Emotional Intelligence Methods Utilized by Successful Major League Baseball Closers to Perform Successfully in High Pressure Situations

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Emotional Intelligence Methods Utilized by Successful Major League Baseball Closers to Perform Successfully in High Pressure Situations

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I consider myself a passionate educator and sports fanatic. I was fortunate to meet the right people who were able to help me marry these passions into a career where I am able to educate student athletes both amateurs and professionals. As leader of an education program for an MLB team, I began learning from experienced coaches and mental skills trainers. I grew fascinated by their teachings. I studied their work and was often called upon to use my Spanish skills to translate their teachings to our Latino players. I realized in order to teach mental skills to professional athletes I must become an expert, not only academically but physically. During my doctoral studies I began to expand my distance running and completed a marathon, giving me an in depth look into the physical and mental dedication and sacrifice needed to be an world class athlete. At the same time, I was researching and teaching emotional intelligence and sports psychology.

As an education department we began teaching our professional student athletes emotional intelligence skills to help them become successful both on and off the field. I became fascinated with the correlation I could see between emotional intelligence and our most successful athletes on the baseball field. I began researching the topic and found that others had also been interested in the correlation and was excited to find academic studies which verified the relationship. Finding quantitative research that highlighted the relationship between emotional intelligence and sports performance was exciting however I still did not understand exactly what successful athletes were doing to be successful. To me it wasn’t enough to recognize a correlation between emotional intelligence scores and success on the field, I needed to understand exactly what superior athletes were doing to utilize their emotions to be successful. Further, I recognized my
unique situation given my personal connections within the business of Major League Baseball, having access to all-time great closers who had performed well under pressure.

As I pursued the best closers to participate in the study, I was excited and amazed by the willingness of some of the all-time great closers to contribute. The closers were humble, honest, and forthright. They happily discussed their routines, sacrifices, struggles, and successes. They were articulate and insightful. As a baseball fan and professional, it was both a thrill and an honor to dive deep into the mechanics of what made these athletes fantastic in their execution, performing in some of the most pressure filled situations in sports. I am grateful to them for participating and the excellent group we were able to put together. It has long been my dream to contribute a lasting positive impact on sports, especially baseball. I hope, that through this study, I was able to help current and future athletes become more successful both on and off the field. Similarly, it is my belief that this research will not only help athletes, but anyone who desires to perform better in high pressure situations.

I thank my soon to be wife and step son for their love and support. They displayed patience, support, love, tough love, and understanding of my desire to accomplish this dream. I thank my family for their belief in me and the high expectations they not only set, but for giving me the tools to reach such lofty goals. I am blessed with parents and siblings who push me to maximize the tools I was given in life. I want to thank my closest friends for their encouragement. This study would not have begun nor been completed without the club, coaches, front office, trainers, and of course our student athletes. A huge thank you to the closers for their participation. After learning from them, it is obvious why they were so successful and would have been regardless of the
profession they chose. Finally, I thank my fellow doctoral students and professors for their enthusiasm, insights, and patience.

I thank my doctoral dissertation committee. This committee encouraged me to shoot for the stars, as I attempted to interview an incredible sample of all-time great baseball players. Their guidance, feedback, encouragement, and support were crucial to my success. Dr. Phil Pendley deserves my tremendous gratitude for believing in me and sharing the enjoyment of the process. His passion for students, learning, and sports helped push this study into existence. Dr. Walt Buster was not only a committee member but my cohort mentor. Dr. Buster was there for me from day one, through the thick and the thin of my doctorate and I am honored to complete this journey with him by my side. Finally, Dr. Greenberg provided incredible energy and excitement, encouraging me to pursue a study so closely intertwined with my passions. My committee was the heart of my batting order and are all Hall of Famers in my book.
ABSTRACT

Emotional Intelligence Methods Utilized by Successful Major League Baseball Closers to Perform Successfully in High Pressure Situations

by Joshua Rosenthal

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the similarities that exist in the descriptions of emotional intelligence methods utilized by retired successful Major League Baseball closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in high pressure situations.

Methodology: The dissertation was a qualitative case study. Twelve of the top 50 retired save leaders in Major League Baseball were interviewed to understand the similarities in the descriptions of emotional intelligence methods used to perform successfully in high pressure situations. This study attempted to understand what exactly elite closers did to utilize emotional intelligence to perform in high pressure situations.

Findings: A total of eight common themes emerged from this study. At least two-thirds of all closers interviewed identified that laser focus on the moment and a short-term memory for emotional regulation, adrenaline utilization of emotions, reflection to appraise emotions, remaining even keeled for emotional regulation, preparation for emotional control, playing for teammates for utilization of emotions, breath for emotional control, and celebration for emotional expression as emotional intelligence methods utilized to perform successfully in high pressure situations.

Conclusions: Eight conclusions were derived from the study’s findings. Successful closers had an honest and regular appraisal routine. The closers celebrated in some form to express their emotions. The closers maintained detailed focus on the moment with a short-term memory. The closers utilized breath to regulate their emotions. The all-time
great closers developed world class preparation and work ethic to prepare themselves for their performances. In order to utilize their emotions, closers used their adrenaline to their advantage and used their teammates as a primary motivation for preparation and performance.

**Recommendations:** High pressure performers must develop routines that include the eight primary strategies used by the elite closers. Though each individual will address the eight routines differently, it is important for those who desire high performance in HPS to develop and maintain these strategies.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Everyone experiences high pressure situations (HPS). The causes of the HPS and how one performs in this pressure varies differently from person to person. HPS can arise in all stages of one’s professional life, often starting with public speaking assignments in elementary school and high stakes exams in high school and college. After school, job interviews create high pressure, as do important presentations and meetings with upper management. How one performs in these situations can dictate his or her success in a profession and how much success one can have in life. Professional athletes experience HPS and their performance in these situations will dictate their success in the sport. Individuals often view HPS as the most important moments in their lives. Individuals more often perform worse in HPS than they do in normal situations, thus adversely affecting their performance and success when they need it the most (Baumeister & Showers, 1986; Mesagno & Bechmann, 2017; T. Murayama & Sekiya, 2015; Toma, 2017).

Sports is a unique industry where using data analysis can compare performance in normal situations and HPS. Toma’s (2017) study revealed that professional basketball players in the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) historically performed significantly worse in HPS. In her study, Toma compared the controlled situation of free throws percentages during high pressure and non-HPS. Toma described HPS as free throws that took place in the final 30 seconds of games where the shooter’s team was leading by one point, tied, or down by one or two points. At the professional level, both leagues’ players’ free throw percentages dropped 3.11% and 5.8% points respectively. The phenomenon of choking
under pressure (CUP) is so common that the term is used in peer reviewed studies. When humans choke under pressure, they have the emotional response of increased anxiety which results in either distraction from the task at hand or a self-focus where individual movements and actions are over analyzed (Baumeister & Showers, 1986; Hill, Carvell, Matthews, Weston, & Thelwell, 2017; Mesagno & Bechmann, 2017; Sattizahn, Moser, & Beilock, 2016).

In 1990, Salovey and Mayer published the first study on emotional intelligence (EI). In their study, they described how one’s ability to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize one’s emotions has a profound effect on his or her success in life. D. Goleman’s works in 1995 and 1998 brought the concept of EI to the mainstream. Since, other studies have proven a positive correlation between EI scores and success in business (Davar & Singh, 2014). More recently, studies have proven a correlation between EI and success in sports. Those who are able to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions are able to avoid CUP and reach peak performance levels in HPS (Campo, Laborde, & Mosley, 2016; Crombie, Lombard, & Noakes, 2009; Masters, 2012; B. B. Meyer & Fletcher, 2007; Perlini & Halverson, 2006; Zizzi, Deaner, & Hirschhorn, 2003).

In baseball, the primary responsibility of Major League Baseball (MLB) closers is to perform successfully in exclusively HPS. These situations occur at the end games when the score is close, meaning within three runs. A qualitative study of some of the most successful players in this group can improve understanding of the specific EI methods used to help athletes perform successfully under pressure. HPS will not only help athletes perform in HPS but all those in other fields who are in HPS.
Background

Human success is often dictated by performance when stakes are the highest. The ability to have a difficult discussion with a significant other, when tensions are high will affect the success of the relationship. A business professional’s ability to perform well in a high-stakes presentation or meeting with a boss affects his or her trajectory with the business. Similarly, an athlete’s ability to perform in a championship game or the final inning of a baseball game will directly affect the sports professional’s success and career.

Studies on sport performance in HPS argue that athletes tend to underperform in HPS (T. Murayama & Sekiya, 2015; Sattizahn et al., 2016; Toma, 2017). Researchers suggested that athletes often underperformed when the stakes were the highest. The phenomenon is referred to as “choking under pressure.” Athletes are a rare population whose performances in HPS can be recorded, viewed and analyzed. Understanding the strategies highly successful athletes use to help them perform well in HPS would be extremely helpful to those who struggle with this.

Professional sports provide a relevant medium for studying the phenomenon of performance under pressure because statistical average results under normal pressure can be compared to statistical performance averages in HPS. S. Laborde, Gullien, and Watson, (2016b) explained the plight of athletes in which they consistently cope with stresses including intense training, competition and their need to understand and regulate their emotions. Recent research indicated that EI has a direct impact on sport performance, however more research must be done to identify more specifically how EI correlates with sport performance in HPS (Zizzi et al., 2003).
Choking Under Pressure in Sports

CUP has been proven in recent studies to occur consistently in the realm of sports. CUP has been studied as the phenomenon in which people underperform when the pressure to perform is high (Mesagno & Beckmann, 2017; Morgulev & Galily, 2018; T. Murayama & Sekiya, 2015; Sattizahn et al., 2016; Toma 2017). Toma (2017) studied the free throw percentage results of the WNBA players and of the NBA players. Toma chose to analyze free throws due to the controlled environment of the free throw. Physical conditions did not change and thus the difficulty of free throws conceivably should only be altered by internal or emotional factors due to the HPS. The researcher discovered that amongst 755,523 free throws observed in the WNBA and NBA, their percentages dropped 5.8% and 3.11% points respectively in HPS. Toma described HPS as free throws that took place in the final 30 seconds of games where the shooter’s team was leading by one point, tied, or down by one or two points. “CUP is a major concern for athletes, coaches and sport psychologists because athletes fail to meet self-imposed performance expectations in critical situations (when it counts most), which is devastating and embarrassing” (Mesagno & Beckmann, 2017, p. 1).

Causes for Choking Under Pressure

Mesagno and Bechmann (2017) attributed much of the decreased performance in HPS to anxiety. The anxiety experienced creates one of two usual reactions, self-presentation or distraction. Their research revealed that when people are under high pressure to perform, they become concerned with how other people perceive their actions. This self-focus causes the performer to over analyze each individual movement which is unlike the method they use during optimal performance. An example of self-
focus is an athlete’s focus on his or her physical mechanics like arm placement and foot position as opposed to focusing on the competition and breathing. The other frequent reaction is distraction (Hill et al., 2017). Distraction occurs when an athlete in a HPS focuses on other items than the task at hand. Several examples include the audience, coaches, or how the athlete’s performance will be perceived by his or her peers.

In addition to anxiety, T. Murayama and Sekiya (2015) related their findings for the causes of athletes to CUP to a decrease in self efficacy, changes in perception, and changes in attention. T. Murayama, Sekiya, and Tanaka (2010) conducted a questionnaire survey and found the top seven factors leading to CUP to be:

- Negative thoughts/feelings
- Motor control changes
- Increased physiological arousal
- Communication failure
- Nervous personality
- Pre-competition condition
- Abnormal somatic sensation

Several of these factors identified, including anxiety were associated with the athlete’s emotions and his or her ability to control those emotions.

**Emotional Intelligence**

In 1990, Salovey and Mayer published their work on EI, defining it as “the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feeling and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (p. 189). Salovey and Mayer further described EI as the process of “appraisal and expression of emotion” (p. 191) and
the “regulation and utilization of emotions” (p. 195). Salovey and Mayer’s work on the appraisal and expression, regulation, and utilization of emotions led researchers to uncover the power of EI when utilized in various facets of life.

**Emotional Intelligence Brought to Mainstream Public**

In D. Goleman’s (1995) work concerning EI took the concepts developed by Salovey and Mayer to the mainstream public with his book entitled *Emotional Intelligence*. D. Goleman separated EI into what he called the five critical pillars or competencies of EI. The five competencies are:

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Self-motivation
- Empathy or social awareness
- Emotional stability

D. Goleman’s original work focused on introducing EI and the science behind the theory. In 1998, D. Goleman released a book entitled *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, which broke down the five competencies into two subgroups. The first subgroup: Personal Competence included the areas of (a) self-awareness, (b) self-regulation, and (c) self-motivation. The second subgroup, Social Competence consisted of empathy and social skills. D. Goleman explained that the Emotional Intelligence Inquiry (EQ-i) scores or what he dubbed EQ, was more indicative of future success than the more popular Intelligence Quotient, also known as IQ.
Emotional Intelligence Success Predictor

Several studies have linked EI to professional success in the business sector (Davar & Singh, 2014; D. Goleman, 1998). In addition, B. B. Meyer and Zizzi (2007) explained that most of the early research on EIs impact on performance was conducted in the corporate and health care sectors. B. B. Meyer and Zizzi listed many studies that proved EI correlates strongly with workplace coping strategies, collaboration and conflict resolution, work performance and employee health, well-being, as well as healthy attitudes towards exercise, alcohol and tobacco. B. B. Mayer and Zizzi also insisted that skills listed above parallel important and healthy qualities of those who succeed in athletics. Many of the same qualities needed to be a successful teammate and individual performer are the same which make a successful nurse or corporate vice president.

Emotional Intelligence in Sports

In 2002, Botterill and Brown affirmed that athletes tend to simply experience their emotional responses and do not pause to reflect on those emotions critically or constructively. The ability to reflect and critique one’s emotions or as explained by Mayer and Salovey (1997), perceive, utilize, understand and manage emotions is equivalent to the concept of EI. Numerous studies explained that top athletic performance requires more than natural athletic ability.

Campo, Labadore, Mosley, (2016) claimed that in sports EI has been found to have a major impact on many aspects of sports performance. Further, Masters (2012) explained that emotional control as well as various stressors athletes face, have the potential to impair athletes’ ability to reach and/or maintain optimal performance. B. B. Meyer and Fletcher (2007) supported that player development and on field performance
are greatly impacted by emotions. They further explained that emotional control and peak emotional experiences may influence factors relevant to sports, listing motivation and anxiety as factors, among others.

**Emotional Intelligence Sports Studies**

Crombie, Lombrad, and Noakes (2009) explained “the task of being an elite professional athlete requires the effective management of stress, tolerance of frustration, regulation of mood, and exercise of emotional restraint” (p. 210). Starkes and Ericsson (2003) asserted that there are few undertakings in which people dedicate so much time, effort, energy, and resources with the goal to be the absolute best they can be, sports are among those endeavors. Crombie et al. continued to explain that sports performance cannot rely solely upon the physical abilities necessary to compete as countless examples of the most skilled or highly trained “athletes and teams often fail to deliver high-performance results. Adding to the importance of this line of enquiry is the fact that sporting tasks typically occur in competition settings that are, by definition, high-pressure” (p. 209).

Crombie et al. (2009) conducted a study of six professional cricket teams in South Africa to discover if their assertion that high EI scores compared to their competition would result in greater team success on the cricket pitch. Their research revealed that a significant positive relationship existed between cricket team performance and EI. A similar study had comparable results. Perlini and Halverson (2006) found a significant correlation between National Hockey League (NHL) games played by players and high EI scores. Perlini and Halverson explained that being an elite professional athlete demands that the athlete effectively manage stress, failure, emotional ups and downs all
in the public eye. Despite this assertion and positive correlation in some areas, their research was not conclusive as their study failed to reveal a positive relationship between EQ-i scores and individual, on-ice performance. A similar research study had comparable results.

**Emotional Intelligence and Baseball**

In 2003, Zizzi, Deaner, and Hirschhorn conducted a study which found a statistically significant correlation between EQ and performance on the baseball field amongst collegiate pitchers. The researchers found a variance for pitching performance ranging from 7% to 23% and elaborated that though this variance may be small, it may also be significant “as the competitive level of sport increases, the disparity in physical skills between competitors diminishes thereby increasing the potential importance of mental skills in determining performance outcomes” (Zizzi et al., 2003, p. 267). Therefore, although the impact of EQ on sport performance may be small, it may also have a high impact on performance and results at the highest levels of competition. Pitchers must analyze information and make decisions about their next pitch, giving them time to either control and utilize their emotions or not. Zizzi et al. recommended further exploration of the correlation between EQ and success on the baseball field, which this study intends to explore.

It is logical that pitchers would be affected by EI more so than hitters. Pitchers specifically pitch under controlled conditions. The distance from the pitching rubber to home plate is always the same. The strike zone is reasonably the same or highly similar, taking into account human error. The pitcher is in control of the pace of the game, the different pitches he chooses to throw and the location of those pitches. These selections
are made by understanding the results of previous pitches, pitcher preferences, strengths and weaknesses of both the pitcher and hitter and the emotional response from both parties to pitches thrown. On the contrary, a hitter must react to the pitches being thrown in split seconds. This reaction is quite different from the pitcher who has time to analyze the previous pitch, and make calculated decisions based on the knowledge and emotion gained. This significant discrepancy offers a theory on why EI may affect pitchers differently than hitters within the game of baseball.

This need for high EI is magnified when considering closers. The job of the MLB closer is to pitch only in HPS meaning the last inning of close games. More specifically, closers pitch exclusively in the final inning of games in which the score is within three runs. Successful closers have proven that they can control their emotions to handle the pressure of pitching in this situation, while those who cannot lose this job. More information is needed on the EI methods used by MLB closers who consistently perform successfully in HPS.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Human beings find themselves in HPS regularly. HPS happen in social situations with family and friends, in professional relationships with colleagues and associates as well as in athletics on a golf course or baseball field. How people respond to HPS determines their success in their relationships, work life, and in sport. The most common human reaction to HPS was explained by the seminal study conducted by Baumeister and Showers in 1986. This study defined the term CUP as a paradoxical performance in which inferior performance occurs despite the incentives for superior performance.
CUP occurs due to an emotional response of anxiety that happens during HPS (T. Murayama & Sekiya, 2015). The anxiety experienced creates one of two usual reactions, self-presentation or distraction. Mesagno and Beckmann (2017) revealed that when people are under high pressure to perform, they become concerned with how other people perceive their actions. This self-focus causes the performer to over analyze each individual movement which is unlike the method they use during optimal performance. An example of self-focus is an athlete’s focus on his or her physical mechanics like arm placement and foot position as opposed to focusing on competition and breathe. The other frequent reaction is distraction (Hill et al., 2017). Distraction occurs when an athlete in a HPS focuses on other items than the task at hand. Several examples include the audience, coaches, or how the athlete’s performance will be perceived by his or her peers.

In order to perform successfully in HPS, athletes must learn to control their emotions. B. B. Meyer and Fletcher (2007) explained that “Emotions play an integral part in the development and performance of athletes and teams” (p. 1). They further explained that emotional control and peak emotional experiences may influence factors relevant to sports, listing motivation and anxiety as factors, among others. Studies have revealed that EI scores have a positive relationship with athletic performance (Crombie et al., 2009; Perlini & Halverson, 2006; Zizzi et al., 2003). EI was originally defined by Mayer and Salovey (1990) as one’s ability to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions. Zizzi et al. (2003) conducted a study which demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between EI scores and pitching performance at the university.
level. Though the correlation was revealed, the specific strategies utilized by the more successful pitchers was not.

Not all athletes choke under pressure. Many of the greatest athletes and champions in modern history can attribute much of their success to performing well under pressure. Tom Brady has a reputation for winning big games (McKenna, 2018). Michael Jordan was legendary for making game-ending baskets (Long, 2019) and in 2019, Mariano Rivera was selected as the first ever, unanimous first ballot selection to the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame (Kepner, 2019). Mariano Rivera’s position in baseball was the closer. The closer’s primary job responsibility is to pitch in the final inning of a game in which his team is leading by three or less runs. This situation constitutes a close game and thus a HPS. Closers retain their job if they are able to successfully perform under pressure, saving the games, and lose their jobs if they cannot. Rivera finished his career with 651 saves; just 51 closers have over 200 saves all time. So, what makes closers special from their competition? What do the best closers do to perform successfully where most humans choke under pressure? If people better understood how closers perform under these conditions, couldn’t they apply these strategies to their own lives and HPS?

Data shows that those who can appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions are more successful (Davar & Singh, 2014; D. Goleman, 1998; J. D. Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Quantitative studies have made up the bulk of this research, proving that the correlations do exist. Qualitative studies on CUP exist and have helped people better understand the emotional reactions to HPS (Hill et al., 2007). More focused qualitative studies on aspects of EI, like motivation for athletes, have helped bring knowledge to this
subject (Keegan et al., 2014) however there is a lack of qualitative information in regard to understanding how EI methods have helped those who consistently thrive in HPS.

Human beings find themselves in HPS regularly. HPS happen in social situations with family and friends, in professional relationships with colleagues and associates as well as in athletics on a golf course or baseball field. How people respond to HPS determines their success in relationships, work life, and in sports. The most common human reaction to HPS was explained by the seminal study conducted by Baumeister and Showers in 1986. This study defined the term CUP as a paradoxical performance in which inferior performance occurs despite the incentives for superior performance.

CUP occurs due to an emotional response of anxiety that happens during HPS (T. Murayama & Sekiya, 2015). The anxiety experienced creates one of two usual reactions, self-presentation or distraction. Mesagno and Beckmann (2017) revealed that when people are under high pressure to perform, they become concerned with how other people perceive their actions. This self-focus causes the performer to over analyze each individual movement which is unlike the method they use during optimal performance. An example of self-focus is an athlete’s focus on his or her physical mechanics like arm placement and foot position as opposed to focusing on competition and breathe. The other frequent reaction is distraction (Hill et al., 2017). Distraction occurs when an athlete in a HPS focuses on other items than the task at hand. Several examples include the audience, coaches or how the athlete’s performance will be perceived by his or her peers.

