving. I explained to Brad that some sports psychologists liken the transition from sport to the stages of grieving the death of a loved one. It was at this moment that Brad began to talk about himself. He responded, “It really is like dying.” He went on to explain that in order to reach professional status as a baseball player you have to believe with all of your heart that you are going to make it to the Major Leagues. Once you reach a level of truly believing this is your destiny you do everything to reach that goal. Secondary careers, education, internships and relationships are often a distraction to the ultimate goal so baseball players put exclusive focus on making it. “When I was released I hadn’t made it yet, so I wasn’t ready. I hadn’t completed what I came here to do. I’ve been working on getting to the Big Leagues since I was in kindergarten and now I can’t do it anymore?”

Brad made several religious references proposing that leaving baseball without fulfilling the life long dreams of becoming a Major League player is like the devout Catholic finding out that there really is no such thing as heaven. He is just now learning to deal with the loss of his dream and the transition from baseball. He has some good
days where he feels like he can move on and find new satisfaction from life and he has some bad days where he feels hopeless and lost without his sport.

Brad would like the organization of Major League baseball to do more to prepare players for transition. He thinks that players should have a transition counselor that works with them from the very start of their career. He would like this person to have one on one time with each incoming player to discuss their other interests and hobbies outside of baseball. He would like players to be educated on their finances so that the money they make when they sign can work to their advantage and make money in the stock market while they are playing. He would also like players to be encouraged to go back to college and complete their degrees so that they do have an education to fall back on if baseball does not work out. Overall, Brad just wants guys to be told that there is a chance that they might not make it to the Big Leagues and just in case they don’t they need to plan early for a life without professional baseball.

**Findings of the Study – Part Three**

**The Human Element**

One of the components of the research process involved conducting one open-ended interview with participants. When conducting qualitative research in general and phenomenological investigations in particular, it is essential to dig deeper and capture the human element on the topic being studied (Creswell, 2007). The objective is to capture the essence of the topic at hand; to tell the story of the research participants. To accomplish this goal, the following questions were posed to the professional baseball players who participated in this study:
1. How do current and former professional baseball players prepare to make the sport career transition?

2. In what ways can preparation for retirement affect the player during and/or after their playing days?

3. How do athletes learn to cope with the sports career transition?

4. What resources and social supports do athletes have available to assist with the transition from professional baseball?

5. How does the attainment of educational advancement and alternative career skills affect the players’ perception of transition?

The following question was posed to the research participants in the open-ended interview: How do current and former professional baseball players prepare to make the sport career transition?

Based on the responses given, the following behaviors were mentioned:

- Avoid
- Neglect
- Overlook
- Reject
- Ignore
- Bypass
- Abstain

Table 3 provides direct quotes as stated by the research participants in response to the open-ended interview questions.
Table 3.

| How do current and former professional baseball players prepare to make the sport career transition? |
| Direct Quotes from the Research Participants |
| “Honestly, for me, I’m not doing anything right now. I don’t think many guys do much. My wife and I have talked about it here and there in the off-season and wondered what would I do? But that’s about it.” |
| “I don’t think players do anything, you can’t. The reason we’re all here is to make it to the big leagues.” |
| “Nobody really does anything. There is one guy who comes in to talk to us during the season and he says that he can help us take classes at the University of Phoenix but its just one of those meetings that we have to go to, I don’t think anyone ever does anything about it.” |
| “They don’t. It’s just not something we talk about. Sometimes a comment will come up about another type of job that someone would like to have when they are done playing but its quick and then the subject is changed to something about the game or something that’s funny.” |
| “I don’t think players prepare, I know I didn’t. It’s not something that you think about preparing to leave because you don’t want to leave; you want to make it to the Big Leagues. I think it would help if players did prepare but they just don’t think about it.” |
| “Ha they don’t, guys don’t think about leaving. They are all caught up in when they make it to the big leagues.” |
| “For the most part we don’t think about it. My dads a coach so I’ve seen how fast guys come and go but even for me I never expected to get released when I did so I just wasn’t prepared.” |
| “Guys eat, breathe and sleep baseball. The last thing they want to do is think about letting go.” |

The next question posed to the participants in the open-ended interview: In what ways can preparation for retirement affect the player during and/or after their playing days? Based on the responses given by the participants the following views became apparent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During career</th>
<th>Post Career</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inhibit</td>
<td>Planned</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counteract</td>
<td>Able</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
These views are highlighted in the quotes noted below made by the research participants.

Table 4.

| In what ways can preparation for retirement affect the player during and/or after their playing days? |
| Direct Quotes from the Research Participants |
| “I think it would affect players in a positive way both while they are playing and then when they retire. For me, I was playing horrible in AAA and really thought I was getting released so I started looking into college classes and preparing for what I was going to do next and that’s when I started playing my best and got called up to the majors. It was like I stopped being panicked and just started playing.” |
| “I guess it could make you start thinking and mess with your own head. I don’t want to think about not playing…. that’s just depressing. I feel like when that time comes I’ll deal with it then.” |
| “I think when you are playing it could be bad to plan for retirement because everyone thinks they are going to make it to the big leagues and be set for life but on the other hand we see guys get released everyday. One of my buddies – he’s like my best friend. He got released two years ago and its crazy he just keeps trying to come up with the next million dollar idea – first he was a bartender, I think he’s trying to make hats right now instead of going back to school or getting a real job and he’s someone who wasn’t prepared so now he’s blowing all his money trying to figure out what to do next.” |
| “I think it could be a good thing to prepare for life after baseball because guys know they aren’t going to play forever but nobody really talks about it. Ha-ha I feel like now that we are talking about it I’m going to start looking into college classes. I’m a free agent after next year and I don’t know what’s going to happen so it’d be a good idea just to see what my options are.” |
| “It would be a tremendous help for players to prepare for retirement while they are playing so that it would carry out into their lives when they leave baseball. I’m telling you from my own experience, it wasn’t fun leaving baseball and trying to figure out what to do. I was lucky that I had a family member who gave me a job but it wasn’t the job I” |
wanted it was just to make money – my wife and I were expecting our first child so I did what I had to do at the time.”

“I think it would help guys be less stressed out while they played but it would have to be done right because guys don’t really want to talk about leaving baseball even though it’d be good for them in the long run. Its just that everyone there is planning to make it to the big leagues so their attitude is whatever.”

“It can be a bad thing to start thinking about getting out, cause then your head might not be in the game and that isn’t what people want. They literally say to you in spring training who’s going to be in the big leagues anyone who doesn’t raise their hand they’d tell to leave – everyone raises their hand

“I think guys need to prepare but it needs to be done right, guys need to be caught right at the start of their career in the minor leagues.”

The third question posed to the research participants in the open-ended interview:

How do athletes learn to cope with the sports career transition? Based on the responses given the following cognitive and behavioral coping mechanisms emerged:

- Grief
- Denial
- Panic
- Non acceptance
- Substance Abuse
- Gambling
- Reliance in faith/religion
- Reliance on support from friends and family

The cognitive and behavioral coping mechanisms are highlighted in the quotes noted below made by the research participants.

