

Public Abstract

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Title:EXPLORING THE LIVED PSYCHOSOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF ELITE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE (NFL) PLAYERS

The purpose of this study was to explore the psychosocial experiences of elite NFL players. Many athletes dreamed and prepared to make it to the NFL as a starter, and to participate in the Pro Bowl or Super Bowl. Only a very few succeed. For these athletes, their process of preparation and performance delivery, has worked. This study was interested in exploring what were the key factors beyond talent and beyond physical/technical training that impacted their achieving success, and becoming a starter and making it to the Pro Bowl/ Super Bowl. What was it that these athletes thought or did, at the Point of Attack, when the ball was snapped?

Three elite NFL professional football players participated in this qualitative study with a narrative research design. The narratives collected from the three players provided rich and intimate personal stories related to each of their lived experiences.

Specifically, the intent of this study was to explore the personal experiences of these athletes, their thoughts, motivations, and intentions, at the Point of Attack, when the ball was snapped, to begin each play. The study also sought to identify evidence in the athletes' lived experiences that reflected the principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and the Flourish (PERMA) model. This study also explored the importance of team chemistry as an influence in these athletes' experience.

But, the primary focus of the study was what was happening in their psychosocial experience at the Point of Attack. And, what was found was profound. These athletes reported their thinking at the moment, at the Point of Attack, was "It's all about me right now!" and "I play for the name on my back!" Foundations and backgrounds for these understandings were uncovered. Implications for coach's education and field application were presented.

There was substantial evidence from the athletes' reports and multiple described experiences that would represent the key components of SDT: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. There were several instances that would represent the key components of Flourish through the PERMA model (Positive emotions, Engagement, positive Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement). Also, reported and described were multiple experiences that would represent the importance of team chemistry achieved through team cohesion and team environment. These athletes reported, "It's all about me right now!" and "I play for the name on my back!"