In order to perform successfully in HPS, athletes must learn to control their emotions. B. B. Meyer and Fletcher (2007) explained that “emotions play an integral
part in the development and performance of athletes and teams” (p. 1). They further explained that emotional control and peak emotional experiences may influence factors relevant to sports, listing motivation and anxiety as factors, among others. Studies have revealed that EI scores have a positive relationship with athletic performance (Crombie et al., 2009; Perlini & Halverson, 2006; Zizzi et al., 2003). EI was originally defined by Mayer and Salovey (1990) as one’s ability to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions. Zizzi et al. (2003) conducted a study which demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between EI scores and pitching performance at the university level. Though the correlation was revealed, the specific strategies utilized by the more successful pitchers was not.

Not all athletes choke under pressure. Many of the greatest athletes and champions in modern history can attribute much of their success to performing well under pressure. Tom Brady (McKenna, 2018) has a reputation for winning big games. Michael Jordan was legendary for making game-ending baskets (NBA.com, 2011) and in 2019, Mariano Rivera was selected as the first ever, unanimous first ballot selection to the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame (Kepner, 2019). Mariano Rivera’s position in baseball was the closer. The closer’s primary job responsibility is to pitch in the final inning of a game in which his team is leading by three or less runs. This situation constitutes a close game and thus a HPS. Closers retain their job if they are able to successfully perform under pressure, saving the games, and lose their jobs if they cannot. Rivera finished his career with 651 saves, just 51 closers have over 200 saves all time. So, what makes closers special from their competition? What do the best closers do to perform successfully where most humans CUP? If people better understood how closers
perform under these conditions, couldn’t they apply these strategies to their own lives and HPS?

Data shows that those who can appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions are more successful (Davar & Singh, 2014; D. Goleman, 1998; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Quantitative studies have made up the bulk of this research, proving that the correlations do exist. Qualitative studies on CUP exist and have helped people better understand the emotional reactions to HPS (Hill et al., 2007). More focused studies on aspects of EI like motivation for athletes have helped bring knowledge to this subject (Keegan et al., 2014); however, there is a lack of qualitative information in regard to understanding how EI methods have helped those who consistently thrive in HPS.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand and describe the perceived similarities among the emotional intelligence methods utilized by successful retired Major League Baseball closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in high pressure situations.

**Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to appraise their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
2. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to express their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
3. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to regulate their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

4. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to utilize their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

5. What similarities exist in the descriptions by retired Major League Baseball closers regarding the appraisal of emotions, expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, and utilization of emotions in high pressure situations?

Significance of the Problem

One’s ability to perform under high pressure can be a difference maker in success or failure. The phenomenon of under-performance in HPS has been called CUP by academics. HPS arise when people have a more than normal burden or incentive to succeed. The most common human response to this environment or situation is an increase in anxiety followed by distraction or self-monitoring. Underperforming in life’s biggest moments has damaging results for all who lack consistent performance under pressure. Sports, due to the statistical evaluation of the games is a field of study in which results can be compared between high pressure situational performance and normal-pressure situational performance. Athletes, on average, CUP (Baumeister & Showers, 1986; Hill et al., 2017; Mesagno & Beckmann, 2017; Morgulev & Galily, 2018; T. Murayama et al., 2010; T. Murayama & Sekiya, 2015; Sattizahn et al., 2016; Toma, 2017). Successful careers depend on an athlete’s ability to conquer that tendency.
Studies have linked EI to success in various facets of life and business (Goldberg, Matheson, & Mantler, 2006; D. Goleman, 1998; O’Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011; Van Rooy, Viswesvaran, & Pluta, 2005). Major publications and studies have defined EI in different ways (D. Goleman, 1995; D. Goleman, 1998; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 2007); however the introductory study by Mayer and Salovey (1997) on EI provided an accepted foundation which divided the skill into four basic parts: (a) the ability to appraise, (b) express, (c) regulate, and (d) utilize emotions.

The effect of EI on sport performance has been examined and positive relationships between EQ tests and sports performance exist (Campo et al., 2016; Crombie, 2009; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Perlini & Halverson, 2006; Zizzi et al., 2003).

In 2003, Zizzi et al. found a positive statistical significance in pitching performance at the university level and EI scores. Though the average sports performance decreases in HPS, not all athletes CUP. Athletes, like closers in MLB make careers out of performing successfully in HPS. A MLB closer’s primary job responsibility is to finish a game with a win by pitching in the final inning of a game within three runs. This situation is always a HPS. When a pitcher successfully finishes a game with a win in this situation, he is awarded a statistical reward called a save. Fifty-one closers have over 200 saves at the MLB level (Baseball Reference, n.d.). How do these athletes consistently succeed under pressure when most athletes fail?

Like Zizzi et al.’s (2003) study, most of the research on the relationship between EI and sport performance has been quantitative, proving a relationship exists. Zizzi et al.’s research explains that EI has a positive relationship to pitching however it does not specifically explain what EI strategies are utilized to be successful. Their study
recommended more research to discover specifically how athletes experience and use emotions effectively in specific performance situations. Cormbie et al. (2009) suggested further research into the role of EI and sports at the individual level. Baumeister and Showers (1986), who first introduced CUP have expressed the need for increased knowledge in understanding how some people reliably perform at their best under pressure.

This study will discover what successful MLB closers actually do to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to consistently execute successfully in HPS. The findings from this research will provide strategies from experts to help improve the performance of any one executing in a HPS. The knowledge gained will be helpful to various athletes who desire to perform successfully under pressure. Professional teams in MLB, the National Football League, the NBA, the NHL and Major League Soccer are several of the professional leagues in the United States of America that will benefit from the findings of this study. College athletic teams and student athletes will also benefit from the study. In addition, students who take high stakes tests, business professionals who present projects, and negotiate high pressure deals will benefit from the techniques found in the research.

People in other walks of life can learn to apply the same strategies to be more successful when it means the most. Identifying techniques used by those who consistently perform successfully in HPS should help not only athletes but all human performance. This knowledge will not only help the athlete hoping to score with the game on the line, it will also assist the small business entrepreneur to deliver a successful pitch to an angel investor, as well as improve a student’s ability to take a high stakes
exam or a young mother’s capacity to educate her teenager on practicing safe sex. The possibilities and applications of this knowledge are endless.

**Definitions**

For the purpose of this study the following definitions will be used:

*Appraise.* One’s ability to accurately assess, evaluate, judge, or perceive emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

*Elite.* Representing the most choice or select; best (dictionarry.com, 2020).

*Elite Focus.* Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined that emotionally intelligent individuals reprioritize the demands on their attention and allocate their available mental resources, accordingly, increasing success on the task that is most important. In this study, elite focus will be considered dedicating one’s attention and mental resources to the task at hand at a high level.

*Emotional Intelligence.* “The ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189).

*Express.* One’s ability either verbally or nonverbally show emotions (dictionary.com, 2019a).

*High Pressure Situations.* A phenomenon in which individuals faced with a HPS do not perform as well as would be expected were they performing under normal conditions (Toma, 2017).

*MLB Closer.* A closer is often considered the best relief pitcher that a club has in its bullpen. Closers are most often deployed for the final inning of a game when a narrow lead -- three runs or less -- needs to be protected. Closers almost always excel against
both right- and left-handed batters and are more often than not capable of striking out batters at high rates. Most closers are right-handed, although there are typically a few left-handed closers in baseball each season (Major League Baseball [MLB], 2019).

Regulate. One’s ability to control emotions (Dictionary.com, 2019b).

Utilize. One’s ability to put to use their emotions (Dictionary.com, 2019c).

Save. A save is awarded to the relief pitcher who finishes a game for the winning team, under certain circumstances. A pitcher cannot receive a save and a win in the same game. A relief pitcher recording a save must preserve his team's lead while doing one of the following: (a) enter the game with a lead of no more than three runs; (b) enter the game with the tying run in the on-deck circle, at the plate, or on the bases; (c) pitch at least one inning (MLB, 2019).

Successful Closers. Top 50 of all time in total saves or having received Cy Young Award (Most Outstanding Pitcher Award for MLB) or Most Valuable Player (for MLB) votes for an exceptional season.

Delimitations

The study was delimitated to include retired MLB closers as of the time of the study: the 2018 championship season. The study includes only retired closers in the top 50 of all time total saves, all having 200 saves or more.

Organization of the Study

The study is presented in five chapters and includes an appendix and references. Chapter I includes a historical background, problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, significance of the study, definitions, and delimitations of the study. Chapter II provides a thorough review of the current literature pertinent to the study,
focusing on HPS, EI and its impact on performance. Chapter III explains the details of the qualitative study. Chapter IV explains the research, data collection and findings. Finally, Chapter V presents conclusions and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the similarities that exist in the descriptions of EI methods used by retired successful MLB closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in HPS. In this literature review, studies were explored to distinguish how some humans thrive in HPS while most tend to CUP. This chapter examined how the phenomenon of CUP can be observed and recorded within the construct of sports. The literature cited studies that compared athletic performances under normal conditions with performances in HPS. The chapter then explored why athletes CUP and what they can do to perform better under pressure and how this information can be transferred to other areas of performance in life.

Research has pointed to EI as a possible factor in performing successfully in sport. The physical connection between EI and the body was explored. The EI effect on success rates in various fields was explored. The concept of EI was produced in 1990 by Salovey and Mayer, whose work provided the theoretical framework for this study. Researchers have evaluated EI and found statistically significant correlations linking EI scores to success in sports. Zizzi et al. (2003), conducted a study on baseball players which found a positive relationship between pitching performance and scores on an EI assessment.

Choking Under Pressure

Failure to Perform in High Pressure Situations

Studies on sport performance in HPS argue that athletes more often underperform when the stakes are the highest. Athletes are a rare population whose performances in
HPS can be recorded, viewed and analyzed. Toma (2017) referred to the phenomenon as CUP, as when athletes or individuals fail to perform at their expected levels in HPS, as they would were they to be performing under normal circumstances.

**Choking Under Pressure in Sports**

Professional sports provide an excellent medium for studying the phenomenon of CUP because statistical performance averages under normal pressure can be compared to statistical performance averages in HPS. S. Laborde, Dossville, and Allen (2016a) explained the plight of athletes in which they “are required to consistently cope with the stress of hard training and competitive pressure, and this includes understanding and regulating their emotions and those of other individuals (e.g., teammates, opponents, coaches, referees, and spectators)” (p. 862). Recent research indicated that EI has a direct impact on sport performance, however more research must be done to identify if EI correlates with sport performance in HPS (Zizzi et al., 2003).

CUP has been proven in recent studies to occur consistently in the realm of sports. Toma (2017) studied the free throw percentage results of the WNBA players, of the NBA players, the National Collegiate Basketball Association (NCAA) men and NCAA women, over the 2003-2013 seasons. Over two million shots were evaluated in the study. Toma chose to analyze free throws due to the controlled environment of the free throw. Physical conditions did not change and thus the difficulty of free throws conceivably should only be altered by internal or emotional factors due to the HPS. Toma described HPS as free throws that took place in the final 30 seconds of games where the shooter’s team was leading by one point, tied, or down by one or two points. The researcher discovered that amongst 755,523 free throws observed in the WNBA and NBA, free
throw percentage dropped 5.8% and 3.11% points respectively in HPS. NCAA women and men shot 1,363,972 free throws from 2003-2013, with free throw percentages dropping 2.25% and 2.09% points, respectively. The difference between free throw percentages in normal situations compared to free throws shot in HPS is statistically significant.

Cao, Price, and Stone (2011) conducted a similar study on NBA free throw data from 2002-2010. In the study the researchers focused on free throws and the impact of pressure on players’ free throw making percentage. The study conducted, examined different scenarios that may affect free throw success. For example, the researchers found a drop of around 4% for shooters when their team is down by one or two points in the final minute of a game. This drop magnifies to 6.3% and 8.8% worse when the team is down one, or two points, respectively, in the final 15 seconds of a game. Choking affects shooter performance even greater when the shooter is a below average shooter and shooting in an HPS. Finally, the research found that shooting performance increases or declines from one shot to the next if a shooter makes or misses the first of two free throws, respectively in an HPS. Performance was unaffected when the score was tied. “CUP is a major concern for athletes, coaches and sport psychologists because athletes fail to meet self-imposed performance expectations in critical situations (when it counts most), which is devastating and embarrassing” (Mesagno & Beckmann, 2017, p. 170).

Similar results have been found in CUP for golfers. Wells and Skowronski (2012) conducted a study that analyzed the data from 28 years of golf results on the Professional Golf Association Tour, the top professional golf tour in the world. Their research revealed that golfers historically scored significantly worse on the fourth or final
round of a golf tournament. What is more, the closer the golfer was to the lead golfer in score, the larger the choking level occurred. S. L. Beilock and Gonso (2008) discovered that the more time an expert golfer has to prepare for a putt, the higher the rate of CUP. This research is supported by the study conducted by S. L. Beilock and Carr (2001) which found that expert golfers choked when they were forced to think about each step of a putt, also known as the explicit monitoring theory.

**Causes for Choking Under Pressure**

Mesagno and Bechmann (2017) attributed much of the decreased performance in HPS to anxiety; however, researchers have conducted additional research to formulate more advanced theories. In addition to anxiety, T. Murayama and Sekiya (2015) related their findings for the causes of athletes to CUP to a decrease in self efficacy, changes in perception, and changes in attention. T. Murayama et al. (2010) conducted a questionnaire survey and found the top seven factors leading to CUP to be:

- Negative thoughts/feelings
- Motor control changes
- Increased physiological arousal
- Communication failure
- Nervous personality
- Pre-competition condition
- Abnormal somatic sensation

Several of these factors identified, including anxiety, were associated with the athlete’s emotions and his or her ability to control those emotions. The two most common theories
associated with the cause of choking include the explicit monitoring theory (EMT) and the distraction theory (DT).

De Caro, Thomas, Albert, and Beilock (2011) explained that pressure can divert too much attention toward skill process and procedures while at the same time pressure can cause the performer to shift attention and working memory away from execution. The researchers found it odd that HPS can cause the brain to do both. The researchers proposed that HPS may involve multiple components and therefore exert various effects. These effects include distracting thoughts, explicit monitoring, or both depending on the specific elements of the HPS being performed and the individual performing.

In 2004, Gray studied baseball batting performance and the impact of pressure on skilled performers. In the experiment that simply focused on an increase in pressure to perform, the athletes actually achieved greater results. Gray’s conclusion was that pressure itself did not adversely affect performance. Gray conducted other experiments to view the effects of self-focus and distraction on athletic performance upon talented athletes. Expert batters were not affected by distraction but were detrimentally affected by self-focus.

**Explicit Monitoring Theory**

Toma (2017) described a theory explaining a cause for CUP which is the explicit monitoring theory that states HPS induces athletes to monitor more closely automated actions. When a player monitors automated actions which are normally subconscious, the natural action is disturbed. Actions like shooting a free throw in basketball, combine multiple movements to eventually create one synchronized action, executed subconsciously. In the event of an HPS however, athletes tend to monitor each individual
movement of the free throw action. This focused monitoring of individual components in a normally synchronized and subconscious movement, prevent the athlete from unfolding action fluidly.

Mesagno and Beckham (2017) explained self-focus CUP as “paralysis by analysis” (p. 170). This phrase means that when an athlete is constantly attempting to control every specific movement, he or she decreases the fluent coordinated movements normally controlled by the athlete’s brain. This alteration from the normal practiced athletic movements sans pressure, occurs as a reaction to heightened pressure. Thus, an athlete applies a different athletic technique than the actions most practiced and implored during non-pressure situations. The result is uncharacteristically bad performance in a situation that is most important to the athlete.

Gray (2004) conducted a study to evaluate how explicit monitoring of specific parts of a baseball player’s swing would affect performance. Gray found that when expert baseball players were asked to identify the direction of their bat at impact, their performance was adversely affected. Thus, Gray concluded that when the expert is focusing on specific parts of a collective skill already mastered, performance is adversely affected.

**Distraction Theory**

Distractions presented to an elite athlete, not directly related to the mechanics of the athletic movements or actions have been found to have little effect on excellent baseball players (Gray, 2004). When expert batters were asked to identify sounds, a skill not related to the mechanics of their swing, the batters’ performance was not significantly
affected. This experiment was performed in a non-pressure situation where the athlete was asked to only focus on hitting a simulated ball and identifying the sound.

Mesagno and Beckham (2017) describe the distraction theory as one’s mind focusing on irrelevant cues and neglect the most important task-relevant information. For the athlete, this can be focusing on the crowd, judgement of coaches and teammates, or the potential result of a well or poorly thrown pitch. However, when the athlete’s attention is focused on factors irrelevant to the task at hand, the lack of task-based focus lowers the athlete’s ability to perform at her or his best.

Worthy, Markman, and Maddox (2009) explained as pressure increases, a decrease in available working memory resources occurs and distraction lowers success rates. When athletes experience anxiety performing under pressure, this pressure is processed in the working memory and the result has an inability to focus on, and process task relevant information (Hill et al., 2017). Gray (2004) found that novice athletes were significantly affected by external distractions and their performance suffered as a result.

**Emotional Intelligence**

**Theoretical Framework**

In 1990, Peter Salovey and John Mayer published their work on EI, defining it as “The ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feeling and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (p. 189). They further described EI as the process of “appraisal and expression of emotion” (p. 191) and the “regulation and utilization of emotions” (p. 195). Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the three parts of this process.
**Figure 1.** Conceptualization of Emotional Intelligence. This figure was created to illustrate in detail, the three primary components that make up the mental process comprising emotional intelligence. Figure adapted from “Emotional Intelligence,” by P. Salovey and J. D. Mayer, 1990, *Imagination, cognition, and Personality*, 9, 185-211.

Publilius Syrus, the historical Latin writer stated, “rule your feelings, lest your feelings rule you” (as cited in Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 185). Salovey and Mayer (1990) viewed emotions as organized responses occurring in various systems “including physiological, cognitive, motivational and experiential systems” (p. 186). Emotions differ from moods, as emotions are shorter lived and more intense than general mood. Further, Leeper (1948) described emotions as a motivating force.

A definition for intelligence often cited by scholars states that intelligence is the combined aptitude of an individual to act with purpose, logical reasoning, rational thought, and act successfully in his or her environment (Wechsler, 1958). Thorndike and Stein (1937) studied intelligence and believed that it can take many forms. One of the forms of intelligence examined was social intelligence. The scholars offered a brief definition: “The ability to understand and manage people” (Thorndike & Stein, p. 275).
Salovey and Mayer (1990) extended this definition to include the inward equivalent which describes one’s ability to understand and manage one’s self. Ultimately, Thorndike and Stein’s provided an explanation of social intelligence as “ability to understand and manage people” (p. 275).

Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) work on the appraisal and expression, regulation and utilization of emotions led researchers to uncover the power of EI when utilized in various facets of life. The value of the appraisal of emotions was explained as “Those who are more accurate (at appraising emotions) can more quickly perceive and respond to their own emotions and better express those emotions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 193). Regulating emotions was linked to managing emotions and using them to motivate one’s self as well as others. Finally, Salovey and Mayer explained an advantage of the utilization of emotions by emotionally intelligent individuals as having the ability to “solve problems adaptively” (p. 199). This theory provided the theoretical framework for this study.

Salovey and Mayer (1990) instructed that accurate appraisal and expression of emotions is a skill of the emotionally intelligent. Being able to accurately evaluate and identify one’s own emotions is a skill because one can more quickly perceive and react to their own emotions and to those of others. The reactions are more appropriate to their true feelings due to the accuracy of their perception. Salovey and Mayer elaborate that this skill signifies EI because the processing of the emotions occurs within the person and because competence at these skills is necessary to function socially.

EI people are described by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as being adept at the regulation of their emotions. This skill allows them to meet particular goals utilizing
their mood. Being able to manipulate one’s current mood, can enhance one’s ability to be successful when completing a particular task. By understanding mood regulation, the emotionally intelligent individual can enhance their own or others’ moods, even managing their emotions as well as others to motivate the group to achieve a worthwhile conclusion.

Several advantages of utilizing EI were outlined by Salovey and Mayer (1990). First, those who can manipulate their mood to be in a positive state of mind can affect how one sees the future. The researchers explain that a person with a positive mood will create multiple positive outcome scenarios in their mind. Due to the perception of a higher likelihood of positive events, a person in a positive mood state will project and ponder more positive outcomes, making them more prepared to take advantage of positive opportunities. Further utilization of EI includes a positive increase in creative thinking. Duncker’s candle task created in 1945 (Isen et al., 1987), studied the effects of mood and personality on one’s ability to solve a basic problem. Duncker found that those with a positive mood were more likely to create innovative solutions. D. Goleman (2011) supports Duncker, elaborating that positive mood improves problem solving, mental flexibility and efficient decision making. Further, emotionally intelligent individuals (D. Goleman 2011; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) can create a hierarchy of their emotions, choosing to focus on the most important task or emotion. Salovey and Mayer (1990) explain that emotionally intelligent individuals reprioritize the demands on their attention and allocate their available mental resources, accordingly, increasing success on the task that is most important.
Finally, Salvoey and Mayer (1990) explained that utilizing motivating emotions can help one to accomplish tasks. Emotionally intelligent individuals may use anxiety for a test to help motivate them to study and be more meticulous in their preparation, or others may focus on building confidence during periods of good mood. By generating confidence in one’s capabilities, an emotionally intelligent person is more likely to persist through adversity and challenging obstacles. Additionally, people with positive attitudes toward life in general, create interpersonal experiences that lead to enhanced outcomes and increased rewards for themselves and others. D. Goleman (2011) offered benefits from the alternative, where a negative mood like anger can help individuals to mobilize energy and focus attention on one task, say beating an opponent.

**Emotional Intelligence and Human Anatomy**

Lesion studies of the brain have established a significant difference in brain functions comparing cognitive intelligence and EI. The studies have shown that patients with lesions or brain injuries in clearly defined areas, specifically in the prefrontal cortex have resulting diminished capacities in specific skills or abilities in regard to critical thinking, decision making, social intelligence and EI (R. Bar-On, Tranel, Denburg, & Bechara, 2003; Bechara, Damasco, & Bar-on, 2007; D. Goleman, 2011, Rivers et al., 2012). These studies have shown specific brain functions occur in different parts of the brain. These specific brain areas control different abilities ranging from cognitive brain function, what results in IQ or the traditional idea of intelligence and aspects of EI.

R. Bar-On, Tranel, Denburg, and Bechara (2003) discovered that brain lesions in the right amygdala caused a loss in emotional self-awareness, and described by D. Goleman (2011) as the ability to understand oneself and appraise one’s feelings. Further,
the right somatosensory cortex is the area which controls not only self-awareness but also empathy. Impulse control, the ability to regulate emotions was found to originate from the anterior cingulate while the prefrontal cortex, helps humans to express feelings effectively. Additionally, the prefrontal cortex is what takes over when humans are performing at their best, as the area of the brain controls cognition, attention regulation, making decisions, voluntary action, reasoning, and flexibility in response (R. Bar-On et al., 2003; D. Goleman, 2011).