Table 5.

<p>| How do athletes learn to cope with the sports career transition? |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Quotes from the Research Participants</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I honestly don’t know how guys cope. A lot of the guys I know just find ways to stay around the game either coaching or playing independent ball someplace. I think a lot of guys just don’t want to move on. For me, I have my wife and my faith and I think that is really important for when my times comes.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I don’t know, I don’t really know what to say. I have no idea what other guys would do”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I don’t know, I guess they just try other stuff. The weird thing is that I feel like most people don’t know what they want to do so they just bounce around...like my buddy making hats, its kind of sad.”</td>
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</table>
"Huh, that’s a good question. I don’t really know what guys do. I guess maybe some go back to school or get jobs. I know for me I want to coach someday and I know that a lot of teachers are coaches so that’s what I would look into. But other guys, some just go the other way – start drinking stuff like that."

“For me it took a while to really cope with it. It really wasn’t until I truly gave myself to the lord that I started to deal with it. Before that I was making bad choices. I never got into drinking or anything like that but I started gambling and also got really into competition on the golf course and it turned into an issue.” First I lost big in the stock market, and then I was out playing golf, competing against people instead of going to work. I was lying to my wife about where I was. It was not good.

“I mean, I don’t really know. For me I’ll tell you it was awful. I remember going home, and literally crying to my dad, I asked him what the hell am I going to do now? I felt like I didn’t know how to do anything other than play baseball and all of a sudden it was over. I think a little bit of me just had to keep my faith that that everything would eventually work out. I felt like my grandmother was watching over me like a guardian angel and eventually it would be ok.”

“I think a lot of guys just don’t cope, they don’t think about it because they aren’t supposed to. Its kind of taboo to talk about leaving baseball so if you can’t talk about it, its something that you can’t really cope with. Even for me, I have a college degree and I had a sick internship in the off season and this has literally been the worst two weeks of my life.”

Another question posed to these research participants in the open-ended interview: What resources and social supports do athletes have available to assist with the transition from professional baseball? Based on the responses given, the supports provided by family, friends, religious beliefs and Major League Baseball vary between helpful, somewhat helpful, not at all helpful and non-existent. These variances are highlighted in the quotes noted below made by the research participants.

Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What resources and social supports do athletes have available to assist with the transition from professional baseball?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct Quotes from the Research Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Like from the organization? I don’t really know of any. Like I said I have my wife, my parents and my faith in god and that is what I rely on for support.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ummmmmm, I mean I don’t really know of any.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There is just the guy who comes in to talk to us about the University of Phoenix and tell us that we could take classes. He gives us his card but its just a meeting that we have to go to.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
"We don’t really have anything, there is the University of Phoenix guy and he talks about some other no name colleges that he can help us go to but nobody ever follows up with it."

"Nothing, I really don’t know of anything, like I said I got lucky because my family had a business but that was my situation. I really don’t know what other guys do."

"That I know of nothing really. My situation was that I was at the right place at the right time and some guy liked that I played ball so he wanted to help me out. I guess that would be the biggest thing, just the networking you get from people who want to help you out."

"From the team? Nothing well I mean I got a handshake and a piece of paper saying I was released. Wait, I got two pieces of paper, the other said that my health insurance was getting cancelled. The only things that I have are supports that I set up from people I have met along the way, like guys who might be able to point me in the right direction or help me out."

"I think they have themselves and whatever is in them to tell them to keep going and make a new life. The guys that don’t have it don’t end up in a good place because they can’t move on. They should also find a hobby, something, anything else that makes them happy."

The final question posed to the research participants in the open-ended interview:

How does the attainment of educational advancement and alternative career skills affect the players’ perception of transition. Based on the responses given, educational attainment and secondary career readiness skills being very helpful, somewhat helpful, or not at all helpful can be seen. These variances in perception are highlighted in the quotes made by the research participants.

Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How does the attainment of educational advancement and alternative career skills affect the players’ perception of transition?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct Quotes from the Research Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I think it depends on the person, some guys would like to know what they are doing next so that they felt well prepared other guys are just not ready to even think about leaving baseball.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I mean I guess it could make some guys feel better? I’m not really in a place where I’d want it or want to think about it. I’m just playing baseball because that’s who I am. It would make me feel worse if I had to start thinking about leaving the game, it would totally change my focus.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I think it’d be a good thing because then guys would feel better about what they were going to do. We all know we can’t play baseball forever so why not look into some other stuff to get us prepared.&quot;</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
"I don’t know, I’m guessing it would be good cause then guys could think about something outside of baseball. I really am going to look into it for myself I feel like it’s a good idea so that I’m better prepared."

"I think it would be huge to help guys out and get them prepared and it would be great if someone helped them with that. I just feel like nobody talks about it so it’s just the way it is, it’s not a good way to live life. Being prepared would give guys a more positive perception of being done."

"It would be amazing if guys had other skills to fall back on. I think it would make them better players so that they would know that there is something else out there besides baseball."

Phase two of data collection involved conducting one semi structured interview to further probe current and former baseball players on their answers given during the phase one open ended interview. The phase two questions were developed after phase one of questioning, the four constructs of Situation, Support, Strategies, and Self (Identity) are represented by the phase two questions to support the theoretical construct. Phase two questions are listed below.

**Situation:**

1. What events or experiences motivated you to become a professional baseball player?

2. Did you have the option of a different career track or college path prior to becoming a professional baseball player? If so, what were your alternative options and tell me about your decision to play professional baseball.

3. What is a typical day as a professional baseball player like for you? Is your day similar to most professional baseball players?

**Support:**

4. What support systems are currently in your life? Who is your primary source of support?
5. What kinds of support (on and off the field) are provided to players by major league baseball?

6. At the time of transition, what resources are available for players to use from Major League Baseball?

7. What resources and techniques do you believe you need to utilize when transitioning from professional baseball? What resources and techniques have other players used?

**Strategies:**

8. When you first encounter a problem or a new situation, what is your first reaction? Then what?

9. When do you begin to prepare for life after professional baseball? When do you think most professional baseball players begin to prepare for life after professional baseball?

10. What do you think you will do after your career in professional baseball has ended to give your life meaning and satisfaction?

**Self:**

11. In what ways has your career in professional baseball contributed to your self-identity?

12. When do you feel you have the most control over your life?

13. When do you feel you have little to no control over your life?

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**Phase Two Themes/Clusters of Meaning and Evidence**

**Theme/ Meaning Unit with Associated Evidence from Participant Statements**
Unprepared

- No. I’m not doing anything to prepare for my transition out of professional baseball. I feel like if I start to prepare I must be saying that I’m not going to make it.
- No, nothing is being done on my end to prepare for life after baseball. I feel like I have to focus on baseball.
- My team doesn’t do anything to help me prepare to leave baseball, I don’t think any team does.
- I feel like I could maybe do more to prepare but I just don’t.
- I wish my bosses from baseball wanted me to get my college degree, because you want to please your bosses, right? But they never say anything about doing anything else to outside of baseball.

Professional Baseball and Education.