R. Bar-On (2002) discovered that patients with lesions in the somatic marker circuitry tested low in EI and poor judgement when making decisions despite scoring normal in cognitive intelligence. Critical thinking capabilities are important when considering EI because it enables people to create sound beliefs, recognize and regulate emotions (Yao et al., 2017).

Yoa (2018) and colleagues reported that people with high EI display higher effectiveness in processing of emotional information, resulting in strong critical thinking abilities. Thus, those who test strongly in critical thinking examinations such as the California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory also test well in EI exams. Further, Yoa et al., explained that good critical thinkers are open minded and are understanding of alternative viewpoints. Research has revealed that nursing students with excellent critical thinking abilities display heightened perspective taking and a positive correlation with empathy, an emotional intelligence competency (Jeong, 2015). Stedman and Andenoro (2007) revealed a positive correlation between EI and critical thinking. Their research also found critical thinkers more effectively detect, understand and respond to the emotions of others. The research also states that strong critical thinkers make more
rational decisions in regard to their emotional lives, improving their reactions and decisions.

A 2013 study by S. Laborde, Lautenbach, Allen, Herbert, and Achtzehn examined the role of EI in regard to emotion regulation and performance under pressure amongst tennis players. The study assessed pressure by utilizing both a self-report emotion questionnaire and by measuring cortisol secretions. Emotional regulation can be displayed by lower than normal increase of cortisol secretion when an athlete is under pressure. S. Laborde et al. found that individuals in their study did in fact choke under pressure, performing significantly worse than the non-pressure pretest. The study revealed that EI was able to predict overall cortisol secretion, as those who tested highest in EI also had lower levels of increased cortisol secretion. The second part of their study revealed a correlation between low cortisol secretion and self-confidence in performance prediction. This correlation did not include EI. The study concluded that high levels of cortisol secretion is detrimental to sport performance and high levels of confidence are beneficial. Further, the study determined emotion regulation, a short-term EI competency had a positive impact on performance and individuals had lower cortisol secretion levels. The study concluded that EI overall was more aligned with long term performance. However, S. Laborde, Dosseville, and Scelles (2010) conducted a study three years earlier which contradicted these results, finding that overall EI and performance under pressure in HPS was related.

Cortisol level testing has proved significant as it provides a biological component to the relationship between EI and stress. The way people control their emotions, termed self-control or emotional regulation, plays a significant role in how athletes and
individuals control their emotions, perform under pressure and regulate stress levels. A 2011 study found that handballers with high EI scores had a lower increase in stress, via heart rate variability measures when put in a stress simulation test. Researchers proposed that individuals with higher EI may view stressors more as a challenge than a threat (Mikolajczak & Luminet, 2008). A study of Chinese and French table tennis players found that high EI scores helped athletes with coping (S. Laborde, You, Dosseville, & Salinas, 2012). Physical measures more than self-report measures provide stronger foundations to EI paradigms (S. Laborde, Brull, Weber, and Anders, 2011; S, Laborde et al., 2012; S. Laborde et al., 2014). Some scholars have cast doubt on the currently accepted forms of EI testing due to the heavy value placed on self-report components of the EI testing. Therefore, biological testing of stress, displayed by heart rate variation or cortisol levels is important to provide more scientific correlations between EI and performance in HPS (Lane et al., 2009; Stanimirovic & Hanrahan, 2012).

**Emotional Intelligence Brought to Mainstream Public**

In 1995, D. Goleman’s work concerning EI took the concepts developed by Salovey and Mayer to the mainstream public with his book entitled *Emotional Intelligence*. D. Goleman separated EI into what he called the “five critical pillars or competencies of Emotional Intelligence.” The five competencies are:

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Self-motivation
- Empathy or social awareness
• Emotional stability

D. Goleman’s original work focused on introducing EI and the science behind the theory.

Victor Frankl wrote in his book *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1959) that self-awareness, is what gives us the ability to choose our response to situations. He explained that he came to this realization as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps. Despite his captors choosing his daily activities, where and when he slept, ate, worked, or whether he or his family members lived or died that day, he understood that he had the power to choose his reaction to these atrocities. Stephen Covey (1989), author of the international best seller, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* elaborated on this idea explaining that this can be explained by the word responsibility, or when broken down our ability to respond. When people have responsibility, humans elect to have the ability to respond to the situations around us. Though we may not be able to choose many of life’s events, we do in fact have the ability to choose our response to life’s events.

In 1998, D. Goleman released a book entitled *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, which broke down the five competencies into two subgroups. The first subgroup, personal competence, included the areas of self-awareness, self-regulation and motivation. The second subgroup, social competence consisted of empathy and social skills. D. Goleman, explained that the EQ scores was more indicative of future success than the more popular IQ.

**Emotional Intelligence Success Predictor**

Several studies have linked EI to professional success in the business sector including position and salary (Davar & Singh, 2014; D. Goleman, 1998; Maudling, 2002; Rode, Arthaud-Day, Ramaswami, & Howes, 2017). In addition, B. B. Meyer and Zizzi
(2007) explained that most of the early research on EI’s impact on performance was conducted in the corporate and health care sectors. B. B. Mayer and Zizzi listed many studies that proved EI correlates strongly with workplace coping strategies, collaboration and conflict resolution, work performance, employee health, well-being, as well as healthy attitudes towards exercise, alcohol, and tobacco. Emotional regulation and facilitation are noted to help develop creativity for workers and those who contain strength in these areas have been found to be stronger leaders and more successful in the workplace (He et al., 2018; Parke, Seo, & Sherf, 2015; Rivers et al., 2012). Further, Szcygiel and Mikolajczak (2017) concluded that EI success resulted in a positive correlation to life satisfaction and subjective happiness. In the workplace, a study of 319 working adults in the U.S. and Australia showed statistically significant increases in better mental health, more work engagement, higher social support and satisfaction in the workplace, and more perceived power, as a result of higher EI (Schutte & Loi, 2014).

B. B. Meyer and Zizzi (2007) insisted that the skills listed above parallel important and healthy qualities of those who succeed in athletics. Many of the same qualities needed to be a successful teammate and individual performer are the same which make a successful nurse or corporate vice president. Another skill important to athletic success is that of resilience in which Di Fabio and Saklofske (2018) revealed that highly EI individuals are significantly more resilient than their lesser EI peers.

Rivers et al. (2012) conducted a study to explore EI impact on student and teacher success. The study produced results indicating that higher EI scores were related to healthier psychological functioning, improved social competence and stronger academic performance in English language arts. Further, a study conducted by Pratama and
Corebima (2016) found a correlation between high EI scores and student success in biology. The results found in this study displayed that EI impacted student cognitive learning success as much as 5.2%.

**Emotional Intelligence in Sports**

**Emotions Affect Performance**

In 2002, Botterill and Brown affirmed that most commonly athletes experience their emotional responses without stopping to critically reflect upon them. The ability to reflect and critique one’s emotions or as explained by Mayer and Salovey (1997), perceive, utilize, understand, and manage emotions is equivalent to the concept of EI. Numerous studies explained that superior athletic performance requires more than genetic athletic ability. Campo et al. (2016) explained that within sports, EI has been found to have a significant impact on various aspects of sports performance. S. Laborde et al. (2016a) maintained that “athletes are required to consistently cope with the stress of hard training and competitive pressure, and this includes understanding and regulating their emotions and those of other individuals” (p. 862). Further, Masters (2012) elucidated that emotional control as well as various stressors athletes face, have the potential to impair athletes’ ability to reach and/or maintain optimal performance. B. B. Meyer and Fletcher (2007) reinforced that emotions play an integral part in the performance results of not only players but teams. Continuing that emotional control and peak emotional experiences may influence factors relevant to sports, listing motivation and anxiety as factors among others.
Emotional Intelligence Sports Studies

Starkes and Ericsson (2003) asserted that there are few undertakings in which people dedicate so much time, effort, energy, and resources with the goal to be the absolute best they can be; sports are among those endeavors. Campo et al. (2016) conducted a study of rugby players to find out if trait EI which the authors described as representing how individuals normally react in emotional situations can be improved in athletes. The investigators proposed that team contact sports such as rugby which are combative in nature could easily trigger fright in athletes due to the contact on the field. Their idea was that training contact sport athletes to regulate their emotions can be a valuable skill. The study results instructed that specific components of EI were improved via interventions and trainings. The aspects improved included social competence, emotion perception, and emotion management. Bechara et al. (2007) argue that EI can be trained and improved in individuals.

Crombie et al. (2009) explained “the task of being an elite professional athlete requires the effective management of stress, tolerance of frustration, regulation of mood, and exercise of emotional restraint” (p. 210). Crombie et al. elucidated that sports performance cannot rely solely upon the physical abilities necessary to compete as countless examples of the most skilled or highly talented teams fail to win championships or win consistently. The researchers assert that sports competitions are by definition HPS and that strong mental skills are necessary for an athlete or team to perform successfully against the competition. Crombie et al. argued that having a higher team EI score should provide teams a competitive advantage over their competition. They conducted a study of six professional cricket teams in South Africa to discover if their assertion that high
team EI scores compared to their competition would result in greater team success on the cricket pitch. Their research revealed a significant positive relation existed between cricket team performance and EI. This is not the only test which has found a positive correlation between EI and sport performance. Tahmasebi, Mirheydari, Kaviri, and Shahhosseini (2012), backed up these results, as the authors found a statistically significant relation between team EI and team performance and success amongst female basketball teams in Iran.

Perlini and Halverson (2006) found a significant correlation between NHL games played by players and high EI scores. The researchers explained that professional athletes must manage stress effectively, regulate their mood despite frustration and failure. The scholars explain that exercising emotional restraint is key during competition, a competition that takes place in the public eye and often under public scrutiny. The skills listed above have a strong overlap with EI competencies of self-regulation of emotions, the need to effectively appraise, and express emotions throughout the game and season with teammates and how to properly utilize emotions to garner their best performance.

Perlini and Halverson (2006) found that NHL players on average scored higher in EI testing than the general public; this supports the findings of S. Laborde et al. (2016b), which discovered positive correlations between the amount of practice time per practice session as well as practice time in terms of days per week, and total time per week, and EI scores. These results contradict the results found in a comparison of athletic and non-athletic female students (Sohrabi, Garejeh, & Mohammadi, 2011). The NHL is the top hockey league in the world and therefore simply being in the league constitutes
occupational success, supporting the theory that EI impacts success. The areas where a NHL player scored higher than the general public included interpersonal factors such as self-awareness, stress management, and general mood. High EI scores did not however contribute to statistical success in scoring or other factors evaluated by the research, with the exception of games played.

A study conducted by Kajbanfnezhad, Ahadi, Heidarie, Askari, and Enayati (2012) published in the Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness, reporting findings of a study on predicting athletic success motivation by identifying correlations between mental skills, EI, and their predictability on athletic success. In the study, male athletes participated in three questionnaires: (a) a Mental Skills Questionnaire, the (b) Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, and the (c) Mental Skills Questionnaire. The study concluded that mental skills scores were the best predictor of athletic success motivation. However, the EI component of self-respect had significantly the highest correlation with the ability to predict athletic success motivation. The authors concluded that psychological skills and EI served as mediating and regulatory factors which lead to improved sports performance, helping athletes to make sound decisions helping them to reach a desired goal.

A 2018 study by Maghsoudipour, Shabani, Najafabadi, Bakhshi, and Coh focused on the relationship between EI and performance factors of female track and field athletes at the university level. This study found no statistically significant correlation between EI and athletic performance amongst this population. Specific aspects of EI were discovered to correlate with performance. The components of EI correlating strongly with athletes’ recorded times were empathy, interpersonal relations, and independence.
In 2016, Cowden conducted a study evaluating mental toughness, EI and coping effectiveness’ interrelatedness among high-preforming adolescent male athletes. The study found that EI is a significant factor in the construct of mental toughness. Mental toughness in sports was described by Cowden as confidence or belief in an athlete’s ability to succeed, commitment, tenacity, perseverance despite challenges and adversity, the ability to control cognitive-emotional experience, and personal accountability over outcomes.

Cowden (2016) found that EI significantly predicted mental toughness. The most notable correlation was the emotional control element displayed in mentally tough athletes. This was explained as an athlete’s ability to perceive and understand their emotions that arise. Further, EI was found to be important in respect to their effect on the competition, meaning those with high EI are able to influence the emotions of their opponents. EI athletes are able to capitalize on or adjust their performance based on the emotional state of the of their competition. What is more, EI athletes are capable of creating a presence that affects the performance of their opponents. In order to achieve the aforementioned, an athlete must be able to identify, understand, and manage other’s emotions, which constitutes the empathy competency of EI.

Cowden (2016) found that EI contributes to the mental toughness capabilities which help an athlete to cope with the pressure of athletic competition. EI is just one of several factors; however, it is a major contributor to an athlete’s capacity to deal with HPS. Self-efficacy is one aspect highlighted in EI individuals which is a factor in mental toughness, contributing to an athlete’s ability successfully deal with emotions during
competition. EI athletes with optimistic perspectives may view HPS as opportunities as opposed to debilitating circumstances.

**Emotional Intelligence and Baseball**

Zizzi et al. (2003) conducted a study which found a modest yet statistically significant correlation between EI and performance on the baseball field amongst collegiate baseball pitchers. The study did not find a statistically significant correlation between EI scores and hitting performance while a moderate, yet significant correlation was discovered between pitchers’ success and EI scores. The researchers explained that this is logical because batters’ success is dependent upon reacting to the pitcher. Hitters rely upon vision, hand-eye coordination, timing, technique, and power which all take place within a split-second reaction. Pitchers on the other hand, are in control of the timing and tempo of the game. Pitchers must learn from and react to the events of the previous pitch and the current game situation. Pitchers must communicate with their catcher and position players on the field. After each pitch, the pitcher must learn from and react to the previous pitch, making a decision on what pitch to throw next.

Zizzi et al. (2003) found a variance for pitching performance ranging from 7% to 23% and elaborated that though this variance may be small, it may also be significant because baseball at the highest level contains competition between athletes with similarly top-notch athletic abilities. Due to the proximity of the athletic skills, mental skills of athletes becomes increasingly important. Therefore, although the impact of EI on sport performance may be small, it may also have a high impact on performance and results at the highest levels of competition. Pitchers must analyze information and make decisions about their next pitch, giving them time to either appraise, express, regulate, and utilize
their emotions or fail to do so. Zizzi et al. recommended further exploration of the
correlation between EI and success on the baseball field especially when emotions and
pressure is high. This study investigated the correlation between EI and success over the
entirety of the season, neglecting to account for performance in HPS.

Research Gap

This literature review has documented numerous studies connecting the regulation
of emotions and EI to performance in all types of human endeavors and, with this specific
focus, athletic endeavors. In addition, the physiological connection between different
parts of the human brain, cortisol secretion, and athletic performance has been
established. What has not yet been researched is the mental and physical process by
which elite athletes with a history of success in HPS, in this case major league closers,
prepare themselves for performance in HPS. This study used Salovey and Mayer’s work
on the appraisal and expression, regulation and utilization of emotions as a framework to
uncover the power of EI when utilized by major league closers in HPS.

Summary

This chapter explored the phenomenon of CUP and the observable nature of CUP
in sports. Though some thrive in HPS, most do not. CUP in sports occurs when athletes
perform worse in HPS than expected under normal conditions. Studies have
demonstrated that choking occurs when the athlete’s emotional response to the situation
results in producing distraction or explicit monitoring, by products of anxiety. A
synthesis matrix is included as Appendix A. The synthesis matrix summarizes the
contents of Chapter II in a table used to identify variables and develop the research and
interview questions for the study.
EI was originally described by Salovey and Mayer (1990) to be the appraisal, expression, regulation, and utilization of emotions. This initial study provides the theoretical framework by which the study is based. EI studies have found that emotional controlling sectors of the human brain, function independently of cognitive sectors the brain.

In 1995, D. Goleman helped bring EI knowledge to the public with his book entitled *Emotional Intelligence*. D. Goleman described five competencies of EI which included:

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Self-motivation
- Empathy or social awareness
- Emotional stability

Scholars have described EI as a more accurate predictor success in life than the previously more common cognitive intelligence or IQ. In the past 20 years, several studies have linked EI to sports performance amongst athletes.

Several studies have found a direct correlation between sport performance and aspects of EI. EI is described as skill more so than a genetic trait and thus, can be learned and improved, thus improving sports performance. In 2003, Zizzi et al. found a small yet significant correlation between baseball pitching success and performance. Ultimately, the gap in the research identified is the mental and physical process by which athletes with a history of success in HPS, in this case major league closers, prepare themselves for performance in HPS.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter starts with the purpose statement and research questions which were answered throughout the study. Chapter II explains the methodology applied for the research study, which includes detailed information about the population, the selection of the sample, and the collection method for the data and data analysis. The study seeks to add to the available literature on EI and its impact on successful sports performance in HPS. Via in-depth interviews, the research will examine the similarities that exist in the descriptions by MLB closers regarding the appraisal of emotions, expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, and utilization of emotions in HPS. The chapter concludes with limitations of the qualitative study and a summary of the chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand and describe the perceived similarities among the emotional intelligence methods utilized by successful retired Major League Baseball closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in high pressure situations.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to appraise their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
2. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to express their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

3. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to regulate their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

4. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to utilize their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

5. What similarities exist in the descriptions by retired Major League Baseball closers regarding the appraisal of emotions, expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, and utilization of emotions in high pressure situations?

**Research Design**

Academic research has two broad research methodologies, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative results are presented as numbers or statistics. In qualitative research, results are presented as considerations of trends or themes based in words. Quantitative studies begin with a specific plan consisting of specific questions or a hypothesis. Quantitative data will eventually be used to test or verify a theory or concept whereas qualitative research discovers concepts, eventually describing the findings in words (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2017; Roberts, 2010).

Since EI was originally presented by Salovey and Meyer (1990), many subsequent research studies have been conducted. EI and its impact on humans has been studied around the world. Many quantitative studies have compared the statistical data
that correlates EI to sports performance (Campo et al., 2016; Crombie et al., 2009; Mayer & Fletcher 2007; Perlini & Halverson, 2006). In 2003, Zizzi et al. found a statistically significant relationship between EI and pitching performance on the baseball field. Zizzi et al.’s study was quantitative and to date a qualitative study on the subject does not exist. The purpose of this study was to acquire qualitative data to understand the similarities that exist in the descriptions of EI skills utilized by successful MLB closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in HPS.

In the Dissertation Journey, Roberts (2010) explained that the term qualitative was based on the philosophical orientation called phenomenology, which focuses on people’s experiences and perspectives. This data can be found via in depth, open ended interviews. The data that will be collected will result in words that describe people’s knowledge, feelings, opinions, and perceptions. The primary reason this study’s qualitative nature is to uncover and understand in detail what lies within the phenomena of what successful MLB closers actually do to be successful in HPS.

Case Study

The case study design was chosen as it was a fit for the research process that would be employed. Patten (2017) explained that while surveys may involve hundreds or even thousands of participants, a case study involves a more limited number of participants. A case study is not limited to a specific number of questions or time, allowing for whatever time is needed to gain depth of understanding. Patton (2002) clarified that a case study is a holistic, in-depth study or comparison. In this analysis, the researcher designed a case study to gather comprehensive, in-depth information on what
MLB closers actually do to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to be successful in HPS.

Patton (2002) clarified that a case study is a holistic, in-depth study or comparison. In this analysis, the researcher designed a case study to gather comprehensive, in-depth information on what MLB closers actually do to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to be successful in HPS. For this study, individual interviews were conducted with each of the 12 selected retired closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in HPS. In addition, the researcher viewed video recordings of each closer performing his closer duties to identify the visual indicators described by the closers in their interviews.

**Population**

A population is a group that “conforms to specific criteria” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129) in which research results can be generalized. The population the researchers studied consisted of MLB closers. MLB closers include professional pitchers who have been designated the role of pitching in the last inning of games with a score within three or less runs, constituting a high stress, close game. According to MLB’s official website, in 2018, 53 players attempted to close 10 or more games. Four hundred and forty-three players have attempted to close at least 50 games in their careers. This population has a unique understanding of how emotions affect performance under pressure.

**Target Population**

According to Creswell (2013), the target population is the “actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected” (p. 393). A target population for a study is the
entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings are meant to be generalized. It is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is typically not feasible, due to time or cost constraints, to study large groups; therefore, the researcher chose population samples from within a larger group.

The target population for this study consisted of the top 50 retired closers of all time, each of whom has 200 or more saves. Retired closers were chosen to avoid trade secrets and conflicts of interest that might occur if current closers were used.

Sample

A sample in a qualitative study is naturally small, and in contrast to quantitative probabilistic sampling, the sampling is purposeful, as Patton (2002) stated, “selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study” (p. 264). The sample is a group of participants in a study selected from the population from which the researcher intends to generalize. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), sampling is selecting a “group of individuals from whom data are collected” (p. 129). Similarly, Patton and Creswell (2013) defined a sample as a subset of the target population representing the whole population.

Sample Size

Qualitative analyses typically require a smaller sample size than quantitative analyses. Qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions. For phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends five to 25 and Morse (1994) suggests at least six. There are no specific rules when determining an
appropriate sample size in qualitative research. Qualitative sample size may best be determined by the time allotted, resources available, and study objectives (Patten, 2017).

A number of criteria were applied when selecting the sample for this study. This technique is known as purposive sampling (Patten, 2017). The sample for this study consisted of an elite subgroup of retired MLB closers. This sample of 12 closers, was selected from the top 50 retired closers of all time, the target population. All of the top 50 retired closers have at least 200 saves. A save is awarded to a closer when he successfully performs his duties to victoriously finish a close game, protecting the team’s lead going into the final inning. This sample was uniquely qualified to discuss the strategies they utilized to be successful in HPS.

**Purposive Sampling**

This study used purposive sampling to identify baseball closers who met the criteria for participation. As a tool for informant selection, Tongco (2007) asserts that “purposive sampling technique is a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within” (p. 147). Given the critical need to have “knowledgeable experts within” (Tongco, 2007, p. 147) and when the population is too small for a random sampling, the research must discover baseball closers who met the study criteria to draw data for the purpose of generalizability (Tran & Perry, 2003).

**Snowball Sampling**

This study also relied on snowball sampling where research participants or associates recruit other participants for the study. Goodman (1961) defined snowball sampling as a finite random population. It is used when it is hard to find or connect with
potential participants. Some participants may not want to be found and others are wary to participate because of possible consequences, exposure, need for anonymity.

**Convenience Sampling**

Sampling by convenience is a selection strategy that allows the researcher to interview those participants who are most readily available (Patton, 2015). Convenience sampling technique may be an effective exploration when selecting potential participants for field testing or when seeking leads for snowball sampling considerations. The researcher was able to use current or existing connections to negotiate access via convenient forms such as phone, virtual conference video communication, networking that varied from formal to informal formats, email, proximity, or any other easily available arrangements (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

**Sample Selection Process**

The researcher applied the following steps to select participants for the study:

1. Identify individual closers meeting the criteria for participation.
2. Discuss possible networking connections with colleagues who played or coached at the MLB level and who could recommend participants and connect them to the researcher.
3. Send an email request to participate to 12 qualified closers.
4. Provide each participant with a Participant Letter of Invitation (see Appendix B), Informed Consent documents (see Appendix C) assuring confidentiality, Audio Release form (see Appendix D), and the Participants’ Bill of Rights (see Appendix E).
5. Repeat the process if any prospective participant declines.

6. Schedule and administer the interviews.

The researcher reached out to the potential participants via email or phone call to determine their interest level and comfort level in sharing their stories and perspectives in this study. Participants were provided the opportunity to review the informed consent prior to being considered for participation.

**Instrumentation**

In this qualitative case study, the researcher served as the primary instrument of data collection. This is standard procedure for qualitative case studies explained Patton (2002). In-depth interviews served as the primary method of data collection. The researcher used open-ended interview questions to discover similarities in the descriptions by MLB closers regarding the appraisal of emotions, expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, and utilization of emotions in HPS. A copy of the Interview Protocol and Questions is included in Appendix F.

The interview questions for the study were developed using an Interview Question Development Matrix (IQDM). Each research question was placed into the matrix and then, based on variables identified in the literature from Chapter II, individual interview questions were developed for each research question. The interview questions developed from the IQDM were then place into the Interview Protocol for the administration of the interviews (see Appendix G).

**Instrument Reliability**

Reliability is achieved when an instrument continues to produce similar results when used in different circumstances (Roberts, 2010). There are different strategies to
ensure reliability of instruments whether they are used for quantitative or qualitative methods (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). This is imperative in research design as it indicates the rigor and trustworthiness of the research findings.

As the researcher, it was important to acknowledge that bias can occur in the planning, data collection, analysis, and practically at any phase of the research (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). An effective study design enhances the generalizability of the study that can be replicated under the same conditions. Therefore, establishing a degree of stability and consistency throughout the qualitative interview or analysis method was imperative especially since the researcher was the known instrument. Having well-designed research, ensures the validity and reliability in the study (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). The researcher followed the set parameters identified by Pannucci and Wilkins (2010) to protect against biases during the interview process and during the data collection which protected the qualitative analysis results.

Following Pannucci and Wilkins’ (2010) model, the case study occurred in a natural setting where the researcher collected data through interviews, analyzing the data, and collectively focused on the meaning as experienced by the participants. Findings in a qualitative study can stand alone because this researcher assessed the beliefs of participants (Creswell, 2013). The collection of rich data consisted of interviews and reflections which were all integral to the data collection process. Creswell (2013) also stated that data collection in a qualitative study can include unstructured interviews, observations, and documents. Therefore, this researcher used the naturalistic paradigm to collect data for this study.
Field/Pilot Test

It is essential in the research design to set a path to assure personal biases were addressed before the interviews or analyses. This researcher was employed by a MLB Franchise during the conduct of the study, therefore precautions to address potential bias were employed. Field tests, cross-checking interviews, and interviewing with an academic colleague familiar with the research process, who are not part of the research, set the controlled methods to protect data collection and assured reliability and validity. The participants who were part of the field test were professional baseball closers, but they were not included in the study. The fellow associate provided constructive criticism to calibrate the process during the interviews, but most importantly, they identified behaviors by the researcher that had to be adjusted. The participants in the field test interviews provided feedback regarding clarity of and understandability of the interview questions and process. Following feedback, modifications were made to the interview protocol as required. By making the modifications, the researcher took the feedback to the actual interviews to ensure the instrumentation was appropriate and without partiality.

Instrument Validity

Validity ensures that the study “measures or tests what is actually intended” (Shenton, 2004, p. 64). Validity also assures that the findings from the instruments are true (Roberts, 2010) and aligned directly to the research questions (Patton, 2015). Various strategies were employed to ensure that both the quantitative and qualitative data collected were valid. The reliability and validity of the study enhances the appropriateness of the method applied that produced internal and external validity that led to the “accuracy of the study results” (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010, p. 5). It is significant
to have instrumentation that is trustworthy. Valid instrumentation produces reliable findings through the questioning which lends itself to valid results that can be generalized.

As a validity measure, the researcher used an IQDM designed to directly align the interview questions with the research questions and variables of the study. The use of the IQDM assures validity in that the data gathered directly addresses the research questions and variables of the study.

This study modeled its data collection process from a collection of case study examples. The data collected were generated from each individual story or journey shared during the questioning process as shared by the participants’ experiences. Since each participant was interviewed individually, validity is founded on the single story that was personal to each participant. Therefore, each unique and individual story contributed to the collection of stories that later were analyzed to form topics, themes, and patterns. Goleman and the other research cited in the Chapter II literature review, were used to validate the content of the instrument. The synthesis matrix provided the foundation for the review of variables and the validity of the instrument.

Data Collection

No data were collected for this study until approval to conduct the study was received from the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. In qualitative research inquiry, the researcher is responsible for data collection via interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton 2002). Twelve individual interviews were conducted. The target population for this study consisted of 12 of the top 50 retired closers of all time, each of whom has either 200 or more saves, or were a closer who
performed at an all-time great level for at least one season in which they received votes for the Cy Young Award. The Cy Young Award is granted to Major League Baseball’s National League and American League best pitchers for a given season. All of the interviews were conducted live, face to face or virtually via Zoom, a virtual meeting platform.

The Interview Process was conducted as follows:

1. Potential participants were contacted via email and sent an Invitation to Participate in the study.

2. Those participants who agreed to participate were sent a description of the study and a Participant’s Bill of Rights.

3. Twelve participants were selected for interviews based upon accessibility. Informed Consent and Consent to Record documents were sent to each participant and interviews were not conducted until Informed Consent and Consent to Record was received.

4. Interviews were scheduled and administered via Zoom:
   a. Background questions were asked to begin the Interview.
   b. The Interview Protocol and Questions were read by the researcher consistently to assure consistency and objectivity.
   c. Probing/clarifying questions were asked during the interviews to allow the interviewees’ to elaborate on their responses.
   d. At the end, the researcher thanked the participant and gave them the opportunity to add any further comments they felt should be added.
In-depth interviews were conducted using an interview guide. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described an interview guide as a type of interview in which “topics are outlined in advance. The researcher decides the sequence and wording during the interview” (p. 356). Probing techniques can be used to improve cohesiveness. All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim using the transcription software provided by Zoom. The live, face to face interviews were recorded by Zoom for record keeping and transcription purposes. All transcriptions were reviewed and edited by the researcher to ensure accuracy of the transcription software. An independent researcher was hired to review the transcriptions for accuracy. Notes were taken by the researcher by hand, noting any non-verbal communication, ensuring all subject matter was covered and commencing the evaluation process of the interview.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is, as McMillan and Schumacher (2010) describe, “primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among the categories” (p. 367). After the interview was reviewed and transcribed, each interview response was organized into at least one of four initial subcategories for analysis. These categories were established by the study’s research questions.

At the conclusion of the 12th and final interview, the transcribed and organized data was coded by the researcher and cross checked by an independent researcher hired to compare the conclusions discovered by the researcher. This inter-coder reliability process was essential to assure both the reliability and validity of the data interpretation. Coding software NVivo was used to assist the researcher to identify frequency of themes.
Where discrepancies occurred, coding was reviewed by both parties and agreements were reached on where to place the responses. Following the coding process the researcher described and categorized the data. Finally, patterns were developed and identified by the researcher. Qualitative analysis culminated the data analysis and the findings were revealed in Chapter IV.

**Limitations**

Limitations are described by Roberts (2010) as “particular features of your study that you know may negatively affect the results or your ability to generalize” (p. 162). These are generally areas in which the researcher has no control. Common limitations include “sample size, methodology constraints, length of study and response rate” (Roberts, 2010, p. 162).

At the time of the study, the researcher worked for a MLB team. To avoid trade secrets and conflicts of interest, the researcher limited the study to include only retired MLB players. No current players were eligible for the study. Five of the top 50 all-time leaders in saves were active players at the time of the study and thus were excluded for consideration. Due to the necessity of the retired status of all of the closers, clarity of recollection from the interviewees may have been less clear than if current players were discussing present techniques in use.

The interview participant selection was another limitation. All interviewees’ participation was voluntary. Many colleagues of the researcher are former players or have been coaches in MLB. These colleagues made recommendations and introductions to players from the sample population.
The researcher was not in control of the responses from the interviewees. Honesty and truthfulness was assumed by the researcher when evaluating responses. Follow-up and clarification questions were used throughout the interview process to ensure that clear and accurate data collection was maximized. Further, the research design requires the researcher to be the primary instrument of analysis. Another limitation is the inherent bias of the researcher, as someone who works in MLB and has heard various sports psychology theories.

Finally, the length of time needed to collect and analyze data due to the nature of qualitative research creates a limitation. Qualitative data analysis takes longer than quantitative data analysis. The increased workload for the researcher can affect the consistency, accuracy and meticulousness of the data collection and analysis process.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the overview, purpose statement and research questions of the study. The research design method was revealed along with the population and sample explained. Instrumentation was discussed along with data collection and data analysis methods. Finally, limitations were disclosed. Chapter IV presents the research, data collection, and findings. Chapter V identifies significant findings, conclusions reached, implications for application and recommendations for future research for other studies.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This chapter reviews the purpose, research questions, and methodology of the study. It then summarizes and presents the data collected by the principal investigator on the descriptions and the perceived similarities among the EI methods utilized by successful retired MLB closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in HPS. First, the data is analyzed and themes are presented by each of closer participants. Then, the data is aggregated, and themes presented are aligned to the five research questions. The chapter concludes with a summary of each question’s analysis.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand and describe the perceived similarities among the emotional intelligence methods utilized by successful retired Major League Baseball closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in high pressure situations.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to appraise their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

2. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to express their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
3. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to regulate their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

4. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to utilize their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

5. What similarities exist in the descriptions by retired Major League Baseball closers regarding the appraisal of emotions, expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, and utilization of emotions in high pressure situations?

**Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

A case study research design was used to understand and describe the perceived similarities among the EI methods utilized by successful retired MLB closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in HPS. For this study, a participant interview protocol was used with the participants as the data collection measure or instrument. The researcher custom designed semi-structured interview protocols consisting of an unspecified number of open-ended questions and follow-up question to answer the study’s research questions.

**Population**

A population is a group that “conforms to specific criteria” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129) in which research results can be generalized. The population the researchers studied consisted of MLB closers. MLB closers include professional pitchers who have been designated the role of pitching in the last inning of games with a score within three or less runs, constituting a high stress, close game. According to
MLB’s official website, in 2018, 53 players attempted to close 10 or more games. Four hundred and forty-three players have attempted to close at least 50 games in their careers. This population has a unique understanding of how emotions affect performance under pressure.

**Sample**

A sample in a qualitative study is naturally small, and in contrast to quantitative probabilistic sampling, the sampling is purposeful, as Patton (2002) stated, “selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study” (p. 264). The sample is a group of participants in a study selected from the population from which the researcher intends to generalize. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), sampling is selecting a “group of individuals from whom data are collected” (p. 129). Similarly, Patton and Creswell (2013) defined a sample as a subset of the target population representing the whole population.

Qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions. For phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends five to 25 and Morse (1994) suggests at least six. A number of criteria were applied when selecting the sample for this study. This technique is known as purposive sampling (Patten, 2017). As a tool for informant selection, Tongco (2007) asserts that “purposive sampling technique is a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within” (p. 147). This study also relied on snowball sampling where research participants or associates recruit other participants for the study. Goodman (1961) defined snowball sampling as a finite random population. It is used when it is hard to find or connect with potential
participants. Sampling by convenience is a selection strategy that allows the researcher to interview those participants who are most readily available (Patton, 2015).

Convenience sampling technique may be an effective exploration when selecting potential participants for field testing or when seeking leads for snowball sampling considerations.

The sample for this study consisted of an excellent subgroup of retired MLB closers. This sample of 12 closers, was selected from the top 50 retired closers of all time, the target population. All of the top 50 retired closers have at least 200 saves. A save is awarded to a closer when he successfully performs his duties to victoriously finish a close game, protecting the team’s lead going into the final inning. This sample was uniquely qualified to discuss the strategies they utilized to be successful in HPS.

**Presentation and Analysis of Data by Individual Closer**

**Closer 1**

**Appraisal of emotions.** Closer 1 used a variety of methods to appraise his emotions throughout his performance of his closer responsibilities. Closer 1 played online chess each day for 30 minutes. He described this activity as a chance to think about how he was performing both in the long term and short term. Playing chess signaled to others that he was busy, so he was able to partake in his daily honest reflection. Closer 1 stated that “appraisal is extremely important,” but emphasized that it needs to be an “honest appraisal process.” This includes being able “to understand, what your best is, and you have to hold yourself to that standard every single day. If you hold yourself to that standard, you will win, you will become a winner. Winning will happen.” Closer 1 acknowledged that throughout the winning process, losing occurs and
that honest appraisal allows one to forget and forgive the losses that will occur. Through honest appraisal, he was able to maintain positive self-talk. He mentioned that situations rarely change, it is simply our perspective of the outcome that changes. Thus, he did not believe in pressure, only energy that would allow him to get excited for each game.

Closer 1, explained that part of his formula for success was the amount of time he dedicated to appraisal. He explained that many of his colleagues only thought about appraisal while at work, while he thought about his performance 15 to 16 hours a day, emphasizing elite preparation as a key to his success. Closer 1, appraised what his body needed on a daily basis to perform at its peak the next day and worked to meet those needs. One of the things his body would need was controlled breathing. When Closer 1 identified himself as breathing too fast, he worked to slow his breath to reduce the stress he was under. Another appraisal technique used by Closer 1 involved his analysis of his ability to completely focus and “lock-in.” If he could not totally lock-in, he knew he was distracted and needed to focus on his breath or clear his mind for improved performance.

**Expression of emotions.** Closer 1, expressed his emotions in a variety of ways. He had a routine of talking to his wife in bed following each home game. In addition to talking to his wife, he spoke with his teammates and coaches. Closer 1 would talk about his emotions and likened the process to a grieving process, where you can talk them through until you feel like they are out of you and you are ready to move on. Not only did Closer 1 value talking through his own emotions with colleagues, he valued the questions his teammates asked him.

**Regulation of emotions.** Closer 1 used a variety of techniques to regulate his emotions throughout his performance of his closing duties. His primary technique was
his pinpoint focus on the moment and task at hand. Closer 1 focused on one pitch at a
time. He was not worried about the results of the pitch but more the execution of his
pitch. He took that mantra to a daily level and credited his upbringing, explaining his
parents taught him that “yesterday is yesterday, and tomorrow is tomorrow.” One of the
ways he put this into practice was the uninterrupted hour he would spend with his
children every morning. This hour was solely dedicated to his kids. He would not think
about baseball or any other issues, only his children. He felt being totally focused on the
moment was a key to his success. He explained that today’s successes or failures have no
impact on tomorrow’s performance, thus focus on the moment, one pitch at a time.

Closer 1 tried to remain even keeled, without getting too high or too low
emotionally, regulating his emotions. He explained that each situation should be thought
of as the same, as the actual actions did not really change. Early in his career, he was
focused on little nuances however he learned to keep it simple and just focus on winning.
Implementing reasonable expectations helped him to not get angry with himself,
acknowledging that the negative emotions did not really help his performance. One of
the ways he could focus on his performance was by controlling his breath. Closer 1
understood the physiological impacts breath has on his body function. He used long,
slow breaths before his outings, to calm himself before beginning quick short breaths to
get himself excited right before taking the mound. Before each pitch, he would take one
deep breath to calm him mind.

Additionally, Closer 1 utilized visualization and positive self-talk to regulate his
emotions. Using the knowledge he gained from his previous pitch, Closer 1 would
visualize his next pitch before throwing. He would use this technique to help him
anticipate the next play and execute his pitch in HPS. Closer 1 would watch himself throw successful pitches on video as well as throw thousands of practice pitches in his mind. He explained that the body could only practice throwing so many pitches, but in his mind, he could throw 1000 sliders from his sofa. Closer 1 only visualized great pitches, much like he kept his self-talk positive.

Closer 1, planned designated time each day to appreciate his life. Every day, Closer 1 would take time to spend with his fans to recall how fortunate he was. Closer 1 believed that telling one’s self the right things can ensure you get the proper perspective. He explained that thinking positively was a tool he used to shorten slumps and extend hot streaks. His positive self-talk included maintaining focus on the task at hand, only focusing on one hitter and one pitch all the time.

Utilization of emotions. Finally, Closer 1 explained the ways in which he utilized his emotions to be successful. Closer 1 used his energy and did not allow it to control him. He told a story about in spring training, the lead up to the regular season, his fastball would top out at 84 miles per hour (MPH). A week later, when the season started, he would throw pitches 92 MPH. He explained this increase due to the energy of real games and the crowd. He explained that the adrenaline or increased energy allowed him to get the most out of his body.

In addition to using adrenaline, Closer 1 used his emotions to inspire himself to train and prepare. Closer 1 explained that winning is a product of what you are willing to sacrifice in your preparation. His desire to win for his team and teammates was so great that it inspired his preparation. Closer 1 explained that a turning point in his career
occurred when he stopped caring about personal accomplishments and only began to play for wins.

Table 1 outlines the themes identified from the interview with Closer 1.

Table 1

*Themes Identified from Interview with Closer 1*

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<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Theme Identified</th>
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<td>Regulation of Emotions</td>
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<td>Adrenaline</td>
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<td>Play for Teammates</td>
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<td>Preparation</td>
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<td>Self-Talk</td>
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**Closer 2**

*Appraisal of emotions.* The interview with Closer 2 revealed that he used honest reflection, self-talk, and communication to appraise his emotions. Closer 2 had a strong religious faith, which he used to accept failures, understanding that one can’t succeed every time. He would watch videos of himself after a failure to understand his problems during the outing. He made sure to give himself an honest reflection, being respectful of the talent of his opponent, understanding that sometimes you get beat by excellent
competition, as opposed to beating one’s self. However, negative self-talk is a way one can beat himself, explained Closer 2. He described a situation where his negative self-talk buried him and caused his failures. Only when he realized that he was not a machine, just a normal person who cannot succeed all of the time, did he return to form.

**Expression of emotions.** Much of his emotional appraisal occurred during conversations with his brother, throughout his career. In addition to talking to his brother, Closer 2 explained that he talked to his mother and God every day in order to express his emotions. Closer 2 maintained healthy conversation with his catcher every day, making sure they were always on the same page. He discussed how conversations with teammates helped him identify emotional shortcomings, and identify ways to maintain professionalism at all times.

**Regulation of emotions.** Regulation of emotions was an important factor in the success of Closer 2. He explained that one method he used to regulate his emotions was leaving his work at work. Closer 2 explained that during the season, he had a responsibility to think long and hard about the game and he was able to leave his personal life outside the clubhouse. Similarly, Closer 2 performed best when he did not take his closer responsibilities home with him. When he was home, he would think about home and family, when he was at the stadium he would think about baseball. Once, Closer 2 was struggling and blew five saves in a row. To calm his emotions and quiet the negative self-talk, he had his fiancé and son come meet him on the road. After watching cartoons and enjoying focused time with his son, he was able to regulate the negative emotions he had been experiencing. Closer 2 blamed his slump on uncharacteristic self-talk. Closer 2 tried to constantly maintain positive self-talk as one of his techniques for regulating his
emotions. He worked hard to never get too high or too low with his emotions. He maintained faith in himself and his abilities and worked to enjoy his experience. By simply enjoying the opportunity to be a MLB player, he was able to regulate his emotional ups and downs. He valued having fun and joking around with his teammates. It was a way to regulate the stress of games and learn to enjoy the long, high pressure season. He understood that baseball was a long season and one must be ready for and expect both successes and failures every year. He would remind himself the he was in control of his opportunities, as nothing happened until he was ready to throw a pitch.

Before each outing, Closer 2 would write his family and God’s names on the mound and in his hat. Much like he used his family to break him out a slump, he used his faith in God to trust the process and God’s plan for him. Closer 2 described a moment in little league, where during a game where he lost his emotional control, he received a warning from a stranger. This stranger explained that if he were able to regulate his emotions, he would go to the big leagues with his immense talent, but if he did not, he would go nowhere. He took it as a message from God and decided to regulate his emotions and have faith in his career.

**Utilization of emotions.** Closer 2 utilized his emotions to maintain confidence. One source was the confidence he derived from his first-rate preparation during the offseason and before games. While at the ballpark, he remained extremely focused on his job. He believed he was ready to fight for his teammates, because they were like his family. In addition to teammates who were like family, he played for his actual family. He described how when he made it to the big leagues, his family was even more excited than he was, and that it was important to use that emotional connection and play for them.
He would remind himself through self-talk that he cannot afford to let his emotions take control because his children have to eat. He worked hard to always be positive, all the time. He believed he had to be ready mentally. Ultimately, he would tell himself to just be himself. He had earned his spot on the team, so he just needed to be himself.

Table 2 outlines the themes identified from the interview with Closer 2.