- There is this guy from the University of Phoenix, I think he’s hired by Major League Baseball or they have a contract with the University of Phoenix but he comes in and talks to us once and a while but nobody ever takes it seriously because he’s just another suit and tie kind of person who doesn’t know what its like for us.
- There is a guy who talks to us every season about going to University of Phoenix but he’s just a pop in, pop out kind of guy. I’d want someone who was hands on and I thought could really be there to help me.
• The only thing I’ve ever known of is this guy from the University of Phoenix. He came in to talk to us and I called him to find out more but I realized that program wasn’t what I was looking for.

• There is a guy who comes in but he’s got connections to no name places that I just don’t take seriously. I was supposed attend a Division One school out of high school if I had gone that way so I don’t think University of Phoenix is where I want to be. I want something that is more highly recognized and regarded.

• Every few years we have to go to a meeting and we hear about schools like the University of Phoenix and they seem really interested in us and seem like they really want to hear from us about attending but nobody takes it seriously. Everybody thinks its just another meeting we have to deal with. Plus everybody thinks that they don’t need to go to college. They are going to be in the big leagues one day and be all set.

**Athletic Identity and the Death of a Dream.**

• Transitioning out of baseball is like getting a divorce that you didn’t ask for.

• I imagine it’s going to be really hard to let go of being a professional baseball player. On a scale of 1 to 5 of relating most closely with this identity, I am a 5 so it’s going to be weird to do something else.

• Your entire day during the season is centered on baseball. Baseball players play well over one hundred games a season so it has to be that way. Baseball is all you think about, it’s hard to change that frame of mind and let go of that.

• Baseball is really all I know so I want to stay in it for as long as I can. I don’t know what else I would be able to identify with that would feel ok.
I just feel like my whole life I was a baseball player, and I was one who really was supposed to make it to the Big Leagues. I’d been playing for so long that leaving it felt like a death. It was really depressing. Now I don’t feel that way but at the time it was hard.

Job in the off-season – time fillers.

- I work time filler jobs in the off-season, just put gas in the tank kind of jobs. I plow snow, work as a valet, and wash cars at a car dealership. Its nothing I’d put on a resume.
- My buddy has a landscape business so I do that in the off-season. Ha no, I won’t put that on a resume.
- One season I sold shoes at an athletic store. I got the job because the manager liked that I played baseball but I wouldn’t put it on a resume.
- My dad had a business cleaning out HUD homes so I’d do that in the off-season.
- I don’t really do much just odd jobs here and there, its nothing I’d put on a resume.
- I give lessons in the off-season, I think a lot guys do. It is decent money since we don’t make much in the minors.

I wish.

- I wish that I had my college degree, I promised my mom I will get it someday but I wish there was someway to get it right now, maybe in the off season? I wish my bosses in baseball told me to get my degree because you want to please your bosses, right? So I’d be more inclined to take classes.
I wish my team would give me internship opportunities in the off-season. I know that there are tons of guys who love baseball who work in all sorts of fields and I just wish there was a way to get an internships with one of them to get some real world resume building experience.

I wish I could get college credits while I’m in baseball. I mean I’ve been playing for the last six years, I feel like in that time I could have at least earned some college credits.

I wish I had, had a plan for what I was going to do next. I didn’t realize how hard it was going to be to transition out of baseball.

I wish I had, had a better idea of what I was going to do when I left baseball, I feel like it wouldn’t have been as difficult if I had.

I wish Major League Baseball had a transition plan for players, like the NFL, I know they do something to help guys out, right?

I wish I didn’t feel so much pressure as a player that I have to make it. I’d like to know that I have other options outside of baseball because I feel like that would also make me a better baseball player right now.

I wish there were classes for players to take in the season, like life skills classes, money management, computer skills, spreadsheet training, how to write a resume, those types of things.

Faith.

At the end of the day, my wife and my faith has really helped me learn that god and family come before baseball. I keep that in perspective. It helps me recognize that someday baseball will end but what really matters is my family and my faith.
It sounds weird but me believing that I was going to make it to the Major Leagues is the way that a Catholic person believes he is going to go to heaven, but it'd be like that person showing up and someone saying ha-ha jokes on you – there is no heaven. The person would be like “I believed my whole life, with all of my heart that I was going to heaven, and now you’re telling me its not going to happen?” That’s what it was like to not make it. I believed with my whole heart, every bone in my body that I was going to the big leagues – and then one day they just said never mind you aren’t going to the big leagues anymore. Its devastating and then you think now what am I going to do?

It really wasn’t until I truly gave myself to my faith that I was really able to start accepting my transition. Before then I thought I was doing ok but I really wasn’t, I was just too far in denial to see it.

It was so hard to transition out but I relied on my faith and as silly as it sounds I felt like my grandmother was watching over me like a guardian angel and that she would take care of me to make sure that I was ok.

I’m pretty religious and it’s nice because we can go to bible study as a team – it’s provided. So I rely on my faith a lot. I pray before every game during the National Anthem and ask that I be protected on the field and do well. I feel like I’m going to ask for the same when I transition out and trust that my faith will carry me through.

I didn’t grow up religious. Faith is something I picked up in baseball. Baseball is such a tough life and it can get pretty depressing – you really need something to
rely on when you are feeling down. I learned that having faith was really helpful, especially when you are having a bad day or a tough time.

- I think a lot of guys have some sense of religion or faith. It's just something that you need cause this lifestyle is just crazy. The highs and lows are so intense, its not real world and that's really why I think guys struggle so hard when they transition out because it's like a culture shock. You become so engrained in baseball, it becomes you and then it's just all its gone.

My plan.

- I'd really love to go into coaching and a lot of coaches are teachers so I think it would be cool to get some internship time or earn some credits in education. I feel like in all the time I've spent in baseball, I could have at least earned some college credits along the way.

- I really have no idea what I want to do after baseball. The only other field I thought about was being a cop so it would be cool if I could get some internship opportunities in the off season to check it out.

- I have no plan, and I'm not going to think about it until I have to. Nobody is telling me I need to think about it so I'm just not going to.

- It's funny, now that we are talking about it, ideas are popping into my head and I wonder if I should start preparing. I feel like the clock is ticking down and I'm going to start thinking about it harder and making decision at the end of this season.
Findings of the Study – Part Four

Findings for Research Question 1:

The first research question that directed this study was: What are professional baseball players’ perceptions about their preparedness for transition from this sport? To describe the transition from professional baseball from the lived experiences and perceptions of the research participants, the sub-categories listed below were examined and analyzed.

1. The circumstances surrounding the transition
2. Lack of organizational supports
3. The culture of baseball
4. Athletic identity
5. Personal, familial and peer expectations and support

In asking the reasons how players understand and describe the sports career transition, the research participants offered several like views and a several views that were divergent. The areas of similarity included:

1. There is little to no support from Major League Baseball
2. The higher ones athletic identity the more difficult it is to perceive the transition as positive
3. Financial backgrounds and planning
4. Lost developmental time in respect to same age peers
The areas of variance included:

1. Emotional response is similar to a death or divorce
2. Education and career planning is an effective use of time while playing
3. Belief that transition planning can be beneficial to the player during their playing days
4. Players should plan for the sports career transition

Table 8 noted below illustrates the variables as described by the participants that impact their level of preparedness for transition from professional baseball.

Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6 responses indicating no preparedness for transition due to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Lack of time to prepare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. No directive from the organization to prepare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. High confidence of career stability in professional baseball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Out of touch with reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Did not feel it was necessary, too immature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Feeling of financial stability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 responses indicating some preparedness for transition due to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Unprepared for the higher level of play and skills in professional baseball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Prior educational experience in college/university</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results for Research Question 2:**

The second research question that guided this study was: What are the situational and contextual factors that impact the professional baseball players’ level of preparation for transition? The starting point for answering this question was explaining the purpose.
and function of Major League Baseball in general. As expressed by the participants in this study, the culture of Major League Baseball is one that:

1. Is a top down approach in which upper level management sets the standard for exclusive focus on the sport.

2. Planning to retire shows a lack of dedication to the sport.

3. Coaches/managers are the decision makers in regards to in-season and off-season expectations leaving the player with little autonomy to schedule non-baseball related tasks.

4. The sport comes before everything else.

In discussing what impacts the professional baseball players level of preparation for retirement a number of factors were reported by the participants in this study:

- Social economic status
- Age
- Reason for de-selection
- Networking opportunities
- Athletic Identity
- Faith/religious beliefs
- Family Expectations
- Education Internships/Job training
- Organizational stigma associated with transition planning

Table 9 noted below illustrates the variety of factors that can impact the extent to which a professional baseball player prepares for the sports career transition.
Table 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparedness for Transition</th>
<th>Little Preparation</th>
<th>Some Preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signing bonus</td>
<td>Top round money</td>
<td>Low round money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Younger players 24yrs and younger</td>
<td>Older players 25 yrs. and older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for deselection</td>
<td>Unexpected</td>
<td>Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking in baseball</td>
<td>Some to several contacts</td>
<td>Few contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic identity</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Not religious</td>
<td>Religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family expectations</td>
<td>High expectation for MLB career</td>
<td>Low expectations for MLB career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/Secondary Skills</td>
<td>Little to none</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma from organization/team</td>
<td>Strong focus on baseball</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results for Research Question 3:**

The final research question that directed this study was: How do situational and contextual factors impact the professional baseball players perceived level of preparation for transition? The important premise that emerged from the conversations with the professional baseball players was that varying perceptions of preparedness were reported in relation to the variety of factors listed in response to research question two. Based on the responses given, the perception of preparedness for transition varies between little to some which is displayed in the table above.

**Textual and Structural Descriptions of Experience.**

Once the researcher develops a number of significant clusters of meaning from his or her data, the next step in phenomenological analysis includes a presentation of textural and structural descriptions of experience. These descriptions assist the researcher in
developing an understanding of the overall essence of participants’ experiences by highlighting *what* subjects experience regarding a certain phenomenon as well as *how* they perceive this experience. The goal is to develop composite textural and structural experiences for the group of participants before moving toward the final step of realizing the invariant structure of experience. The researcher achieves these composite textural and structural descriptions through synthesizing individual experiences of study participants and imaginative variation on the part of the researcher. This imaginative variation involves an effort on the part of the researcher to interpret an understanding of overall group experience beyond simply what each individual perceives (Moustakas, 1994). The textural description of experience captures the essence of *what* study participants experience concerning the phenomenon of interest. The structural description of experience provides a framework for understanding *how* participants experience a phenomenon by making explicit the underlying structures influencing this perception.

**Textural description of experience.**

Preparing for the transition out of professional baseball is an experience in which professional baseball players feel unprepared for. The baseball player does not spend time thinking about his transition because he does not think he needs to. Although he knows that his transition can come at any time during his playing career he is so caught up in the game that he does not think that it will ever actually end. This phenomenon results in a significant disruption of long standing routines, the end of a life long dream and a new set of “real world” expectations for which the player has little experience.

Preparing for transition is a time of searching for new purpose in life and grieving
the loss of a long-lived dream. The baseball player believes with all his heart that he is going to “make it.” Baseball players play 142 games each year and spend their additional time practicing and working out. The baseball player eats and breathes the game. Most conversations, even in the off-season involve and reference baseball and most activities involve a link to the sport in one way or the other. The baseball player does not typically think of preparing for his transition until he believes that his career may be ending for reasons such as old age, injury, or poor performance. Often though, the baseball player is released from the sport much sooner than he thought because in reality no player ever really thinks it is going to end. Some players reflect back and wish that they had taken more time to explore educational opportunities and resume building jobs during the off season once they realize how far behind their same aged peers they are in “real world” skills and experiences. These young men recognize that they have skills learned through baseball (determination, focus, leadership, performance under pressure, and social/media skills) that would be valuable to employers but worry that without an education to pair with these skills they will be overlooked in today’s competitive job market.

Overall, preparing to leave professional baseball is a difficult experience that players are often unprepared for. Feelings of sadness, uncertainty, loss, concern, and regret permeate the phenomenon. It is wishing that he could still be on the field working to achieve his life long dream of making it to the big leagues while trying to cope with the idea that it was not in the cards for him. It is a time of great stress as he wonders what he will do next. He wonders if anything in life will still give him the same rush of energy, happiness and joy that he got from being a professional baseball player. All wonder anxiously about what the future holds for them as they try to construct a new identity in
their unfamiliar lives beyond professional baseball.

**Structural description of experience.**

Several aspects of the professional baseball player's experience influence how he perceives this phenomenon. The first of these includes disengagement with a closely held identity in order to make room for a new sense of self after professional baseball. The professional baseball player is forced to separate from the role that they have known for the majority of their existence. The player does not feel like himself and struggles to forge a new identity that will provide him with a sense of joy and happiness. For professional baseball players there is a profound sense of loss while they struggle without the support of their former baseball organization to adjust. The disengagement from professional baseball pushes the professional baseball player out of his comfort zone and tests his ability to make sense of a new world without the identity which he has so closely held.

Another aspect of the professional baseball players experience is the influence of the relationships that he has outside of baseball on his preparation to leave the sport. The professional baseball player spends little time with former teammates once retired from professional baseball and must find others who are willing to support them as they work to develop a new place for themselves in the real world. Professional baseball players seek out the support of family, significant others and close friends to support them during their transition. The professional baseball player relies on those who have been with him since the start of his career and can understand the different highs and lows that he has experienced with playing the game. This person tends to be a parent, grandparent or
significant other. The professional baseball player also learns to rely on his faith and reports that his beliefs in his faith help give him peace and guidance during his transition out of professional baseball.

**Invariant Structure**

The final step of phenomenological data analysis includes the development of a textural-structural synthesis revealing the invariant structure or overall essence of experience regarding how participants experience a particular phenomenon. This essence of experience provides a framework for understanding how a certain group experiences a phenomenon, which, in the case of this study, is preparing for exit from professional baseball. Since the invariant structure closely relates to the study’s central research question and an outcome of the analysis process, I will present it in the final chapter where I engage in a detailed discussion of study findings.

**Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to present a number of findings that emerged from the analysis of my data. Initially, I presented a series of narrative pieces for each professional baseball player along with a number of significant horizons and important clusters of meaning developed through the process of phenomenological reduction. Following these significant statements and themes, I constructed textural and structural descriptions of experience ultimately leading to the revelation of an invariant structure or essence of experience for professional baseball players transitioning out of professional baseball. The next chapter includes, the relevance of findings in light of current literature and theory; outlines the contributions of these findings to my central research questions,
including a presentation of the invariant structure; and highlights potential limitations of
this research and future directions for inquiry.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

One of the only inevitabilities in high performance sport it that eventually every competitor will have to terminate his or her sporting career at the professional level, some individuals have been found to experience difficulties when faced with their retirement (Taylor & Oglive, 2001). Professional baseball players can experience the sport-career transition as a period of adjustment depending on a number of individual factors. One of these individual factors is level of preparedness, such that the overall quality of the sport-career transition can be directly influenced by the amount of time the professional baseball player devotes to sport-career transition preparation. In this chapter I return to the three research questions from the original research design:

1) What are professional baseball players’ perceptions about their preparedness for transition from this sport?

2) What are the situational and contextual factors that impact the professional baseball players’ level of preparation for transition?

3) How do situational and contextual factors impact the professional baseball players’ perceived level of preparation for transition?

The intent of this final chapter is to discuss the study findings presented in Chapter four. This chapter is composed of five sections: section one examines how
insights from participants’ experiences assist in answering the study’s central research questions, section two presents a discussion of study findings and emphasizes their linkages to contemporary research. Finally, sections three, four and five highlight study limitations, implications for practice and recommendations for future research along with a summary of the study and conclusions regarding research, theory, and practice.

Summary of Results

The sport-career transition is considered to be a process, rather than a single event (Coakley, 1983; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Swain, 1991). With this in mind, these findings confirm that in order for professional baseball players to experience successful career adaptation after professional baseball they must take the time to prepare for the sport-career transition before the transition occurs. Thus, it is imperative that preparation for life after professional baseball begins early on in the players’ career.

Using interview data, I examined the experiences of four current professional baseball players and four former professional baseball players. These findings reveal that current professional baseball players feel little to no preparation for retirement while former professional baseball players experience mild to severe adjustment difficulties after their retirement from professional baseball. The level of adjustment to the transition from professional baseball is mediated by several individual, behavioral, situational and contextual factors, which can occur before or after disengagement from professional baseball. These factors, which have been obtained from Chapter Four are used to answer the research questions to ultimately provide meaningful insights into how professional baseball players can decrease their risk of a crisis transition, and increase the likelihood
of successful career adaptation once their professional sport-careers have ended.

Preparation or lack there of for life after sport is inevitably part of the game for all professional baseball players, it can precede both great challenge and great opportunity. Research question one asks what are professional baseball players’ perceptions about their preparedness for transition from this sport. Responses to this question ranged from no preparation to minimal preparation and varied among participants. Findings indicate that failure to prepare on any level, formal or informal, will at some point during the sports-career transition result in feelings of dissatisfaction with life. Participant eight recommends that even at the most basic level professional baseball players should obtain hobbies, skills and interests outside of baseball that provide them with some type of happiness and satisfaction. Additionally, he recommends that professional baseball players account for their money in a responsible way so that they will have some type of a financial cushion at the time of their transition out of professional baseball. All of the currently playing participants noted that they could be released from the sport at any point in time, which perhaps may be the motivator for some of the participants to plan, minimally at best for their transition out of professional baseball.

Having a plan for life can eliminate some of the uncertainty and financial pressure typically associated with the end of a professional sport-career. This notion is consistent with results from the research of Sinclair and Orlick’s (1993) study of Canadian Olympic and World Game athletes who showed an apparent lack of educational achievement and secondary skills readily accessible to effectively assist them at the time of their transition. Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993) provided an example of life skills or transferable skills that can be applied across settings, including organizational skills, adaptability/flexibility,
dedication and perseverance, patience, self-motivation, and the abilities associated with performing under pressure, meeting challenges/deadlines, and setting and attaining goals (Danish et al., 1993). Participants one and four indicated themselves that they believe their lack of secondary skills and educational achievements will be the biggest barrier to making a successful transition.

Research question two seeks to identify the situational and contextual factors that impact the professional baseball players’ level of preparation for transition. The goal of this question was to gather concrete information from participants based on their individual experiences, and the experiences of their teammates regarding specific elements believed to help or hurt players as they move through the sport-career transition period.

Attributes believed to have a positive perception on the impact and the quality of the transition from professional baseball include: possessing a college degree or attending some college prior to professional baseball, having vocational skills and interests outside of baseball, strong sense of religion/faith, supportive family and friends, being of an older age (25yrs +) and not having athletic identity that identifies solely with the athletic role to the exclusion of other roles. Sinclair and Orlick (1993) noted that a positive factor in sport-career transition is having other interests and participating in other activities after retirement. This finding supports the importance of encouraging athletes to maintain balance in their life by pursuing other interests and activities while engaging in competitive sports (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Additionally, the research of Werthner & Orlick (1986) found support of family and friends could ease the degree of disruption in the transition out of sport, as emotional support helps the athletes to adjust to the
Attributes believed to have a negative influence on the players perception of transition from professional baseball include: failing to obtain a college degree or failing to attend some college prior to ones career in professional baseball, little to no vocational skills and experience outside of the sport, confusion about what to do next, unsupportive family and friends, and exclusive baseball specific identity. Participant six who failed to obtain his college degree stated, "I remember going home, and literally crying to my dad, I asked him what the hell am I going to do now? I felt like I didn't know how to do anything other than play baseball and all of a sudden it was over.” Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder (1993); Pearson & Petitpas (1990) contend that because athletes spend much of their time dedicated to their sport at an early age, this creates a situation in which time has not been allocated to acquiring interests in other areas. This may result in a disruption to normal developmental events such as alternative vocational skills and career exploration outside of sports (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990).

When faced with the possibility of their professional baseball career coming to an end, these athletes may experience a plethora of psychological, social, financial, and vocational changes (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1990). The quality of the transition from professional baseball can depend on individualized developmental experiences that have occurred since the onset of the athletic career (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Havinghurst (1972) defines a developmental task as one that arises at a certain period in our lives, the successful achievement of which leads to happiness and success with later tasks. Unsuccessful achievement leads to unhappiness, social disapproval, and difficulty with later tasks. According to Havinghurst, during early adulthood (19-29 years) typically developing individuals are in the process of selecting a mate, starting a family, managing
a home, starting an occupation, and finding a congenial social group. Professional baseball players report that their time spent playing during the season and training in the off-season leaves them little to no time to engage in the critical tasks that arise in their lives during young adulthood. Consequently, when athletes retire from sport, they may feel lost and become disillusioned (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990).