Table 2

*Themes Identified from Interview with Closer 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Theme Identified</th>
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<td>Self-Talk</td>
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<td>Religion or Family</td>
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<td>Utilization of Emotions</td>
<td>Play for teammates</td>
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<td>Preparation</td>
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<td>Self-Talk</td>
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<td>Religion or Family</td>
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**Closer 3**

**Appraisal of emotions.** Closer 3 described reflection and preparation as forms of appraisal techniques he utilized to be successful. He referenced honest reflection and analysis of performance as he believed that fair reflection helped him from getting upset after failures. Moreover, Closer 3 was more concerned about his preparation. Appraising superb preparation gave him confidence. Conversely, a lack of preparation left him doubtful and adversely affected his confidence in his performance.
Expression of emotions. Closer 3 tried very hard to not express emotions on the field. He did not want to show anybody up. Further, he felt that he shouldn’t need to celebrate his job, doing what he was expected to do for the team. Closer 3 referenced a time when he reached a professional milestone and that his teammates were more excited than he was.

Regulation of emotions. One of the methods Closer 3 used to regulate his emotions was by focusing on today. Closer 3 demonstrated tremendous physical preparation which gave him the emotional confidence he needed to be successful. Further, he understood that yesterday’s success or failures do not help nor hurt our performance today. He managed to stay even keeled, not allowing much emotion to overtake him on the field. He viewed the field as a mental escape from outside problems or stresses.

It was very important for me to stay on a very even keeled. I could not gripe with the umpires. I couldn't allow something that I could not control, change my approach and sometimes you have to catch yourself and stop yourself from doing that. (Closer 3)

Utilization of emotions. Though Closer 3 was able to regulate his emotions, he acknowledged that he was not emotionless. He explained that he needed adrenaline and emotion to pitch successfully. He described that he felt like a giant on the mound despite his smaller stature. Adrenaline made his body feel better and gave what he described as a positive nervous energy. He would channel that drive in the direction of playing for his teammates. He did not want to let down his team, and this pressure improved his performance. Closer 3’s fear of failure was described as his biggest asset.
There are times when someone asked you what's your biggest asset? And mine was fear of failure. I was afraid that if I didn't perform then I got to walk off the mound in front of 30 or 40,000 people, hearing the heckles and the boo’s I hated to fail, and I was afraid to fail. I'm 5’10”, 175 pounds. But when I was in a ballgame, I was 6’10” to 250. I mean the adrenaline made me better. (Closer 3)

Table 3 outlines the themes identified from the interview with Closer 3.

Table 3

Themes Identified from Interview with Closer 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
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<td>Fear of Failure</td>
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<td>Play for teammates</td>
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Closer 4

Appraisal of emotions. Closer 4 appraised his performance both physically and mentally after each game while it was fresh in his mind. Good or bad, he evaluated what happened, learned from it and left it behind in the clubhouse. He would not take the previous game home with him after his regular appraisal. Closer 4 would evaluate his strengths and try to match them against his opponents’ weaknesses. He would use self-
talk to evaluate and focus on the task at hand, always the next pitch. He was not immune to pressure, as he recalled his legs shaking on the mound during his opening start.

**Expression of emotions.** At times, Closer 4 would have an internal conversation with himself. This occurred at times when Closer 4 was not on his A-game. He would give himself a pep-talk trying to dig a little deeper in a game he would call a *fight*. Closer 4 did not describe himself as demonstrative, preferring a fist pump and handshakes as his expression of emotion, with an attitude of “get off the field and let’s do it again the next day.”

**Regulation of emotions.** Closer 4 used a variety of techniques to regulate his emotions. A focus on the moment was credited for his success. Closer 4 always left his performance at the stadium. When he was with family, he was able to forget about the results of the game. He worked hard to stay in the present. Closer 4 stated, “Honestly, it is the best way to live life. I think a lot of times we get away from that, but I think we would all like to be present as much as we can.”

Before his outing he would do visualization practice. Before he prepared his body to pitch, Closer 4 would visualize throwing all of his pitches, saying “see yourself throwing pitches…visualize what you want your pitches to look like.” When on the mound, he tried not to think too much. He credited his many opportunities and experiences pitching in HPS, allowing HPS to be his normal. Finally, before every pitch he would take a big, deep breath.

Physical preparation gave Closer 4 confidence. He credited his preparation for turning nervous energy to positive knowing the work has been put in to be successful. His routine included physical training and mental preparation such as studying the team
scouting report on the opposition. His routine and the consistency in his work allowed him to not get too high or too low emotionally throughout the season. Finally, his family played a large part in his emotional regulation. He believed that when he left the ballpark, he became dad and husband. Family was his postgame refuge, explaining they helped put things behind him. Closer 4 stated that “Family keeps me in check.”

Utilization of emotions. Closer 4 explained that emotions gave him a physical performance advantage. He described not only utilizing but embracing nerves to achieve extraordinary things. He believed adrenaline and emotions gave him more energy and improved performance, increasing his top fastball velocity by seven mph from spring training games to regular season games. “The only difference is the adrenaline and the nerves. And when it counts. Maybe subconsciously you are able to get and to push yourself a little bit further, with that energy, and with those emotions” (Closer 4).

Additionally, Closer 4 tried to remain positive with his self-talk and stated:

When doubts creep in they tend to dominate so you trying to keep that wall and keep those doubts out of your thoughts and stay as positive as you can…. I think positive thoughts, everyone has heard, stay positive, positive thoughts are pretty miraculous. And they are, if you set out to do something, with confidence, more often than not, you can do it.

He discussed how you must stay positive, because one can’t let the negative emotions of one bad performance snowball into a week of bad performances or a month of bad performance. When failures repeat you can cost your team, thus you owe it to them to leave your negative emotions behind.

Table 4 outlines the themes identified from the interview with Closer 4.
Table 4

Themes Identified from Interview with Closer 4

<table>
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Closer 5

**Appraisal of emotions.** Closer 5 would maintain a consistent routine each day that would help him understand how he was feeling and how to go about the rest of the day to ensure he was ready to perform. Once he addressed the issue, he would forget it and move on with his preparation. Immediately after each game, Closer 5 would evaluate his performance alone in the dugout. He appraised his performance immediately following his performance when it was fresh in his mind. Every pitch was scrutinized. He would use self-talk to assess his outing. Following his individual meeting, he would meet with catchers and coaches as needed to discuss his performance. The assessment was process based and the results didn’t necessarily matter, meaning he focused on his own pitch execution and not the end result. In baseball, many variables exist, for
example a poorly hit ball can result in an offensive positive result, conversely a well hit ball can result in a negative result. Thus, focusing on execution or process was more important than result.

**Expression of emotions.** Closer 5 did not express his emotions in excess. Occasionally, in the heat of the battle he would have an emotional outburst to celebrate or release frustrations. Further, occasionally he would express his emotions to catchers and coaches and rarely to his family. However, most often, Closer 5 wanted to leave his performance emotions and thoughts about baseball behind when he left the stadium.

**Regulation of emotions.** Closer 5 did several things to maintain a high level of focus. First, he did not dwell on physical or emotional stress. He tried to maintain a high level of focus without over thinking, choosing to rely on his athleticism in the heat of the game. He did not want “paralysis by analysis.” When he needed to heighten his focus, he would focus in on a pebble in the dirt. He would try to find details on that pebble until it was the only pebble he could see. This was a technique he learned from another fantastic closer included in this study. He understood that he could only control what he could control. He would not enter the bullpen until the later third of the game. He remained in the clubhouse to suppress the excitement from the crowd.

He understood that the body is never perfect, but he could do certain things to help maintain his mental focus. For maximum hydration and focus, instead of coffee he drank water. Closer 5 used distance training to lower his resting heart rate. He ran to keep his body in great shape, flushing both his body and mind. During his runs he would practice long, deep breaths. During his runs he would use visualization. Again, in the bullpen he would visualize his performance. Closer 5 would study video of his
opponents, so that when he did his visualization practice he could imagine throwing to those hitters. At times, he stated that he could trick his mind into not knowing if he was visualizing or actually pitching. This superior preparation helped him stay calm because he knew he was ready to perform. These routines gave him something to fall back on in HPS, as he knew he had a process that built success.

Utilization of emotions. Closer 5 believes that all competitors naturally become emotional in competition. He found competition in his preparation. Closer 5 was very competitive in his physical and emotional preparation. Not only did his preparation breed confidence, it released negative emotions. In the video room, he would study his competition to understand how he could lineup his strengths against the competition’s weaknesses. In addition, Closer 5 understood that pressure was more on his competition than upon him. He never wanted to give his opponent any advantage, thus he never displayed his emotions on the field. All of this preparation gave him a mental edge and increased confidence. He took great pleasure in his pregame preparation.

Closer 5 used his emotions to inspire him to play for his teammates. In college baseball, he got his real first taste of winning as a team. He always focused on team accomplishments over personal accomplishments. This focus on team allowed him to stay focused and not get nervous when he was approaching major milestones or HPS. Many of his biggest moments occurred with his family and friends in attendance. He viewed their presence as a benefit and motivation as opposed to adding stress to an already HPS.

Table 5 outlines the themes identified from the interview with Closer 5.

Table 5
Themes Identified from Interview with Closer 5

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<th>Research Question</th>
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Closer 6

**Appraisal of emotions.** Closer 6 realized that if he was focused on anything except the next pitch, he needed to refocus. This emotional distraction appraisal was one technique he used to evaluate his emotional state. Another evaluation technique he used was watching his chest and noticing if he needed to slow his breathing. Currently, as a baseball coach, Closer 6 using this technique to evaluate how his current pitcher is handling a HPS. When he was on the mound, he would use self-talk to tell his heart to slow down if he appraised that he was breathing too fast. Finally, Closer 6 would wait until the next day to evaluate his performance. He did this the day after a performance so that he had a clear head and was able to evaluate all aspects of his performance.
Expression of emotions. Before and after games, Closer 6 would express his emotions in casual conversations with select coaches and staff. After games, he was celebrating his successes. He explained that he could not constrain his postgame celebrations and outbursts of emotion. In a game, he was typically calm, cool, and collected but as soon as he would complete his performance, he would have an explosion of emotions.

Regulation of emotions. In order to regulate his emotions, Closer 6 developed a technique in which he would focus on one pebble in the dirt. He would study that pebble, its shape, color, and try to find unique features, this would help him to regulate his emotions in HPS. Before each pitch, Closer 6 would take long, deep breaths to control his emotions. When in pain or emotionally distracted, he credited pinpoint focus for helping him block out possible distractions. He would apply self-talk, telling himself to slow his heart rate. He would remind himself that the team needed him and that he needed to protect his job.

Closer 6 credited his ability to maintain a singular focus and lack of multitasking as a mechanism for regulating his emotions. At the end of games, he would allow the emotions of the game to simply drift away. He learned from his mentor, another excellent closer that the way to last in the game of baseball is that one needs to be able forget yesterday. Thus, Closer 6 maintained an identical postgame routine after both wins and losses. This routine, which he maintained after both wins and losses, usually included drinking two or three beers after the game to calm himself down. Before games, Closer 6 had determined preparation. He would do his video study of the opposition, which would help him build confidence going into HPS, lowering his tension.
Additionally, he would run the bleachers of every stadium throughout the year. This would increase his confidence and allow him to alleviate emotions. His consistent routine helped him control nerves and maintain a clear head and confidence.

**Utilization of emotions.** One of the primary ways Closer 6 utilized his emotions was the belief that he always played for his teammates. He directed his emotions towards his teammates and was motivated to not let them down. He explained that his teammates were his primary motivation and his job was to protect leads that they gave him. Playing for his teammates allowed him to overcome distractions and pressures or personal milestones or high pressure games. He was able to get away from personal statistics and focus on playing for his teammates.

Closer 6 took pride in doing what he was supposed to do. The primary technique he implored was maintaining focus on the next pitch and the next pitch only. On rare occasions he would create extra emotion when needed by trying to make things personal in his mind between himself and the hitter.

Table 6 outlines the themes identified from the interview with Closer 6.

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**Table 6**

*Themes Identified from Interview with Closer 6*
Closer 7

**Appraisal of emotions.** Closer 7 explained that in order to be a good self-evaluator you needed to be honest with yourself. He watched videos to critique himself and give himself honest feedback on his performance in HPS. In game, he would count the number of breaths he would be taking. If he was counting fast, he understood his emotions were high and he needed to calm down.

**Expression of emotions.** Closer 7 did not do much to express his emotions. He did participate in some self-talk. Closer 7 told himself to “get your mind right.” He would count breaths while repeating his slogan, *get your mind right.*

**Regulation of emotions.** Closer 7 currently works as a coach and gave some of his thoughts on regulating emotions by stating,
The guys that make it, are the guys that can control their emotions. And the guys that can’t, are the ones that can’t control their emotions... trust your routine. Have a routine that you can trust. We have a lot of kids that can’t control their emotions. They filter out, they fizzle out... But I do believe that you can teach a kid how to control his emotions. There's a lot of books. There's a lot of things on the internet. You just have to give them different tools... You can give them breathing exercises. You can give them visualization exercises. You can, I mean, there's actual physical exercise you can do about controlling your emotions. You know you can send them to both escape rooms and let them work on their emotions.

Throughout Closer 7’s career, he concentrated on a focus on just today. He believed in controlling what you can control. When he succeeded, he behaved like he had done it before. To gain optimal emotional regulation, he studied his competition to ensure he was fully prepared. He would visualize throwing thousands of pitches, which gave him confidence. Another confidence source was his routine. Closer 7 committed to the same routine every day. He explained that his routine helped him to create a short-term memory. When he was feeling emotional, he would count his breaths which helped him to slow down. If he was still worked up after a bad game, he would have a couple of drinks to calm his nerves and help him forget about the previous HPS.

**Utilizing emotions.** While preparing for HPS, Closer 7 worked to constantly master his strengths and strengthen his weaknesses. This strategy gave him confidence and allowed him to view energy and emotions as positive. He claimed to be an adrenaline junky and thrived off of his emotions. Closer 7 claimed his fear of failure
would be channeled into adrenaline. Though he had a fear of failure that drove him, he insisted that he was not afraid to fail, because he knew it was part of the process. Closer 7 craved and thrived on adrenaline. His pre-HPS run from the bullpen to the mound, helped him to generate peak adrenaline which he used to perform at the highest level.

Table 7 outlines the themes identified from the interview with Closer 7.

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Closer 8

**Appraisal of emotions.** Closer 8 explained that he would spend time giving himself an honest evaluation, especially following a couple of failures. He described this appraisal as being without emotion. He was seeking an unbiased analysis which he could use to improve his performance. Closer 8 gained a lot of confidence from his practice. He developed and perfected his skillset. In addition to practice, he was prepared. He
understood his opponent and how to attack his opponent. Further, Closer 8 took excellent care of his body with adequate rest, a healthy diet, physical conditioning, and arm care.

**Expression of emotions.** Closer 8 is a self-proclaimed introvert however he did talk about his emotions on occasion with teammates. He acknowledged that he would talk to himself and keep things simple. Closer 8 would talk to himself about simply throwing strikes.

**Regulation of emotions.** Closer 8 discussed his use of breath to control his emotions,

When people get excited, their heart beat picks up, once again, in the case of closing a MLB game, you get a little rush of adrenaline in you and everything kind of picks up the pace, but there is a point where you need to find where your equilibrium is where you can perform at your best. Sometimes, when that adrenaline kicks in and you get all excited, you have to calm yourself and taking in some deep breathes does that.

Another technique was his dedication to just throwing strikes, essentially focusing on the fundamental controllable aspect of his job. He was day to day focused, but when the adrenaline did get to him, he would focus on his breathing and concentrated on what he could do right now, which was always just throw a strike. He claimed to be able to shut out the crowd and the other team during his performance. Before games, Closer 8 would use video study and mental imaging with the focus on “always trying to stay in same place after every pitch, after every out, or every failure or every success.” Finally, Closer 8 acknowledged his religious faith as a primary element of regulating his
emotions. He knew there was more to life than baseball and his faith and family kept him grounded.

**Utilization of emotions.** Closer 8 felt extremely frustrated when he failed which he used as a motivating factor. He mentally prepared himself for the adrenaline rush he knew he would get when he first began preparing for an HPS in game. He knew the adrenaline would pick up again just before he took the field. Preparing his mind for that helped him use his emotion for his benefit and not his detriment. He wanted to give his best effort and get off the field so that his teammates could do their job. Seeking the respect from his teammates and opponents motivated Closer 8 to perform at his best.

Table 8 outlines the themes identified from the interview with Closer 8.

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Closer 9

**Appraisal of emotions.** Closer 9 would review his HPS performance immediately following the game. He would use a teammate with a similar job, the set-up man to evaluate performance. They would look for things they did well and things they did poorly; however, they would also acknowledge the competition’s skill understanding that at times one just gets beat. His pregame evaluation of his previous outings would allow him to plan for the upcoming game. When evaluating his performance, he would have to be completely honest with himself and not allow his emotions to blur his appraisal. Excuses did not work, because everyone had them. Rarely are conditions ideal in an HPS. Finally, he evaluated his self-doubt and looked to get away from the negative self-talk when he was able to identify it.

**Expression of emotions.** Closer 9 always had a teammate that he would talk to throughout the season. By maintaining close relationships with teammates, they could help identify problems and work through the ups and downs of the season. He also spoke to a sports psychologist about his approach and better ways to look at the mental side of pitching. Physically, Closer 9 tried not to express emotions on the field. He did not want to give his opponents extra motivation for the next game. Finally, he had some self-talk. He learned to use positive framing and reinforcement, saying things like, “I am going to” as opposed to “I have to.”

**Regulation of emotions.** In order to regulate his emotions, Closer 9 focused on the task at hand for that day. He felt that if he just went out, and gave it his best for the day, success would happen stating, “Yeah, pitch by pitch, inning by inning, batter by batter.” He accepted the results, understanding that there were ups and downs throughout
the long season. He also respected his opponents and respected when they simply beat him that day. He believed that HPS were an opportunity to go out and show what you can do. Occasionally Closer 9 implemented visualization as an emotional regulation technique to help him prepare for the emotions of a big moment but more often he relied upon was breathing before every pitch. He believed that a good breathing routine helped him be loose and ready to make each pitch. When things were going out of control, he would feel the game speed up on him. Focused breaths helped Closer 9 slow the game down. After games, he would drink a beer to help calm his nerves.

**Utilization of emotions.** Closer 9 used nervous anxiety as fuel for his performance on the mound. He believed it helped him throw harder, heal wounds and soreness, as well as excel in HPS. Closer 9 described the nerves and his experience when throwing in Game 7 of the World Series, the final, winner-takes-all championship game:

> I mean the adrenaline was still there. The nerves will stay there. But once you are between the lines and once I got an out in that- in that game. The seventh game, there were no nerves. I mean, it was, it was adrenaline. It was excitement… the pressure was there. The feeling like you were, like nothing can happen until you throw that pitch. That's what takes over…So for me it was just getting on the rubber, facing the first guy and getting that first strike.

Closer 9 later discussed how adrenaline would help him perform better when harnessed, “Well, just use it. Use the emotions. Use adrenaline every day. And that was for me that was the technique.”

Closer 9 felt embarrassed when he failed, and he used that emotion to motivate him to work harder and be more prepared for the next game or next season. He didn’t
want to let down his team, teammates, and the city he represented. He used that fear of embarrassment to fuel his preparation and performances.

Table 9 outlines the themes identified from the interview with Closer 9.

**Table 9**

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**Closer 10**

**Appraisal of emotions.** Closer 10 appraised his emotions via honest reflection. After the game he became a perfectionist analyzing his performance and not giving himself credit for a lucky pitch. He would use postgame media interviews to work through his performance evaluation. Closer 10 discussed his failures with media and his teammates to critically evaluate his performances in HPS by stating,

I took it on. Those reporters, I would just come to it. It's like therapy. It’s just gone with it… there's no excuses. You know, there's just no excuses. Let alone
if a guy hits a ball out of the ballpark. You just eat it. You make a bad pitch sometimes maybe not bad. You know, and then you tip your hat, that sort of thing.

**Expression of emotions.** At times he would talk to his trainers when he needed to express his feelings throughout his career. At times, he would lean on a good friend or family member. In addition, he would engage in internal self-talk to project aggressiveness and confidence in an attempt to overcome insecurities. However, Closer 10 regularly used the post-game media interviews as an opportunity to express his thoughts, feelings, and emotions about his performance stating:

> Well I talked about the failures with the people that are coming around to the locker to record. That's the stuff that you have to be accountable for, but for me it was more than that. It was like, I needed to really take this thing on to flush it. A lot of guys tried to brush it off, but I can't brush it off and I never brushed it off. I had this aura, like I was, unaffected, you know, but I was totally affected. I want to be a perfectionist. Ultimately.

He described his post-game interviews occurring after failures as grief counseling.

Post-game celebrating existed as well. Closer 10 often celebrated his victories with physical gestures and vocal outbursts sharing:

> When I made a good pitch, because every out is big, especially, obviously, the last one. But you try to hold on to your emotions, but… it made me, yes. I don't know. I just got better with emotion. You know, it got the best out of me. I couldn't be like Mr. Cool, calm. It just wasn't who I was. I mean, it was real. My emotion, it wasn't premeditated.
Sometimes, he wished he had been less demonstrative, because he did not want to show
Guys up. Closer 10 could not control his emotions however, it was an unconscious
release of the emotions that had been building for him.

**Regulation of emotions.** One of the methods used by Closer 10 to regulate his
emotions was to try to enjoy the moment. He realized that wins don’t last long when you
are on to the next game the next day. He also understood that being a professional at that
level was fleeting. His fear of failure and discussion of this fear was a way he would
temper his emotions, and maintain a focus on the moment, the pitch, the game.

Closer 10 credits his physical preparation as a major factor in his ability to calm
his emotions. He was in fantastic shape, running four miles a day. His incredible shape
and preparation gave him confidence to succeed. Being disciplined to maintain his level
of training helped calm him down. He believed that running was very good for his head.
He said that running gave him confidence and the more confident he was, the calmer he
was. Mental preparation came from planning for his performance which also gave him
confidence and thus, calm. When confidence was hard to find, he would try to fool
himself into feeling optimistic and confident. He credited motivational self-talk as a
technique used to regulate his emotions. His postgame interviews were more like therapy
sessions helping him to calm down as his emotions were flushed at the end of each night.
Interviews were only the end of his long routine-oriented day, he believed the many
superstitions or habits he had created helped him to regulate his uncertainty, thus
providing an emotional regulatory affect.

**Utilization of emotions.** Closer 10 believed the adrenaline and emotional
excitement was always there for him. He understood that adrenaline could work to either
your benefit or detriment. It helped him throw harder and helped him achieve feats that
even surprised him. Adrenaline made his physical pain and soreness go away. He
likened adrenaline to taking a drug, as you never know exactly how it might affect you.
For him, this emotional high was addicting and exhilarating. When entering the game,
his walk out music would help him to get amped up, and he had to be careful not to get
too excited to where it adversely affected his performance. He would work to channel his
adrenaline to be a positive force in his game.

In the offseason, past failures would motivate him to prepare for the next season.
Player 10 enjoyed an all-time great regular season to only watch it end in a World Series
loss that he had pitched in. He was miserable throughout the offseason, motivating his
workouts and progress. The following several seasons turned out to be all time great
years as a closer.

Table 10 outlines the themes identified from the interview with Closer 10.

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Closer 11

**Appraisal of emotions.** Closer 11 did very little emotional appraisal. He felt similar most days, whether it was a Spring Training game or a World Series.

I was always feeling the same because I knew that I was going to my home, win or lose, and I was a father, a friend, and a friend to my kids. I used to go to the ballpark, most of the times with them. If they didn’t go with me, when I get home, I am the father. I was never mad or stuff like that because, I would say, ‘I blew a save today, and the same situation is going to come tomorrow, and I got to pitch, and I got to do my job.’ You know what I mean, that was my mental motivation every day. I blew it today, tomorrow I got it. (Closer 11)

**Emotional expression.** As Closer 11 rarely appraised his emotions, he similarly rarely expressed his emotions. Off the field, on occasion he would talk to a coach or teammate. On the field, he never wanted to show up the other team, he always wanted to be respectful. Only when accomplishing personal or team milestones did he show emotions on the field.

**Regulation of emotions.** Closer 11 did several things to regulate his emotions. First, he took his job very seriously but knew he only needed to be completely focused for three innings. For the last three innings of the game, he would give it his all. When he was at home, he only focused on home and family. Family was always his focus before and after games. When at home he left his family separated from his work. When he was at work, he left family issues outside of the stadium. He chose to focus on what he could control.
For the most part, Closer 11 understood what he could control was throwing strikes and his preparation. Every day he would eat his wife’s cooking and then head to the stadium to run and lift weights. His pregame routine gave him strength and confidence. Closer 11 always had an elite work ethic. People would tell him that nobody trained as hard as he did, which gave him confidence. When his emotions did get going, he would simply tell himself to relax and throw strikes. Closer 11, believed God had a plan for him and he could not change God’s will. He believed God was always in control.

**Utilization of emotions.** Closer 11 believed he was a better pitcher under pressure. He believed that to be the best, you have to be able to perform against the best. His pregame routine was rigorous, which helped him get some of his emotions out and at times would tire him, so his emotions helped him perform when his name was called in an HPS. His love for family motivated him. Not only did he play for his wife and children, but he came from a large family for which he felt a responsibility to provide for.

Table 11 outlines the themes identified from the interview with Closer 11.

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Closer 12

Appraisal of emotions. Closer 12 would use his partner, the catcher, to help him appraise his performance, including his emotions. He expressed the importance of honest evaluation. He would give himself 24 hours to enjoy a win or sulk in a loss, after that, it was gone. He viewed himself as a realist. He valued his ability, after his emotions wore down to be able to recall his performance and honestly evaluate.

Expression of emotions. Expression of emotions was limited for Closer 12. He would use self-talk to get himself into the zone. He would reinforce his emotional well-being, repeating self-assurances. After games he would have an emotional dump. After a successful performance Closer 12 would

Just let it go. You just can’t hold it. I don’t know how else to explain it, you just can’t hold it. And then it is like a postgame high. You know, let’s say you come in after a successful outing and you’re fired up and you’re screaming, and everyone is high fiving.

Regulation of emotions. Closer 12 utilized many techniques to regulate his emotions. First, he had a concentrated focus on the moment. His focus was to just get three outs. He kept it simple. Regardless of a game’s outcome, he would wipe it clean from his memory within 24 hours. He understood that despite the many players, coaches, fans, and umpires, it boiled down to just a one-on-one competition, a competition he had to win. He tried to stay even keeled, even in the World Series he did not get too high or too low, understanding it was just him against the batter.

When emotions did run high, he used his breathing to calm his heart rate. Closer 12 stated,
Breathing, take a deep breath, step off, and take a deep breath. Assess the situation and then kind of think, ‘now what? What are we going to do here?’ Find a calmer state, between my ears, and not to say that I could do it every time and that I was always successful, but these are things I did to slow my heart rate and try to get back into the zone.

In addition to breathing he would provide positive self-talk. Closer 12 offered self-assurance with slogans like, “I am the man,” or “I will win this pitch or win this at bat.”

Closer 12’s preparation also gave him confidence which helped him regulate his emotions. When chosen to play for a World Baseball Classic team, in order to regulate his emotions, he simply maintained his regular preparation and work ethic. Closer 12 had a pregame, during game, and post-game routine that he followed each day to help him calm his emotions. Closer 12 stated:

I always lifted before games, so the heavy emotions were out of my system already and I am just preparing to give myself the best chance to win. I think it would help me build my confidence. I’d go lift weights and think, ‘alright, you are strong, you’re ready to do this. You are prepared.’ I knew that I was prepared every time I was on the mound; I knew that I was prepared.

When out on the field, he focused on getting three outs. He knew he was well supported by his teammates, had put in dedicated preparation and was ready to perform. Finally, when the game was over and all of his responsibilities were completed, he would have a beer or two to relax his nerves.
Utilization of emotions. The fear of failure motivated Closer 12 to always be prepared. He was sure that when he went out onto the mound to pitch, he had checked all of the boxes on his preparation list. He utilized the energy from the crowd to motivate him. He liked pitching in front of a loud and supportive crowd, almost as much as he loved pitching on the road. Away fans would give him an extra chip on his shoulder which motivated him to be his best. He utilized this adrenaline burst, explaining that he threw best when in an HPS.

Table 12 outlines the themes identified from the interview with Closer 12.

Table 12

Themes Identified from Interview with Closer 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Theme Identified</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Expression of Emotions</td>
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<td>Elite Focus and Short-term Memory</td>
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<td>Preparation</td>
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<td>Fear of Failure</td>
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Data Analysis by Research Question

This section of Chapter IV summarized the most common themes that emerged from the 12 interviews conducted with elite MLB closers. The most common themes are offered in detail with the highest frequency reported first and the lowest frequency count
Research Question 1 asked: What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to appraise their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

Common theme 1: Honest reflection. Ten of the 12 closers, with a frequency response count of 18, described honest reflection methods as a technique they used to perform successfully in HPS. Post-performance honest reflection allowed the closers to evaluate their performance and identify what, if any adjustments need to be made before their next performance. It was important to each of the closers to give an honest evaluation of their performance. This appraisal helped them to understand what actually happened, while creating a strategy for success for their next outing.

Emotionally, an honest appraisal was important because it provided closer on the previous outing and a plan going forward. This allowed the closer participants to forget the outing and move on, helping them stay in the moment, a strategy important to all 12 closers. Honest evaluations included recognizing successes and what made them successful, be it skill, execution, or luck. Conversely, identifying the potential cause for failure, either skill of the opponent, lack of execution, or bad luck was equally important. By pinpointing the cause for the result of their performance, they were able to understand what occurred and thus, how to repeat successes or correct failures. Some closers used video to assess, others did so by memory or conversations with teammates or coaches. Some of the closers conducted their evaluations immediately following the game, not
leaving the ballpark until the appraisal was complete, while others chose to appraise their performance the next day.

Closer 1 stated:

The appraisal process of yourself has to be refined to one simple ideal which is you have to be honest with yourself. ‘Am I getting it done because I am getting it done? Am I getting it done because I got lucky? Am I not getting it done but I am pitching well?’ Sometimes you just get beat and that is okay.

**Common theme 2: Self-talk.** Self-talk was referenced by seven closers with a frequency response count of 12. The closers discussed their use of positive self-talk during the appraisal process. They would be sure to assure themselves that failure was part of their job and to forgive themselves for failures. The closers would remind themselves that expecting perfection was not reasonable. The top closers would remind themselves to take deep breaths when they were overly stressed. Further, they would remind themselves to focus on the moment or the next pitch. This again, was example of being honest with one’s self about their closer’s tasks. One closer would remind himself that he was not perfect.

Closer 2 stated, “You are a person, you're not a machine. And you're not always going to do well. Who tells you that you're going to do good every time?”

Another closer would review his performance immediately following games for three to five minutes in the dugout. He would talk himself through his past performance. Another closer would remind himself that the situation always stayed the same, just his perception of the consequences of each pitch would change.
Common theme 3: Preparation. Preparation was mentioned by 6 of the 12 closers as an appraisal technique with a frequency response of nine. The closers expressed that through their preparation, they were better able to understand how they were feeling and adjust their preparation accordingly. They believed the quality and consistency of their preparation would positively or negatively affect their performance.

Closer 5 stated:

But I also knew that through my routine, once I was done, that was a better assessment of what I was going to have to overcome in four or five hours, once I finally got on the field. And so, based off of that I would be trying to shore some things up emotionally, if it needed to be done. If it was physical. It was getting in the training room it was getting more hydration, it was maybe taking a nap. All the things that I need to do to try and get back to square one where I was most comfortable.

Common theme 4: Communication. Communication was suggested as a means for appraising performance by 4 of the 12 closers with a frequency count of five. Four of the closers revealed that they appraised how they were feeling during conversations with someone that they trusted, be that person a teammate, relative, or even the media. By discussing their feelings, they better understood their current emotional state. Like a therapy session, the closers were able to diagnose themselves and work through issues so they could perform at their best when they needed it.

Common theme 5: Routine. Three of the closers, with a frequency count of four referenced routine as a technique used to appraise their emotions. One of the closers would evaluate his mental and physical state via his pregame routine. Another would
evaluate his emotions before each pitch during his prepitch routine, while another closer had a routine of evaluating his performance, in the three to five minutes immediately following his performance. His appraisal routine would evaluate both his physical and emotional state throughout his outing. He explained that this appraisal process would help him understand what he needed to do that night or the next day to prepare himself to be better the following outing.

**Common theme 6: Breathe.** Of the 12 closers, three of the closers used breathing to appraise their emotional state, with a frequency count of three. One closer would count his breaths. If he was counting fast, he understood that he was amped up and needed to calm down. Another closer would self-talk himself into slowing down his heart rate when he too was breathing too fast. The third closer would appraise non-breathing or breathing too fast as a sign of stress.

**Common theme 7: Focus.** Two of the closers with a frequency count of two, referenced their appraisals of their ability to focus, or lack thereof as an indicator of their emotional state. Both closers described that when they realized that they were not completely focused or locked in on the next pitch, that they were emotionally distracted. By identify this distraction, they would react by refocusing their attention which would help them perform successfully.

Table 13 identifies the common themes for Research Question 1.
Table 13

*Common Themes for Research Question 1*

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<th>Themes Identified</th>
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**Research Question 2**

Research Question asked: *What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to express their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?*

**Common theme 1: Celebration.** Eight of the 12 closers, with a frequency count of nine, identified celebrations as an expression technique that helped them to perform successfully in HPS. The closers described their celebrations as emotional outbursts that they could not contain. Most of the closers wanted to behave like success was expected. They did not want to embarrass their opponent or give their opponent added motivation for the future. However, several closers admitted that they could not contain their emotions after a successful outing, especially after achieving a team milestone.

Closer 6 stated:

It might be with a big fist pump or it might be with screaming or whatever. I was just really amped up and by the time I’d get to the dugout, my heart would be racing. And what is funny, my heart never increased, in fact I think it slowed
down depending on what the situation was. But as soon as it was over it would take me 20 or 30 minutes to amp myself back down.

All of the closers were successful at restraining their emotions in the moment of the HPS. They all handled the post-performance differently. One closer would use the media as his emotional dump, where he would just let his emotions out vocally. Others would fist bump, high five, scream or yell. One closer described how he once landed a plane he was learning to fly which had a landing gear malfunction. When they landed safely he was so excited; however, his instructor was shocked at how cool, calm and collected he was during the HPS. The closer likened the situation to throwing, calm and confidently in the World Series only to finish a game with emotions out of control.

**Common theme 2: Communication.** Seven of the 12 closers, with a frequency count of 15, referenced communication as an expression technique that helped them to perform successfully in HPS. The closers mentioned talking to teammates and especially catchers, coaches, trainers, family members, the media, and even God. They described communicating about what they were feeling to be an important way to understand their emotions, as well as work through their emotions so that they could start the next day with a clean slate and that they wanted to leave the ballpark with a clear head and not dwell on their past performance, positive or negative. Two of the closers likened their communication to a grieving process or therapy.

Closer 10 stated:

I sat there and talked to those reporters…They all come to your lockers…I just knew that you got to take it, you know, here it is, and give credit…and then you
live with it and then you move on and then you look back, it's exactly what I was supposed to do, you know, is go through, get through it. It's like grief counseling.

**Common theme 3: Self-talk.** Seven of the 12 closers, with a frequency count of eight mentioned self-talk as a technique they used to express their emotions to improve their performance in HPS. One closer would apply self-talk when he felt he wasn’t physically at his best while another closer would use self-talk when he was distracted mentally. One closer emphasized the way in which he talked to himself as being important.

Closer 9 stated:

Well, the one thing that he always taught us was, you know, don't ever go out to say, ‘I have to throw a fastball, I have to throw a curveball. I have to throw a strike, or I have to do this.’ It's ‘I'm gonna throw it. I'm going to throw a strike. I'm gonna throw fastball here. I'm going to throw a good slider down and away.’ To start that believing of ‘I'm going to, you know, instead of I have to.’ And I think once you start believing in, you know, ‘I'm going to throw a strike here I can throw a strike.’

The seven closers all referenced their self-talk to be positive. They would tell themselves assurances to help maintain their confidence, aggressiveness, focus or to give themselves a little extra motivation. Sometimes, self-talk would help them focus on the task at hand, encouraging themselves to just execute the next pitch. One closer emphasized the way in which he talked to himself as being important.

**Common theme 4: Routine.** Three of the closers referenced routine, with a frequency count of four. These closers referenced maintaining emotional expression as
part of their routine which set them up for success. One of the closers would regularly talk to his wife after games. Another closer, described that he was at his best when he carried out a routine which included expression. The third closer maintained that he would have to express himself professionally on both good days and bad to maintain his routine of self-expression of his emotions.

Table 14 identifies the common themes for Research Question 2.

Table 14

*Common Themes for Research Question 2*

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<th>Themes Identified</th>
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<td>Self-Talk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
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**Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 asked: *What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to regulate their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?*

**Common theme 1: Elite focus on the moment and a short-term memory.** Elite focus on the moment and a short-term memory was referenced by all 12 closers as an emotional regulation technique with a frequency response of 45. The closers discussed not just living one day at a time or even one inning at a time but one pitch at a time. They referenced controlling what you can control and not worrying about the rest. Controlling what you can control means focusing on the current task to be ready for HPS. Controlling what you can control means making pitches, just throwing one strike on the
next pitch? Once the ball left their hands the result was out of their control, so they focused on execution of their pitch, regardless if the result was a stakeout, walk, or homerun.

The best closers believed in living for today. When they got to the ballpark, they were only focused on their work obligations. When they left the ballpark, they were completely focused on family. Several of the closers had family routines where they would dedicate an hour every morning to their kids or dinner with their wife. While they were with their families that was their sole focus. One closer expressed that his family would clear his mind of successes and failure. Another closer broke out of a slump by having his son visit him on a road trip. As opposed to dwelling on recent failures, he watched cartoons and played at the park with his son and immediately rediscovered his form.

Closer 1 stated, “Yesterday is yesterday, and tomorrow is tomorrow. But today was always the center of my focus.” Closer 4 stated, “Honestly, it is the best way to live life. I think a lot of times we get away from that, but I think we would all like to be present as much as we can.”

**Common theme 2: Remaining even keeled.** Not allowing emotions to get too high or too low, was mentioned as a method for regulating emotion by nine of the 12 closers with a frequency count of 20. Even in World Series games, these closers tried to stay even keeled. They explained that the task doesn’t change. Their goal, no matter the game or time of the game is to throw strikes and get outs. The closers explained that perception of the consequences is the only difference as the action is the same.
Closer 7 stated:

And that's part of controlling your emotions and you see a lot of kids and they get out there and they walk the first guy and they never recover. So, it’s just about controlling your emotions, and if you can do that, you can be in the game a long time. Everybody there has the ability to get people out. Controlling your emotions is the hardest thing.

The closers explained that it is important to respect the difficulty of the task and temper one’s expectations. At the MLB level, the opponents are the best in the world. The elite closers, despite their success, expected and understood that failure would occur. They did everything possible in their preparation however they understood that over the course of a long season, they knew failure would happen. Mentally, they were prepared to take on both successes and failures. They did not expect perfection. Many of the closers in this study both lost and won championships. Their wins were exhilarating but their losses were very public. Two of the closers discussed that losing was part of the job. They understood that in every game one team has to lose and losing doesn’t make you a loser. Most of the closers had a nearly identical routine after both wins and losses.

Though they understood that failures would occur, they had an extremely high level of confidence in their skills and preparation. They practiced routines that would prevent them from getting too excited, like staying in the clubhouse for much of the game or drinking water instead of coffee. They understood that little things would happen throughout the day, or during their performance that were less than ideal. When things go against you that create an emotion, they worked hard to discard that emotion if it was not helpful.
Common theme 3: Preparation. Eight of the 12 elite closers with a frequency count of 23, identified their preparation as a technique they used to regulate their emotions. Many of the closers ran distance and worked out in the gym every day. Closer 3 explained that his physical preparation gave him confidence and on days when his physical preparation was not possible, he lacked conviction and most often failed. Another closer explained that physical preparation helped him to calm his nerves and turn nervous energy into positive energy which he could harness on the field. Running was a method used by many to help flush or clear the mind and body of toxins and toxic thoughts. The elite work ethic is a common theme for the closers interviewed.

The closers explained that they had extraordinary work ethic and this work began long before their performance on the field. Often this physical and mental preparation began long before many of their teams or opponents arrived at the ballpark. One example of this was explained by Closer 6 who said that some of his skilled, younger teammates questioned him one day about what made his so successful. These colleagues believed that all he did for his daily preparation was play cards with his friends. Closer 6 told the two young athletes to meet him at the stadium at noon to join him in his daily routine. Three hours before the rest of the team arrived, Closer 6 began to run the bleachers, touching every step of a 50,000-person stadium. After finishing one section of the stadium, his young teammates wanted to give up but Closer 6 did not allow them to quit. After running the stadium, Closer 6 went to the gym to lift weights. Then, he went to the video room to study his past performance and plan for the night’s game. By the time the rest of the team arrived around 3:00 in the afternoon, Closer 6 was in his pregame clothes and playing cards. The young pitchers never questioned the source of his success again.
When several of the closers did their daily running routines, they also practice their breathing. The closers would take long, deep, breaths. They understood that being in great shape would lower one’s resting heart rate, assisting the player in staying clam under pressure the running would help the closers to relieve stress and adrenaline while building confidence.

**Common theme 4: Breath.** Breathing techniques were mentioned by eight of the 12 closers with a frequency count of 12, as a means for regulating emotions. Many of the closers identified taking a long, deep breath as a technique used to regulate their emotions before throwing each pitch in their performance. The benefits of calming one’s heart rate and nervous energy were identified as results of long, deep, focused breathing.

Closer 1 stated:

I see that all the time, in a two or three breath period people will breathe five times. So, the oxygen that goes to your cells and all of those things, and from an actual physiological process, you are tightening your muscles, you are tightening back, your rhythmic blood flow. Now the water you drank six hours ago is not going to be dispersed as quickly. Your hydrogen, your energy, your ATP. I have studied all of those things to understand how the body works. And it is amazing how many forms of relaxation are based on breathing. Breathing not only to calm you down, but also short add quick breaths, breathing techniques, to try to get myself excited or try to get my heart rate up, which literally, I would do that in the top of the 8th inning, every single day. But in the top of the 7th inning, I would be breathing slowly.
Other closers explained that they would practice their breathing techniques while running or in the bullpen before performances. One closer explained that he would breathe to find and equilibrium. Another stated that he would focus on his breath to help him ignore all other thoughts, while a different closer explained that he would count his breaths to monitor his heart rate during his performance, calming himself when needed.

**Common theme 5: Visualization.** Visualization was identified as a technique for regulating emotions by half of the 12 closers, with a frequency count of 12. Several closers referenced the benefit of throwing thousands of pitches in their minds. They would only watch a video or visualize themselves throwing great pitches, never bad pitches. Their arms and bodies were not capable of such physical practice thus they could practice throwing to specific hitters, throwing specific pitches, and visualizing thousands of positive outcomes in their minds. One of the closers became so proficient at visualization that he could trick his mind into forgetting whether he was using visualization practice or actually throwing in a real game. The same closer would visualize while running distance, so he could practice his performance while his heart rate was high, as it would be in an HPS.

**Common theme 6: Self-talk.** Six of the 12 closers, with a frequency count of 16 explained that they used self-talk as an emotional regulatory technique. The closers explained that the self-talk always has to be positive. At the stadium, closers would not allow negative thoughts to enter their minds. Statements like, “you got this,” or “no worries,” or “you the man,” and “control what you can control,” were common. One closer blamed a bout of negative self-talk for the worst slump of his career.
Closer 1 stated:

I was really good at forgiving myself. I always tell young guys, it’s about, extending your streaks and limiting your valleys. Limiting your slumps and extending your streaks. How do you do that? We all have different mechanisms but, the biggest thing that I found was that positive, thinking positive constantly. Thinking positive this, positive that.

In game, one closer would tell his body to calm down or to slow down his breathing when he identified he was throwing in an HPS. He would remind himself that the team needed him. Another would think logically, reminding himself that there was more pressure on the opponent. Before games one closer would schedule time in his day to remind himself of his fortunate place in life and show appreciation for his situation.

**Common theme 7: Routine.** Five of the 12 elite closers, with a frequency count of 11 identified routine as a technique for regulating their emotions. Having consistency in their routines gave closers confidence that they had put in the necessary work to be successful. The routines consisted of physical training, mental training, and planning for today’s performance. Multiple closers referenced that their routines helped them to clear their heads, control their nerves, while producing confidence.