The final research question aims to identify how the situational and contextual factors identified by the participants impact the professional baseball players’ perceived level of preparation for transition. While these interviews provided a variety of answers to this research question, the overwhelming consensus was that at no point during their professional baseball career or at the onset of transition do they perceive themselves to be highly prepared for the transition from professional baseball. This acknowledgement from the current players illustrates the influence of athletic identity and the dream of “making it.” All of the current players knew that their time in professional baseball may end unexpectedly and abruptly but none of them were actively preparing themselves for such an outcome. Likewise, all of the former professional baseball players reported that they never truly planned for life after professional sports because they did not think their time would come to an end when it did. Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 were able to voice support in planning for life after professional baseball and came to the consensus that obtaining alternative educational and vocational skills would ease the difficulty of transitioning out of professional baseball. Furthermore, participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 all concluded that preparation for life after baseball may be beneficial during their time as a professional baseball player. Participant one stated, “I feel like I would be less panicked or stressed when playing if I knew what I was going to do next. That way I could just go
out there and play the game without worrying if the next pitch is going to be the one that cost me my job. If that was the case I think I would play much better because perspective helps your competition.”

These findings are consistent with Petipas, et al. (1992) who examined the impact a career assistance program had on professional athletes. It was found that activities, in which the athletes were able to identify their transferable skills, enabled them to gain confidence in their abilities and to experience less anxiety when confronting their retirement from professional sport. Wylleman and Lavellee (2004) found that athletes, who take advantage of services that assist in creating a plan for their retirement from sport, are better able to anticipate some of the changes that they might experience and gain confidence in their ability to cope with these changes.

Discussion of Results

Coakly (1983) defines athletic retirement as the process of transitioning from participation in competitive sport to another activity or set of activities. The use of the term process is essential in this research to verify that a transition plan for professional baseball players would be initiated while the player is still actively involved in the sport. Hence, the transition from professional baseball is not based on the single event of being released from the sport but is rather a series of steps that prepare the professional baseball player for his subsequent transition from sport. One of the most compelling findings from this body of research to factor into transition planning is the emotional response to the sports career transition. Not only is the emotional response to the sport career transition difficult for the professional baseball player, it may be the most challenging component to convey while still actively competing. This is due to the fact that players
who are currently playing may not know what they are going to feel when their professional baseball career ends.

Some of the typical responses to the sport-career transition provided by the former professional baseball player participants align closely with models grown from Thanatology, the study of death and dying. The stages of death theory proposed by Kubler-Ross initially grew out of a study of terminally ill patients. This theory has been applied in sport psychology literature in recent years (Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000). The stages when applied to retirement from professional baseball are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Participants five, six and eight all conceded that leaving baseball for good “feels like you are dying”. Participant eight expanded on this thought by comparing the experience of leaving baseball to that of a devout Catholic leaving earth to find that there is no heaven. He described this as the death of a dream, a passion, a belief, and the person you once were. It was the intention of this researcher to determine if transition programming for professional baseball players should incorporate cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and psychosocial factors related to theories of death and dying into its model. Findings from this research partially support the Kubler-Ross stages of death as helpful in understanding the sport-career transition of professional baseball players. There was lacking evidence in regards to the currently playing professional baseball players as to how exactly they will feel when released from the sport.

Situational and contextual factors can manifest while players are coping with the transition from professional baseball, typically occurring at the onset of release or retirement from the sport and continuing throughout the transition. Negative behaviors such as irritability, drinking, substance abuse, gambling, and isolation from family and
friends were found to be areas of concern. Individuals who reported that they used negative behaviors as a strategy to cope with disengagement from sport reported a more difficult sport-transition period (Mihovilovic, 1968). Former professional baseball players were eventually able to overcome these hardships, by utilizing external resources leading to a more positive change in behavior.

The Model of Human Adaptation developed by Schlossberg (1981) states that transitions occur when people's assumptions about themselves and the world change, fueling a need to alter behavior and relationships. Schlossberg (1995) revised her initial framework to include four key factors believed to influence the individuals' ability to cope during a transition. The four S system (Schlossberg, 1995) describes the factors that make a difference in how an individual copes with change and how these can be viewed as potential assets or liabilities. Participants of this study discussed their perception of preparedness for the transition from professional baseball within the constructs of situation, self, support and strategies to explain how situational and contextual factors are seen as potential resources or deficits when making the transition from professional baseball. It was the intention of this research to examine whether this model is helpful in developing an understanding of the process of the sport-career transition for professional baseball. Findings from this research support the Human Adaptation to Transition Model.

Additionally, the majority of the literature on the transition from professional sports has suggested the use of a crisis-orientated approach to describe the circumstances surrounding the sport-career transition of professional athletes. McPherson (1980) whom suggested that a process-oriented approach would be best suited to replace the crisis-oriented approach. Withdraw or retirement from sport should not simply be perceived as
an event, but instead, a process that should begin shortly after the athlete becomes engaged in his/her career (Kim & Moen, 2001; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Swain, 1991; Torregrosa et al., 2004). Viewing the sport-career transition as a process can assist in helping professional baseball players individually prepare for their sports-career transition given their individual perceptions of the situation, personal resources, coping strategies and developmental experiences (Sinclair & Orlock, 1993).

Study findings confirm that participants’ value educating professional baseball players early on in their professional baseball career on the potential for adjustment difficulties at the end of a sport-career and during the sport-career transition. Issues to be included in a sport career transition program are: to value ones education by obtaining an undergraduate degree, establish contingency plans in the event that a professional baseball career is short lived, engage in vocational counseling and internship opportunities, develop computer and other transferable skills for secondary employment, develop and promote responsible/intelligent financial behaviors.

The following process-oriented outline may be useful when assessing the professional baseball players’ perception of transition and coping resources (McPherson, 1980 Schlossberg, 1995).

SITUATION: Does the individual want to transition out of professional baseball?

- What kind of transition is it
  - Positive/Negative
  - Expected/Unexpected
  - Desired/Undesired
• Timing
  o Good or worst possible
  o Voluntary/Imposed
  o Where are you in this transition (Beginning, middle end)

SELF: Transferable skills that can be used in vocations outside of professional baseball
  • What strengths/weaknesses do you bring to the situation
  • What options do you believe you have
    o How do you deal with uncertainty

SUPPORT: Who will be there for you when your career in professional sports has ended?
  • Who will help or hinder you
    o In what ways can they support you (positive/negative)
    o Family
    o Friends
    o Teammates
    o Faith or religious leader

STRATEGIES (plan of action): Expectation that professional baseball players will participate in a sports career transition plan
  • What coping strategies do you have
  • How creative are you
  • How do you manage stress
Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study have been reflected upon to determine the relevance of this particular body of findings. The first is an expected limitation of the selected methodology in which it has been concluded that the study findings cannot be applied to wider populations outside of professional baseball. The insights obtained in this study regarding preparation for sport transition represents only the experiences of the professional baseball players involved in my research at the particular time at which the study was conducted. It cannot necessarily be assumed to reflect the sport-career transition experiences of all professional baseball players, players of other professional sports or professional female athletes.

A second limitation concerns the study’s small sample size. The intimate size allowed the researcher to delve deeply into the perceptions of the participants but does not represent an exhaustive list of professional baseball players’ perceptions on transition from sport. More studies that contain a larger sample size and address contextual considerations are needed to develop a framework for viewing the professional baseball players’ transition experience.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

This phenomenological exploration of the sport-career transition perceptions and experiences of current and former professional baseball players has yielded greater awareness and appreciation for some of the specific challenges faced by these athletes. It has also highlighted the need to continue research efforts in this particular area of inquiry.

A practical direction and intention of this researcher is to develop and implement
a sport-career transition intervention program for professional baseball players, follow
the players from the onset of their professional playing career and throughout, and
evaluate the program effectiveness. Such longitudinal studies will most likely provide
more complete information about the sport-career transition since it is a process, not an
event.

Conducting interviews with the professional baseball players’ immediate family
and significant others is another appealing approach for gaining added perspective
concerning the sport-career transition of current and former professional baseball players.
The interviews of this study focused solely on the professional baseball player. Insight
from spouses, significant others, and family members may yield additional, meaningful
findings in regards to the transition from professional baseball. Lastly, it is essential to
conduct more investigations on the transition from professional baseball in the United
States to strengthen the literature. It is the hope of this researcher that more studies are
conducted to improve all aspects of the transition from professional baseball. This
investigation does not claim to be the end point, but only the building block to further
scholarly investigations.

Summary

Conducting this research was an extremely enlightening experience. It is our
responsibility as practitioners to continue research in this domain of transition and
develop programs to assist athletes in their preparation for the transition from
professional sport. Professional baseball players retiring from sport need to be aware of
how their skills may be transferable to other settings. In order for them to transfer skills,
they must understand how their skills and qualities may be valuable in areas other than
sport. A sport-career transition plan for professional baseball players may be an effective way to assist these athletes in engaging in life after sport by helping them realize that the skills they need to be successful in other areas of life are skills that they have already acquired through their involvement in sport (McKnight et al., 2009). Participants who have the benefit of wisdom and experience, advocate that future and current professional baseball players begin this process as soon as possible.

While it is the responsibility of the individual athlete to take action, all professional baseball players should be supported each year by qualified personnel employed by Major League Baseball whom are dedicated to preparing the athlete for the transition from professional baseball. This level of support will provide a continuum of services to the professional baseball player that delivers a culture of “caring” for success in all aspect of the professional baseball players’ life. It is evident from these data that Major League Baseball and its affiliates are currently not adequately addressing the crucial sport-career transition of professional baseball players.

While transition programming may not be able to help all professional baseball players realize the benefits of preparing for life after professional baseball it is important to continue to try by conducting research, and creating programs that address the issue of sport-career transition. Research is crucial to assist professional baseball players in experiencing positive sport-career transitions.
REFERENCES


Casey, T. (June 3, 2000). Minor-league reality contrasts big-league dreams: The perks are few for ball players-in-training who understand that pinching pennies can be as difficult as driving a pitch to the opposite field. The Ottawa Citizen.


Completing this demographic survey is voluntary and should take approximately five minutes. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers. If you have any questions feel free to ask the researcher to clarify and feel free to include any additional information that you believe might further assist in better understanding the sport-career transition experiences of professional baseball players.

Identification Number

Demographic Information

Age

Current Employer
(Please list team name and league level if currently employed by Major League Baseball)

Race Ethnicity (Check)

☐ Caucasian ☐ Hispanic/Latino ☐ Native American
☐ African American ☐ Mixed Race ☐ Other

Marital Status (Check)

☐ Married ☐ Single ☐ Divorced
☐ Widowed ☐ Other

Level of Education (Please indicate highest level of education, you may choose from the box below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Junior College/Associates Degree</th>
<th>Bachelor’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>Doctoral/MD/JD</td>
<td>Certificate Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highest Level of Education (as listed above)

Number of years attended
Graduated yes/no

Degree Earned

Did you receive the MLB Scholarship Plan at the time of signing? (yes/no)
Are you Currently Eligible for the MLB Pension Plan? (yes/no)

Sport Background

How many years did you compete in your sport, please break down (i.e., elementary school 4 years)?

Elementary ___________ years
Middle School ___________ years
High School ___________ years
College ___________ years
Professional Minor Leagues ___________ years
Professional Major Leagues ___________ years
Independent Ball Leagues ___________ years

When were you drafted (i.e. after high school, after junior year of college, after completion of bachelors degree)?

What primary position do/did you play?

Do/did you attend school during your professional sport career? (yes/no)

If yes, what type of school?
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
PHASE ONE - OPEN ENDED

1. How do current and former professional baseball players prepare to make the sport career transition?

2. In what ways can preparation for retirement affect the player during and/or after their playing days?

3. How do athletes learn to cope with the sports career transition?

4. What resources and social supports do athletes have available to assist with the transition from professional baseball?

5. How does the attainment of educational advancement and alternative career skills affect the players' perception of transition?
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PHASE TWO – SEMI STRUCTURED

Situation:

1. What events or experiences motivated you to become a professional baseball player?

2. Did you have the option of a different career track or college path prior to becoming a professional baseball player? If so, what were your alternative options and tell me about your decision to play professional baseball.

3. What is a typical day as a professional baseball player like for you? Is your day similar to most professional baseball players?

Support:

4. What support systems are currently in your life? Who is your primary source of support?

5. What kinds of support (on and off the field) are provided to players by Major League Baseball?

6. At the time of transition, what resources are available for players to use from Major League Baseball?

7. What resources and techniques do you believe you need to utilize when transitioning from professional baseball? What resources and techniques have other players used?
Strategies:

8. When you first encounter a problem or a new situation, what is your first reaction? Then what?

9. When do you begin to prepare for life after professional baseball? When do you think most professional baseball players begin to prepare for life after professional baseball?

10. What do you think you will do after your career in professional baseball has ended to give your life meaning and satisfaction?

Self:

11. In what ways has your career in professional baseball contributed to your self-identity?

12. When do you feel you have the most control over your life?

13. When do you feel you have little to no control over your life?
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Professional Baseball Players Transition from the Sport

Project IRB Number: 2014-086 Lynn University 3601 N. Military Trail Boca Raton, FL 33431

I, Amy Moviel, am a doctoral student at Lynn University. I am studying Educational Leadership in the Ed.D. program. One of my degree requirements is to conduct a research study.

DIRECTIONS FOR THE PARTICIPANT

You are being asked to participate in this study. Please read this carefully. This form provides you with information about the study. The Principal Investigator, Amy Moviel, will answer all of your questions. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this study. You acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age, and that you do not have medical problems or language or educational barriers that precludes understanding of explanations contained in this authorization for voluntary consent.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY: The purpose of this study is to gather, examine, and elucidate the knowledge, beliefs, and actions of selected professional baseball players who have previously or will in the future transition from professional baseball. The research will allow the participants to voice their perception of their preparedness for transition from professional baseball and discuss the situational and contextual factors believed to impact the transition and their perception of preparedness. As stated in Creswell (2007), data “are collected from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. Often data collected in phenomenological studies consists of in-depth interviews and multiple interviews with participants...researchers interview from 5 to 25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 61). The participants will be selected from minor and major league teams operating within the United States. Data will come from one open-ended interview and one semi structured interview. This research
will be conducted in order to aggregate qualitative information on how professional baseball players perceive their preparedness for the transition out of professional baseball. The data will be used to contribute to the literature on transition from professional baseball and to propose possible recommendations to improve the athletes’ preparation for the transition.