Closer 5 stated, “I was a big routine guy, so I did the same thing every day.” Closer 5 went on to explain that having a routine to turn to the next day, forced him to forget about the previous day’s successes or failures. On the mound, it would help one closer to focus despite physical ailments or mental distractions. In HPS, falling back on routines helped to stay calm and confident.
Common theme 8: Faith or family. Five of the 12 closers, with a frequency count of 15 identified faith or family as a means for regulating their emotions. The closers that identified family as a benefit described their family as a refuge from their work. When these closers were with their families they were not thinking about work, they were focused on the moment, focused on their families. They described family as keeping them in check and as a means for helping put stresses behind them. One closer discussed a time when he was slumping and used his son to distract him from his negative thoughts. He recalled, as soon as his son arrived, his slump was over.

Several closers identified their faith in God as a mechanism for regulating their emotions. One of the closers would write God’s name on the mound or in his hat. Another closer would stay confident because he knew God had a plan for him. Another closer identified his faith in religion as a means he used to get over a loss in the World Series, explaining that God had a plan and that he had faith in that plan. Finally, another closer identified his faith and his family as a way of staying grounded, remembering that he is more than just a ballplayer.

Common theme 9: Drink a beer. Four of the closers, with a frequency count of four identified having a drink after their performance helped them to regulate their emotions. The closers would have a routine of drinking one to a few beers after a game to help them calm their nerves. One of the closers would remain calm during his performance but after the game his emotions would run high due to success or failure. He believed having a drink would calm his nerves.

Table 15 identifies the common themes for Research Question 3.
Table 15

*Common Themes for Research Question 3*

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**Research Question 4**

Research Question 4 asked: *What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to utilize their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?*

**Common theme 1: Adrenaline.** Ten of the 12 closers, with a frequency count of 28, referenced adrenaline utilization as a key to their success. Hoffman (2013) explained that adrenaline was first identified by Walter Canon at Harvard Medical School in the early 20th century. Canon postulated that fight-or-flight responses evolved in our ancestors, unconsciously occurring with fear or rage. Further studies have proven that adrenaline is an involuntary stress hormone secretion that causes the heart to beat faster, and opens lungs to increased airflow, amongst other physical reactions. According to Sissons (2018), the effects of adrenaline can last up to one hour or a complete inning for a closer.
The closers described the effects of adrenaline as a feeling of nervous and positive energy. Some said that when they were nervous or anxious their bodies produced adrenaline which the closers used as fuel for their performance. For several, they could physically accomplish more or throw harder. Multiple closers explained that they increased their fastballs by 8 to 10 miles per hour, from one day to the next considering the transition from throwing in Spring Training to throwing on Opening Day. Another described adrenaline as having the power to heal wounds. Closer 3 believed he needed the energy to be successful.

Closer 3 stated:

I was afraid that if I didn't perform then I got to walk off the mound in front of 30 or 40,000 people, hearing the heckles and the boo’s and I was, I hated to fail, and I was afraid to fail. I'm 5’10”, 175 pounds. But when I was in a ballgame, I was 6’10” to 250. I mean the adrenaline made me better and I think, you and I talked about it earlier, about, you know, I didn't see them perform as well in a 11-run game as I did in a one run game. And I think the reason is that I didn't have that same level of intensity. I wasn't, you know, I wasn't 6’10”, 250, I was 5’10, 175, and I needed I needed that situation. I needed that, you know, that that ability to get adrenalized and, you know, again, it's, there's a lot more fear of failing when it’s a one run game because there's no margin and it just, it seemed like those situations may be better.

Another closer called himself an adrenaline junky. His fears helped him to naturally produce adrenaline. He craved adrenaline and thrived on it. He wanted to feel nervous. He described leaving the bullpen and his run to the mound as his peak point of
adrenaline. Though he could not involuntarily create it, it utilized it to improve his performance. One of the closers explained that you have to control the adrenaline and utilize it, you cannot let it control you, because it can either help you or hurt you. One of the closers described utilizing his breath as a technique for calming himself while his body was involuntarily producing adrenaline. One of the closers enjoyed pitching in his home stadium with the loud cheers of supportive but admitted that he preferred to pitch on the road because the hostility gave him a chip on his shoulder which provided extra energy and adrenaline. Finally, one of the closers explained that the adrenaline was inevitable, so one must plan for its arrival, thus being able to use it for good.

**Common theme 2: Play for teammates.** Eight of the 12 closers interviewed, with a frequency count of 18, described playing for their teammates as a primary motivator and utilization of their emotions to perform successfully in HPS. Multiple closers referenced that playing for your teammates was vital, as it kept one focused and away from distractions like playing for money, statistics, or personal accolades. One of the closers referred to the moment he dedicated himself to forgetting the aforementioned distractions and dedicating himself only to getting wins for his team as the turning point in his career. Another closer, one of the most successful in history stressed that playing for wins and his teammates allowed him to ignore the potential stress of accomplishing personal milestones.

Closer 4 stated:

I think, again this is something that you learn with experience. I think as a younger player, emotions come out more. And then, as a veteran with more experience, I think you are prepared for those times. And even though a game
might not go your way, it is about doing everything we talked about. Putting those things behind you, not being so emotional. Just because you had a bad day today, turns into a bad week, turns into a bad two weeks, or a bad month, and you find you are not just hurting yourself, but you are hurting your team and now your team is in a whole. It’s not just affecting you, but it is affecting your teammates as well. So I think you learn to control those emotions and know that the better you are at putting these things behind you, the better your teammates are going to be, which ultimately I think is the most important thing when you are diving into team sports.

One closer described his teammates as his family. He believed you always put family first and you fight for them. Another closer explained that losing meant letting down your teammates which was his ultimate frustration. One of the closers talked about playing in playoff games and how, as a veteran he attempted to calm down his nervous teammates, which would in turn calm himself down as well. While another closer simply wanted to finish his job as quickly as possible so his teammates could do their job.

One closer referenced playing for his teammates throughout the entire interview. His teammates served as his primary motivation. He did not want to let them down. He took pride in playing for them. He said they helped him overcome distractions like the pressures of the game or personal accolades. He explained that he played from his teammates in his heart.

**Common theme 3: Fear of failure.** Seven of the 12 closers, with a frequency count of nine identified fear of failure as a mechanism for success in HPS. One closer described his fear of failure as his greatest asset, referencing fear as the ultimate
motivator. Another closer felt that when he failed, he would embarrass himself, his team, his family, and his city. He always wanted to avoid that which inspired his work ethic. Similarly, one of the closers interviewed finished an all-time great season with a loss in the World Series, with him on the mound. This final failure motivated him all offseason as he did not want to experience failure again, prompting an all-time great streak for closers. Conversely, another closer described his desire to create fear in his opponent and he personally never wanted to show any fear or emotion. While Closer 7 turned his fear of failure into adrenaline and referred to lessons he learned from basketball legends Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant.

Closer 7 stated

I knew when I got into a stressful situation, I knew I had been through its thousands of times so I knew I could still do it. Like those guys said, how many games, how many game winning shots did they miss? There was a fear of failure but in that same sentence it is said, not being afraid to fail.

Common theme 4: Preparation. Half of the 12 closers, with a frequency of 11, referenced that they utilized their emotions to inspire their preparation for success. One of the closers described winning as a byproduct of what you are willing to sacrifice in regard to preparation. Superior preparation gave the closers confidence and motivation to perform at their best in HPS. Another closer maintained his confidence because he knew he was always prepared.

Closer 5 stated:

For me, again, going back to kind of being a worker bee. It was, the competitiveness would come out at two o'clock. It's like, hey, it’s time to work.
This is where I'm going to create an edge and you know I want to be able to feel like I've created that edge against the other team.

One closer believed that competition naturally creates emotion in a competitor. He would use that competition to motivate him in his preparation. He used that emotion in his preparation, inspiring him to have excellent work ethic physically, with his visualization practice, and in the video room to understand his personal strengths and his opponents’ weaknesses. Another closer used his emotions to fuel him to master his strengths and strengthen his weaknesses.

Common theme 5: Self-talk. Five of the closers interviewed, with a frequency of eight, referenced self-talk as a way they would utilize their emotions to be successful in HPS. One closer would use self-talk to convince himself that he would succeed. Another closer would remind himself that he had earned his right to be where he was and that he just needed to be himself to be successful. While another closer would tell himself that he had to be successful in order to feed his family.

Closer 4 stated:

When doubts creep in they tend to dominate so you trying to keep that wall and keep those doubts out of your thoughts and stay as positive as you can. And that was the best formula for me. And I am not saying I never had doubts out there, because they would creep in and I would try to force them out. But, like I said, when you get doubts going, they tend to stick around for a little bit and tend to do some crazy things to you while you are out there. I think positive thoughts, everyone has heard, ‘stay positive, positive thoughts are pretty miraculous.’ And
they are, if you set out to do something, with confidence, more often than not, you can do it.

Several closers used their opponent to create self-talk which turned into motivation. If an opponent complained to the umpire, one closer would tell himself that he wouldn’t let a complainer or an excuse maker beat him, assuring himself that he had already won and that his opponent deserved to lose. Another closer would remind himself that the pressure was always on the opponent. Making it personal in the mind of one closer was a strategy used to motivate himself to achieve.

**Common theme 6: Family.** Two elite closers, with a frequency count of two, referenced their family as a motivation for utilizing their emotions to perform well in HPS. One closer confessed that he played for his family. His goal was to be a professional baseball player and make money for his family. The goal of being a Major Leaguer was more of the goal of his family. He explained that his family was more excited about his first MLB game than he was. The other closer came from a very big family and they served as motivation for his success. He knew his family depended upon him in order to eat and survive. Motivation is an emotion that he utilized to continue to thrive to be his best.

Table 16 illustrates the common themes for Research Question 4.
Table 16

Common Themes for Research Question 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes Identified</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Frequency of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrenaline</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play for Teammates</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Failure</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Talk</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 5

Research Question 5 asked: What similarities exist in the descriptions by retired Major League Baseball closers regarding the appraisal of emotions, expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, and utilization of emotions in high pressure situations?

Eight themes were discussed by at least 66% of the elite closers interviewed. The most frequent response was in reference to having a laser focus on the moment and a short-term memory as a means for controlling one’s emotions in HPS, which was discussed by all 12 of the closers. The second most prevalent response was the use of adrenaline to utilize one’s emotions, mentioned by 10 of the 12 elite pitchers. Third, honest reflection as an appraisal technique was mentioned by 10 closers, as well. Fourth, the ability to remain even keeled, not getting too high or too low was described by 75% of the closers as a method for controlling one’s emotions. Four techniques were mentioned by at least 8 of the 12 closers. The use of breathing techniques and preparation were both mentioned by eight closers as a strategy implored to regulate emotions in HPS. Playing for teammates was cited by eight closers as a mechanism for utilizing one’s emotions in
Finally, eight closers stated they celebrated as the primary means for expressing emotions.

Table 17 illustrates the most common themes by respondents.

Table 17

*Most Common Themes by Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes Identified</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Frequency of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elite Focus on the Moment and a Short-Term Memory</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory for Emotional Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrenaline for Utilization of Emotions</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest Reflection to Appraise Emotions</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining Even Keeled for Emotional Control</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for Emotional Control</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing for Teammates for Utilization of Emotions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breath for Emotional Control</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebration for Emotional Expression</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another eight techniques were mentioned by at least half of the elite closers.

Communication and self-talk were each stated seven times as a technique of emotional expression. Self-talk was acknowledged by seven closers as a way to appraise one’s emotions, while the fear of failure was identified by seven closers as a method to utilize emotions.

Four techniques were recognized by half of the closers interviewed. Self-talk and visualization were each labeled by six closers as methods to regulate emotions in HPS. Preparation was documented as a practice for utilization of emotions by six closers interviewed. Finally, preparation was described as a process used to appraise emotions.

Table 18 illustrates the themes identified by at least half of the respondents.
Table 18

Themes Identified by at Least Half of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes Identified</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Frequency of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication for Emotional Expression</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Talk for Emotional Appraisal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Failure for Utilization of Emotions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Talk for Emotional Expression</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Talk for Emotional Regulation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualization for Emotional Regulation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for Utilization of Emotions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for Emotional Appraisal</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary by Research Question

Summary Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was: *What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to appraise their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?* The most common themes identified by the respondents in regard to appraisal of emotions were honest reflection, self-talk, and preparation. At least half of all respondents described the three themes during their interviews. Honest reflection was mentioned by 10 respondents. Self-talk was discussed by seven of the respondents. Six respondents mentioned preparation as a method.

Summary Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was: *What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to express their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?* The three most
common themes revealed by the closers about how they expressed their emotions in order to perform successfully in HPS consisted of celebration, communication, and self-talk. Eight elite closers mentioned celebration as an expression technique. Seven respondents stated that communication was used as an expression tool. Finally, self-talk was indicated as an expression technique by seven of the closers.

**Summary Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 was: *What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to regulate their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?* Six themes were identified by at least half of the closers regarding how they regulated their emotions to perform in HPS. This category received the most responses by the closers interviewed. The ability to have detailed focus on the moment and a short-term memory was identified by all 12 of the closers interviewed. Remaining even keeled was acknowledged by nine closers. Breath and preparation followed as eight closers mentioned each. Six closers identified visualization and self-talk as methods for controlling one’s emotion in HPS.

**Summary Research Question 4**

Research Question 4 was: *What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to utilize their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?* Utilizing adrenaline to be successful in HPS was discussed by 10 closers. Eight closers discussed playing for their teammates as a primary motivator for utilizing their emotions to perform. Fear of failure was referred to by seven closers, while preparation was acknowledged by six closers as a utilization technique.
Summary Research Question 5

Research Question 5 was: What similarities exist in the descriptions by retired
Major League Baseball closers regarding the appraisal of emotions, expression of
emotions, regulation of emotions, and utilization of emotions in high pressure situations?
Eight themes were commonly identified by at least two-thirds of the closers as techniques
deployed to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize emotions to perform successfully in
HPS. Elite focus on the moment and a short-term memory for emotional control was
mentioned by all 12 closers. Adrenaline as a means for emotional utilization was referred
to by 10 closers. Ten closers used to reflect to appraise their emotions. Remaining even
keeled for emotional control was discussed by nine closers. Preparation, along with
using breathing techniques were applied for emotional control. Two-thirds of the closers
labeled playing for their teammates as a method to utilize emotions. Finally, celebration
was used by eight of the closers as a technique for emotional expression.

Eight techniques were identified by less than two-thirds, but more than half of the
closers involved in the study. Communication for emotional expression, self-talk for
emotional appraisal, fear of failure for utilization of emotions, and self-talk for emotional
expression, were all mentioned by seven closers as techniques used to perform in HPS.
Half of the closers in the study identified self-talk for emotional regulation, visualization
for emotional regulation, preparation for utilization of emotions, and preparation for
emotional appraisal as techniques used for high performance in HPS.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter starts with an overview of the study and has restated the purpose, the research questions, and the methodology. The chapter then summarizes and presents the major findings and recommendations based on the results included in Chapter IV as well as the unexpected research findings. Chapter V concludes with future implication and recommendations for future research. Finally, the researcher provides concluding remarks and reflections.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand and describe the perceived similarities among the emotional intelligence methods utilized by successful retired Major League Baseball closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in high pressure situations.

**Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to appraise their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

2. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to express their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

3. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to regulate their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
4. What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to utilize their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

5. What similarities exist in the descriptions by retired Major League Baseball closers regarding the appraisal of emotions, expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, and utilization of emotions in high pressure situations?

**Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

A case study research design was used to understand and describe the perceived similarities among the EI methods utilized by successful retired MLB closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in HPS. For this study, a participant interview protocol was used with the participants as the data collection measure or instrument. The researcher custom designed semi-structured interview protocols consisting of an unspecified number of open-ended questions and follow-up question to answer the study’s research questions.

**Population**

The population the researchers studied consisted of MLB closers. MLB closers include professional pitchers who have been designated the role of pitching in the last inning of games with a score within three or less runs, constituting a high stress, close game. According to MLB’s official website, in 2018, 53 players attempted to close 10 or more games. Four hundred and forty-three players have attempted to close at least 50 games in their careers. This population has a unique understanding of how emotions affect performance under pressure.
Sample

The sample for this study consisted of an elite subgroup of retired MLB closers. This sample of 12 closers was selected from the top 50 retired closers of all time, the target population. All of the top 50 retired closers have at least 200 saves. A save is awarded to a closer when he successfully performs his duties to victoriously finish a close game, protecting the team’s lead going into the final inning. This sample was uniquely qualified to discuss the strategies they utilized to be successful in HPS.

Major Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Below is a summary of the major findings identified by the researcher. The findings were organized by the study’s five question based on the common themes presented in Chapter IV.

Major Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations for Emotional Appraisal

A major finding indicated that many closers actively and honestly appraised their performances in HPS as part of their daily preparation. Some of the closers had a video routine the next day to evaluate their performance while others did it from memory immediately following a performance. Some closers included their teammates or coaches in this performance evaluation while others did it individually. Regardless, it was regular and consistent for the top closers. There was a planned time in each closer’s routine to reflect on their performance. The closers took the time to make the time for reflection.

The most important part of this reflection was that it was honest. An honest reflection involves understanding what genuinely transpired without bias or emotions. The all-star closers understood whether they were beaten by a strong opponent, or if they beat themselves by making mistakes, or perhaps they got lucky or unlucky. Each closer
needed to understand what the cause of their performance results were in order to make adjustments or maintain their plan for next time.

Sometimes a closer understood that they did their job, but their opponent was simply better that day. Respecting your competition or the difficulty of the task results in perhaps creating a new plan for approaching the same opponent however not developing any major changes to their approach or training. Other times, a closer could have executed effectively but had an unfortunate result. Again, this outcome would not warrant a change in approach or training. Finally, a performance with high quality execution and a favorable result would indicate that the closer’s routine should remain unchanged.

Other times, a closer may fail to execute, resulting in getting beaten by their opponent, or a closer could fail to execute but succeed due to favorable luck and a positive result. No matter the outcome, in this scenario successful closers would need to appraise their performance, preparation, routine, and execution in order to understand what, if any changes needed to be made. Despite poor execution, the closers understand that they will not always perform at their best. In fact, it is expected that they will fail from time to time. Understanding the cause or causes of failed execution, and the regularity of these failures helped the closers identify what changes if any, needed to be made in their preparation, routine, practice, plan, or approach.

Despite the closers’ differences in time of reflection, their scheduled reflections allowed them to move on with their life beyond the outing. Where one closer would review his performance in the dugout immediately following a game, another closer may reflect the next day during video review. Neither closers dwelled on their performance.
after the game. They understood that there was a time to reflect. This helped them to have a short-term memory and leave the game in the past and focus on sleep, family, regeneration of their body, and other things to maintain a healthy mind, body, and spirit. As a result, the closers maintained positive self-talk dialogue within while maintaining a healthy lifestyle off the field, vital in a seven month long, pressure filled season.

Athletes and anyone who performs regularly in HPS must develop an appraisal process that works for them. Like the elite closers, each person’s process will be different in the details however, assessment must be part of a high pressure performer’s routine. This may take place directly after a performance, or the next day, however it should be planned and part of one’s preparation and routine. This assessment can be done alone or with a colleague who understands the craft, to give educated feedback. It is the execution that needs to be evaluated as opposed to the outcome. Performance organizations must develop cultures and routines for performance appraisal. Closers, all athletes, and other high pressure performers including students and working professionals must be able to make honest assessments and create improvement plans, only if and when needed.

**Major Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations for Emotional Expression**

It is important to release pent up emotions, described Closer 1, and other participants. All of the closers admitted to having emotions about the game. The closers were not machines and all referenced nervousness, excitement, and the effect of adrenaline before entering HPS. Most claimed that during their performance they tried to keep the expression of their emotions at a minimum. This was done to be respectful of the other team and to not give the opponent extra energy. However, in the immediate
aftermath of their performance in HPS, most closers would celebrate their victories with their teammates.

In HPS that requires intense preparation and high pressure performance, releasing the emotions one has built up inside was described as a necessary and healthy action by the closers. Being proud, enjoying the moment, and rewarding hard work for completing goals and objectives should be celebrated with teammates, friends, and family. This celebration allows you to enjoy the victory, move on and begin to prepare for the next HPS. Enjoying a victory or mourning a loss quickly via celebration or communication is an important aspect of having a short-term memory and maintaining a focus on the moment.

After games most closers had someone that they could talk to about the game and their emotions. It is important to have a good ear to talk to throughout your process of performance in HPS. Athletes and all performers in HPS must develop an outlet both professionally and personally who they can confide in. It is important to be able to express one’s self. Closer 10s consistent use of the media as a therapy session was a unique method of expression. He explained his utilization of his media obligation as an emotional dump was a practice rarely described by athletes. If done tastefully, I believe that the media could be a useful tool for expression for athletes and performers in the public eye.

Again, all of the closers chose to celebrate in their own ways. Some celebrated or showed frustrations loudly in the public eye, where others celebrated in private. Some gave high fives or handshakes, others would scream or curse, while some would celebrate calmly with a beer in private with teammates. As a result of the findings, it is concluded
that celebration and expression of emotions is a necessary part of performance in HPS. The implication is that how one chooses to express their emotions is up to the individual and will vary depending on personalities and situations however, all performers should develop a celebratory and venting routine that works for them. Performance organizations must create opportunities for emotional expression for their performers. For performers without a friend, family member, or teammate they feel comfortable confiding in, the performance organizations should have personnel available for performers to confide in.

**Major Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations for Emotional Regulation**

Despite notions that athletic emotions are negative and should be avoided (Grover & Lesser Wenk, 2014), all of the successful closers admitted to feeling emotions before, during, and after their performances. The athletes interviewed made successful careers, performing almost exclusively in HPS. They felt emotions but were experts at regulating those emotions before, during, and after their performance. The athletes accomplished this by staying in the moment, not getting too high or too low emotionally, utilizing their breath, staying positive, and having effective routines that prepared them for their outings.

The only unanimous theme throughout this study was the closers’ collective ability to stay focused on the moment and maintain a short memory of past experiences. These athletes accomplished by focusing on the task at hand. When the closers were at work, they focused on their work. If they were exercising before a game, they remained focused on their body during that activity. When in the bullpen warming up, they were focused on executing warm-up pitches. When the athletes were on the mound in a game
time situation, they were solely focused on the next pitch and the next pitch only.

Finally, when they were home with family, they forgot about their baseball responsibilities and focused on being a dad, husband, or friend. Many of the closers had set routines to focus only on their families. They would put their phones away and forget last night’s HPS or tonight’s upcoming game to concentrate on playing with their children.