PROCEDURES:

Interviews

The interview begins with mutual introduction of the researcher and participants followed by your response to demographic questions. In phase one of the study you will be asked to provide your insights to thirteen open-ended questions that are relevant to this study. The open-ended interview should take about 30 minutes to complete. Questions in the phase two interview protocol will be developed after phase one questioning is completed to further probe you based on the answers given during the phase one open ended questioning. Phase two questions should take about 45 minutes.

Audio Tapes

All interviews will be audiotaped. Audiotaping will allow the researcher to accurately document participants’ words during the interviews. It will also allow the researcher to study the content of the interviews at a later time during the study. The participants will not be anonymous to the researcher but names will be changed to preserve anonymity to others. Only the researcher will have access to the audiotapes. The researcher will listen to and transcribe all audiotapes verbatim.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

Participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to decline participation and/or withdraw from participation at any time during the research study. There will be no penalty for doing so.

Risks or Discomforts

Participants may experience some level of discomfort due to the sensitivity of the questions.

Benefits of the Study

This study will further the research and will help the baseball players in the transition from sport.

Compensation and Injury

There is no compensation or payment for participating in this study. Participation in this study is not expected to cause any physical or psychological injury.

Copy of Informed Consent
A signed and dated copy of the Informed Consent form will be given to each participant before the first interview. Participants may request a copy of the research findings upon completion of the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. Only the researcher Amy Moviel will know who you are. During the Interview you will be given a fictitious name. Data will be coded with that fictitious name.

Interview data, including the audio recordings will be coded so that there is no personally identifying information. They will be heard only for research purposes by the investigator, Amy Moviel and faculty advisor Dr. Kathleen Weigel. They will be transcribed and coded. At the end of the study, all audio-tapes will be destroyed in a responsible manner.

All the data gathered during this study, which were previously described, will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher. Data will be stored in password enabled locked files in the researchers computer and destroyed at the end of the research.

All information will be held in strict confidence and will not be disclosed unless required by law or regulation.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: You are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS/ACCESS TO CONSENT FORM: Any further questions you have about this study or your participation in it, either now or any time in the future, will be answered by Principal Investigator, Amy Moviel who may be reached at [contact information] and Dr. Kathleen Weigel, Faculty Advisor who can be reached at [contact information]. For any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may call Dr. Farideh Farazmand, Chair of the Lynn University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at [contact information]. If any problems arise as a result of your participation in this study, please call the Principal Investigator, Amy Moviel, and the faculty advisor, Dr. Kathleen Weigel, immediately.

A copy of this consent form will be given to you.

AUTHORIZATION FOR VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read and understand this consent form. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been assured that any future questions that may arise will be answered. I understand that all aspects of this project will be carried out in the strictest of confidence, and in a manner in which my rights as a human subject are protected. I have been informed of the risks and
benefits. I have been informed in advance as to what my task(s) will be and what procedures will be followed.

I voluntarily choose to participate. I know that I can withdraw this consent to participate at any time without penalty or prejudice. I understand that by signing this form I have not waived any of my legal rights. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form.

__________________________________________________________
Participant’s printed name

__________________________________________________________
Participant’s signature

__________________________________________________________
Date

I voluntarily agree for the interview to be audiotaped. I know that I can withdraw this consent to participate at any time without penalty or prejudice. I understand that by signing this form I have not waived any of my legal rights. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form.

__________________________________________________________
Participant’s printed name

__________________________________________________________
Participant’s signature

__________________________________________________________
Date

INVESTIGATOR’S AFFIDAVIT: I have carefully explained to the subject the nature of the above project. The person participating has represented to me that he/she is at least 18 years of age, and that he/she does not have a medical problem or language or educational barrier that precludes his/her understanding of my explanation. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who is signing this consent form
understands clearly the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation and his/her signature is legally valid.

__________________________________
Signature of the Investigator

__________________________________
Date of IRB Approval
APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

**Participant 1** is a 29 year-old white male. He was drafted in 2003 out of high school but made the choice to attend college. He played three seasons of college baseball and was then drafted in the fourth round of the 2006 Major League Baseball Draft. He has spent time in both the minor and the major leagues. He is currently signed to a one-year pitching contract in the major leagues. He has completed three years of college, he is currently not enrolled in college classes. He is married.

**Participant 2** is a 27 year-old white male. He was drafted in 2005 out of high school but choose to attend college. He played one season of college baseball and was then drafted in the fourth round of the 2006 Major League Draft. He was released from his contract with a major league affiliate in 2012. He played independent league baseball until he was acquired in 2014 by another major league affiliate. He ended the season prior to his interview as a player pitching in the major leagues. He has completed one year of college, he is currently not enrolled in college classes. He is single.

**Participant 3** is a 24 year-old white male. He was drafted out of high school in the second round of the 2009 Major League Draft. He spent the first two years of his career not playing due to an injury. He is currently playing Triple A baseball and is considered a top major league prospect for his organization holding a place on their forty man roster. He holds a high school degree and is currently not enrolled in college classes. He is single.
Participant 4 is a 26 year-old white male. He was drafted out of high school in 2007 in the thirty-fourth round but did not sign and in 2008 in the twenty-third round after his sophomore year of college but did not sign. He attended two years of junior college and one year at a four-year university. He signed as a free agent after his junior year of college out of a collegiate summer league. He is currently playing Double A baseball and has played in several major league games during spring training. He has completed three years of college; he is currently not enrolled in classes. He is single.

Participant 5 is a 47 year-old white male. He was drafted out of high school in the first round of the 1985 Major League Draft. He played eight years in the minor leagues before deciding that he was not going to go back for his ninth season of spring training. He is currently employed as the president of a general air and plumbing business in his hometown. He has taken some college classes but is not a degree-seeking student at this time. He is married.

Participant 6 is a 32 year-old white male. He was drafted after his freshman year of junior college in the thirty-sixth round of the 2003 Major League Draft. He played five years in the minor leagues before his release in 2007. He is currently employed as the Director of Operations for a full service security and event related company operating within close proximity of his hometown. He is married.

Participant 7 is a 24 year-old white male. He was drafted after completing college earning both his bachelors and masters degree. He was drafted in the twenty-ninth round of the 2014 Major League Baseball draft. He is currently in process of obtaining employment with Major League Baseball Europe.
Participant 8 is a 28 year white male. He was drafted after his junior year of college in the ninth round of the 2008 Major League Baseball draft. He spent time on the forty-man roster with a major league team before he was released. He played several years of independent baseball. He is now living in Florida and gives private baseball lessons to youth in the Tampa Bay area.