Likewise, performance organizations must focus on daily tasks and short-term goals. Future goals and challenges must be planned for but not dwelled upon by in-game HPS performers. Performance organizations must develop a culture of focus on the moment and task at hand. Organizations should avoid creating distractions for their personnel during training and performances. Once performance appraisals and their consequent adjustments have been made, the past must be forgotten. Bill Belichick, six-time Super Bowl champion Head Coach and General Manager of the NFL’s New England Patriots, famously responded to five straight questions after a lopsided loss that he was “On to Cincinnati.” He later explained that “we had to turn the page.” (Fox Sports, 2015). Applying an on to the next task attitude can help performance organizations create a focus on the moment mentality.

Pressure can build over time and it was important for performers to keep things simple. One closer reminded us that throwing a pitch in an offseason bullpen, during Spring Training, or Game 7 of the World Series take the same actions, and it is only one’s perception of the consequences of that action that changes within a performers mind. Looking at the big picture is distracting. Worrying about how one’s teammates, coaches, future contracts, or fans will react distracts a person from the task at hand. For
athletes, it is important to only focus on the task at hand, this pitch, this play. Nothing else matters. The past has passed, the future does not exist. All that matters are this moment. Like the elite closers interviewed, all performers should focus only on the task at hand, not the overall performance but each moment within the performance. A marathon begins with just one step and is completed by combining thousands of steps, yet only one step can be taken at a time. Further, performances must be viewed as a part of the collective whole, which likely includes both successes and occasional expected failures. The skill of focusing on the moment demands laser focus and an ability to remain even keeled.

Utilization of breath was one of the methods used by the closers to calm their bodies and their emotions. They would often practice breathing during their preparation. One closer would practice his breathing and visualization techniques while running distance, so he could simulate a scenario in which he was short of breath. He worked to lower his resting heart rate during extreme exercise, as he would have to do in an HPS. Those who want to perform at the highest levels must practice their breath and slowing their heart rate. Meditation and mindfulness breathing are among the many breathing techniques all performers should practice, gaining mastery of their breath and focus on that breath (Dyer, 2007). This is a way any performer can calm oneself in HPS. Performance organizations must make meditation or breathing practices such as mindfulness meditation or yoga as part of their performer training process.

The elite closers prepared at an extraordinary level. All of the closers interviewed had maintained high-level work ethic throughout their careers. Through their visualization practice, pregame planning, video study, distance running, physical training,
and other practices, the closers prepared both their minds and bodies for their performance. It was the confidence they received from this training the proved most significant. Elite preparation produces elite confidence. If a student knows that they prepared their best possible for their SAT’s, the student should have extreme confidence when taking the test. During a high stakes test, performance, or game, performers will feel emotions. If unprepared, those emotions may include fear, nervousness, or anxiety. If prepared at an elite level, those emotions may include excitement, joy, anticipation, and above all positive thoughts. Emotions will be felt, but one’s preparation for HPS dictates which emotions will be felt.

If one desires to perform their best in HPS, their preparation must also be amongst the best. Depending on one’s personality, sport, occupation, or activity, the preparation will differ. It is the preparation that allows targeted regulation of emotions. The recommendation is that, although each body and mind operate differently, all high pressure performers need incredible work ethic which breeds readiness and confidence in one’s ability to perform. That preparation, readiness, and confidence leads to the ability to regulate one’s emotion in HPS.

**Major Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations for Emotional Utilization**

All of the closers in this study discussed using their emotions to help them perform in HPS. This happens both in the HPS and in preparation for that moment. The closers, like all humans experience a variety of emotions throughout their careers. Learning to utilize emotions is an important step in learning to be successful in HPS.

Most of the closers in the study admitted to utilizing their adrenaline to perform better. Several discussed an ability to throw harder in HPS than they could in a practice
setting. They described how the HPS made them feel larger than life, capable of accomplishing great feats that even surprised themselves. Others described adrenaline as an assistance to getting into the zone, where optimal performance occurs. Simulating adrenaline is difficult, thus it is important to find situations that make one nervous to practice performing with adrenaline. As an athlete performing in HPS, you will have a competitive advantage if you have more experience in HPS than your opponent. At the highest level, the most important games, are often decided by a few points or runs. Nineteen of the past 24, World Series Game 7’s, were decided by three or less runs (Major League Baseball, 2019). Closer 1 stated that most games are decided by just a few key plays. In a close game, if the talent levels are similar, the team that can perform the best under pressure more often than not will be victorious. This can decide who becomes a champion and who goes home empty handed. Performance organizations and high pressure performers must seek out opportunities to perform in HPS. Experience performing under pressure gives one the opportunity to become accustomed to adrenaline and learn to perform with it.

Several closers utilized their nervous energy to fuel their pregame and offseason workouts. They learned to channel their competitiveness into their training. Many teams are moving away from distance running as a primary method of developing cardiovascular strength and endurance due to anatomical factors and adverse effects on the body (Swartz, personal communication, 2020). However, most of the closers described distance running as a major factor in the daily preparation and year-round training. They described the runner’s high and expulsion of emotions as result of their distance training. In addition to developing world-class physical stamina, a lower resting heart rate, and the
ability to breathe deeply and calmly, many distance runners, myself included, use running
to flush out negative emotions, sort out problems, and find inner peace (Friedman &
Jurek, 2012.)

Factors outside of the field can help one to utilize their emotions. Many of the
athletes were driven by failure. The stress one feels before a high stakes performance or
test can result in motivation to prepare. Thus, the fear of failure can help a person
achieve elite preparation. Many athletes in this study admitted that they hated losing
more than they enjoy winning. Understanding one’s fear of failure as a result of the
consequences of inadequate training can be a strong motivator preparing for HPS.

Similarly, playing for one’s teammates proved to be another external motivator.
Several closers identified the fear of letting down their teammates down as a primary
inspiration. They comprehended the hard work and dedication their teammates had put in
and they wanted to reward them for their hard work. The closers understood the
sacrifices, pain, and preparation their teammates invested and wanted to help them
receive the dividends on these investments. The closers viewed their teammates and
coaches as family members throughout a long season. Thus, they prepared at a unique
level to provide for family members, teammates, colleagues and friends, the opportunity
to taste victory.

Based upon the findings it is concluded that the practice of knowing your why,
why you do what you do every day can help people remember why they prepare at an
elite level day in and day out (D. Goleman, 1998). Understanding your why is an EI
competency. Offseason training, in season practice, travel schedules, among other
training can be grueling, and remembering why and for whom, you do what you do is an
important aspect of using your emotions to prepare to perform in HPS. Knowing why one does something created a context for their appraisal of their emotional state. The implication of this conclusion is that those who perform, or need to perform, in HPS, regardless of the activity, must be clear not only about what they are doing but also about why they are doing it. This understanding allows them to accurately appraise and use their emotional energy. Performance organizations must develop training workshops to help performers realize their why. Remembering your why can help you work through obstacles and challenges.

**Conclusions Based on Similarities amongst Elite Closers**

Several quantitative studies have found a positive correlation between EI and sport performance but never before has such an impressive group of professional athletes, with a proven track record of high pressure performance been investigated from a qualitative perspective. This sample was comprised of the all-time greats in the field of high pressure sports performance. Together, their insights provide a blueprint for future athletes and high pressure performers for successful execution when it is most important. All athletes, students, and business professionals would be wise to use the blueprint set forth in this study to develop their own EI routine. By tailoring the teachings set forth by these experienced professionals, performers can improve their preparation and performance.

The closers in this study used similar techniques to prepare and perform successfully in HPS. They appraised, expressed, regulated, and utilized their emotions however, how they did this varied greatly. Depending on one’s position, occupation, personality, and circumstances the specific details will vary on how to utilize EI. Despite
variations, the core concepts of EI must be present. One must develop a routine for each of the four areas in regard to their emotions.

Based upon the similarities described, appraisal must be honest and consistent. Privately or publicly, when, where, and with whom you express your emotions will vary but it must be done. Regulating your emotions must be done via one’s own combination of mental or physical techniques however, it one’s emotions must be regulated. How a performer utilizes their emotions in both their preparation and performance will differ, but emotions must be utilized. The implication is that performers must acknowledge that they are not machines and the emotions that exist need to be channeled to their benefit. Despite the differences in personality, preferences, and context that exist, all individuals who wish to perform at a high level in HPS must develop conscious methods for addressing the appraisal, regulation, expression, and utilization of their emotions. The individual processes and activities will vary by individual but the need for managing emotions in these four domains is constant.

**Unexpected Findings**

Many of the closers described their moments of highest tension, not as a World Series game but more often a game they played in college, Little League, a professional tryout, or their first game in the big leagues. They described how championship games at all levels felt like they had the same level of pressure. For the closers, HPS were not limited to the MLB Playoffs or World Series, they happened at all levels, both on and off the field. Thus, people should seek HPS throughout their lives and practice the effective strategies that make one successful at high pressure performance, as explained by Closer 4.
Many of the players learned from one another. Even as professionals at the highest level, they admired pitchers who had wisdom and experience. Several closers in the study mentioned other closers in the study as primary influences, role models, and people they learned from. Other closers not involved in the study were mentioned more than once. Some of the closers mentioned more than once include Mariano Rivera, Trevor Hoffman, Lee Smith, Dennis Eckersley, and Troy Percival. These closers learned from veteran closers’ expertise and techniques. Many of the closers pride themselves on being a resource for younger players either as an official or unofficial coach.

Finally, it was interesting how the closers accepted their successes and failures as part of their legacy and personal story. The closers spoke candidly about their successes and failures at the highest level. Some discussed failures that literally ended seasons. Several discussed losses in the World Series or homeruns they gave up to their competition. They spoke with respect for their opponents and an understanding that losing was part of the experience. They enjoyed incredible amounts of both personal successes and failures. Using the EI methods discussed in this study, this group of 12 elite closers combined to accumulated 4,125 saves, 48 All Star Game appearances, 40 playoff appearances, 11 World Series appearances, three World Series Championships, 23 years in which they received an MVP Vote, one MVP Award Winner, 14 seasons in which they received Cy Young votes, one Cy Young Award Winner, one No-Hitter, one Rookie of the Year Award Winner, and two Hall of Fame Inductees, according to Baseball-Reference.com.

Table 19 illustrates the total statistics, accomplishments, awards, and accolades for the study participants.
Table 19

Total Statistics, Accomplishments, Awards and Accolades for the Sample

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**Literature/Research Based Conclusions and Implications**

The research and literature on EI, when compared to the findings for this study, lead to the conclusion that the findings from this study are overwhelmingly supported by previous research into EI. Salovey and Mayer’s Theoretical Model for the elements and domains of EI align perfectly with the descriptions shared by the 12 former MLB closers. When looking at Salovey and Mayer’s model below it can clearly be seen that the alignment between this study’s findings and the major elements and the sub-elements of the model is literally one-to-one. Although this is not a quantitative study, such alignment would be, in quantitative terms, a correlation of 1.0 or one-to-one.

The implication of this relationship is clear: The results of this study can be generalized to other individuals who perform in HPS. It follows, then, that the types of techniques and practices used by these 12 highly accomplished performers can help others who need to succeed in HPS in their own arenas if practiced in the context of the individual’s personality and endeavor. The implication is that these techniques are not just baseball/athletics specific and they apply to all arenas and must be taught by organizations that train any individuals who will perform in HPS.
Future Implications

All sports teams, businesses, schools, and individuals must invest the time and money necessary to train themselves and their organizations to maximize performance where it is most significant, when the pressure is highest. The sample population was selected because this group of athletes created successful careers performing successfully in these HPS. Closers, by definition pitch in closely contested games nearly exclusively. These are moments with the highest pressure. This group enjoyed incredible success as highlighted by the statistics provided above. However, closers are not the only baseball players who experience HPS, similarly baseball players are just one amongst all sports whose athletes experience HPS. Further, non-athletes experience HPS in their everyday lives. A few examples include but are not limited to students, business leaders, first responders, doctors, nurses, lawyers, educators, parents, and students.

For performance organization and businesses alike, providing training to employees, to increase their performance in HPS is necessary to maximize results. Organizations spend countless funding and time training employees to understand the basic needs of occupations. The fruits of this labor ultimately ripen when workers can perform their best in the HPS. Professional sports teams like those in MLB invest millions of dollars on top prospects. In my experience in MLB, I witnessed some of the top prospects fail to achieve even a minimal return on investment. This was due to an inability to perform in HPS. Organizations lose millions in sunk costs, due to scouting, on-field coaching, physical strength training, planning, etc… when attempting to get those within the organization with the most talent to the top. When top athletic talents, receiving significant bonuses fail to reach their potential, the organizations miss out on
maximize potential. Not only do organizations lose the money invested, but they lose the possible production of their human capital. Performance organizations, small businesses, and corporations must maximize the potential of their employees by providing the EI training skills outlined in this study.

The methods identified in this study should serve as a guide to anyone seeking to create and maintain prosperous performance in HPS. By implementing the strategies identified in this study, modified to meet one’s personal or organizational needs and circumstances, people can develop a process for appraising, expressing, regulating, and utilizing emotions to perform successfully in HPS. Everyone faces stressful situations thus, individuals who create habits with a routine designed to prepare one’s self for those HPS, people can be prepared to perform successfully when those situations arise.

Malcom Gladwell (2008), in his book *Outliers*, explained the exponential growth or lack thereof when comparing athletes who perform best in hockey tryouts. He described how young hockey players who are selected for all-star teams, are usually the eldest children when the tryouts take place. Thus, these slightly older players are bigger and more coordinated, appearing more skilled than their younger peers. These children receive more and better training throughout the all-star season than those not selected. The extra training and experience better prepares them for the following season, where they are even more prepared and experienced, leading to another all-star selection and consequently more training and experience. This has an exponential effect over the years, to the point where the majority of Canadian National Hockey Players are born in the same 4-month period.
The same concept is true for those who perform successfully in HPS. A student who performs well in HPS, may find greater achievement on the SAT exam, for example. This success will provide the opportunity to attend a better school, learn from better teachers, build a social and professional network with those who also have experienced similar successes leading to a better job, making more money, and eventually providing greater opportunity and privilege to their children. This too is a model of positive growth patterns that cannot be quantified directly but has obvious value. Parents and teachers owe it to their students to not only provide the academic curriculum to prepare students for the SAT’s but they must provide students with the training to perform in HPS. By being skilled in HPS, students will have the ability to showcase what they have learned, opening countless doors in their future.

Though many of these strategies have been identified by sports psychologists, this study provides a citable resource for mental skills coaches. This all-time great group of experts on the subject of high performance in HPS is extraordinary in their pedigree and accomplishments. The review of the literature did not show any comparable group ever studied in regard EI and more specifically in high pressure performance. The frequency of their responses and their first hand insights offer specific examples of how and why such techniques were used. This study provides validity and deeper understanding into mental skills strategies used by leading athletes for athletes and all performers at all levels who desire improved performance in HPS.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was conducted to understand and describe the perceived similarities among the EI methods utilized by successful retired MLB closers to appraise, express,
regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in HPS. Based on the results and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations for future research include:

- Replicate this study with all-star MLB Hitters.
- Replicate the study with other athletes with proven success in HPS, including NFL Kickers and Quarterbacks, PGA Golfers, NBA Basketball Players, International Soccer Goalies, NHL Hockey Goalies, Olympic Athletes, etc.
- Replicate this study with high pressure professionals such as surgeons, teachers, trial attorneys, police officers, firefighters, emergency room nurses, performers, business leaders, combat soldiers and officers, superintendents etc.
- Conduct a quantitative EI in sports study, to determine what level of relationship exists between success in HPS and results on EI tests.
- Conduct a quantitative study to compare EI results amongst starting pitchers, middle relief pitchers, and closers.
- Conduct a study that identifies ways to differentiate training regimens and protocols adjusted to the personalities of the performers.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

Dick Fosbury famously once said, “when you reach that elite level, 90 percent is mental and 10 percent is physical.” Unfortunately, athletes have a difficult time understanding what aspects of the mental game they need to improve. The 10% physical, is easier to identify thus, most athletes spend a majority of their time working to improve this 10% of their game.
This study identified methods top closers used regularly to achieve success consistently in HPS. Athletes who utilize the finding of this study will understanding the core EI competencies needed to perform in HPS. They now have the blueprint for how to develop the ability to achieve high performance in HPS. Further, scouts can use this study to understand the mental game of prospects, making better predictions for athlete success under pressure. Teams, trainers, coaches, and front offices can use this information to identify players with strong and weak EI, helping them to make more informed decisions on who give a scholarship or who to draft. Once a player is on a team, the staff must use this information to assess, guide, and create development training plans to help athletes develop their mental game.

How many careers could have been improved by this information? How many millions of dollars of investment could have been saved using this knowledge as an evaluation instrument or better yet, as a development tool? How many players never reached their potential? How many organizations missed out on championships due to athletes choking under pressure? We will never know. However, we can change the projection of athletes’ success in the future. Teams, athletes, students, and professionals need to apply this blueprint to develop habits that will create success. The practices outlined in this study will help all performers who choose to embrace it, achieve greatness when they need it the most, in HPS.
REFERENCES


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# APPENDIX A

## Literature Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synthetic Matrix</th>
<th>High Pressure Situations IPS</th>
<th>Checking Under Pressure CIP</th>
<th>Career CIP</th>
<th>CUP Sports</th>
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**Notes:**
- IPS: In-Process Situations
- CIP: Creative Intelligence
- CUP: Creative Understanding
- EG: Emotional Growth

159
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APPENDIX B

Invitation to Participate

**Study:** Emotional Intelligence Methods Utilized by Successful Major League Baseball Closers to Perform Successfully in High Pressure Situations

August 20, 2019

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a qualitative case study to understand the similarities that exist in the descriptions of Emotional Intelligence methods utilized by retired successful Major League Baseball closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in high pressure situations. The main investigator of this study is Joshua M. Rosenthal, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University’s Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen because you have successfully saved at least 200 Major League Baseball games or received Cy Young Award votes for one or more of your seasons as a closer.

The population the researchers’ studied consisted of is Major League Baseball closers. Major League Baseball closers include professional pitchers who have been designated the role of pitching in the last inning of games with a score within three or less runs, constituting a high stress, close game. According to Major League Baseball’s official website, in 2018, 53 players attempted to close 10 or more games. Four hundred and forty-three players have attempted to close at least 50 games in their careers. This population has a unique understanding of how emotions affect performance under pressure.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the similarities that exist in the descriptions of Emotional Intelligence methods utilized by retired successful Major League Baseball closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in high pressure situations.

**PROCEDURES:** If you decide to participate in the study, the researcher will interview you. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow me to understand and share your experiences as an elite Major League Baseball closer and how you were able to appraise, express, regulate and control your emotions to perform successfully in high pressure situations.

**RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS:** There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient to spend up to two hour in the interview. However, the interview session will be held at an agreed upon location, to minimize this inconvenience, or can be done virtually using an online virtual meeting platform.
POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation, however, your input and feedback could help current and future Major League Baseball closers, pitchers, position players, athletes and anyone who performs in high pressure situations. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, athletes, and anyone looking to perform successfully in high pressure situations. Additionally, the findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study, and any personal information you provide, will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

You are encouraged to ask questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me at [redacted] or by email at [redacted]. You can also contact Dr. Phil Pendley by email at pendley@brandman.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Respectfully,

Joshua M. Rosenthal

Joshua M. Rosenthal
Doctoral Candidate, Brandman University
APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA  92618

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: Emotional Intelligence Methods Utilized by Successful Major League Baseball Closers to Perform Successfully in High Pressure Situations

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Joshua M. Rosenthal, Doctoral Candidate

TITLE OF CONSENT FORM: Consent to Participate in Research

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the similarities that exist in the descriptions of Emotional Intelligence methods utilized by retired successful Major League Baseball closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in high pressure situations.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, the researcher will interview you. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow me to understand and share your experiences as an elite Major League Baseball closer and how you were able to appraise, express, regulate and control your emotions to perform successfully in high pressure situations.

I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient to spend up to two hour in the interview. However, the interview session will be held at an agreed upon location, to minimize this inconvenience, or can be done virtually using an online virtual meeting platform.

b) I will not be compensated for my participation in this study. There are no major benefits to you for participation, however, your input and feedback could help current and future Major League Baseball closers, pitchers, position players, athletes and anyone who performs in high pressure situations. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, athletes, and anyone looking to perform successfully in high pressure situations. Additionally, the findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants.

c) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Joshua M. Rosenthal, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Mr. Rosenthal may be contacted by phone at [redacted] or email at
[redacted]. The dissertation chairperson may also answer questions: Dr. Phil Pendley at pendley@brandman.edu.

d) I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

e) The study will be audio-recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this project. Audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interviews. Once the interviews are transcribed, the audio and interview transcripts will be kept for a minimum of five years by the investigator in a secure location.

f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be informed and my consent re-obtained. If I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

_________________________________________  ________________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party  Date

_________________________________________  ________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator  Date

Brandman University IRB 2018
APPENDIX D

Audio Release form

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: Emotional Intelligence Methods Utilized by Successful Major League Baseball Closers to Perform Successfully in High Pressure Situations

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

I authorize Joshua M. Rosenthal, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate, to record my voice. I give Brandman University and all persons or entities associated with this research study permission or authority to use this recording for activities associated with this research study.

I understand that the recording will be used for transcription purposes and the information obtained during the interview may be published in a journal/dissertation or presented at meetings/presentations.

I will be consulted about the use of the audio recordings for any purpose other than those listed above. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising correlated to the use of information obtained from the recording.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to the outlined terms. I hereby release all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material.

_____________________________________________  __________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party  Date
APPENDIX E

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Brandman University IRB
Adopted
November 2013
APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Joshua M. Rosenthal

Interview time planned: Approximately one-two hours

Interview place: Virtual online platform other convenient agreed upon location

Recording: Digital voice recorders

Written: Field and observational notes

Introductions: Introduce ourselves to one another.

Opening Statement: [Interviewer states:] Thank you for taking time to meet with me and agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the similarities that exist in the descriptions of Emotional Intelligence methods utilized by retired successful Major League Baseball closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in high pressure situations. The questions I will ask are written to elicit this information and to provide you an opportunity to share any personal stories and experiences you have had, at your discretion, throughout this interview. Also, your identity will remain anonymous, our interview will not take place until after a consent form is signed, and I encourage you to be open and honest for the purposes of this research study.

Interview Agenda: [Interviewer states:] I anticipate this interview will take about an hour today. As a review of the process leading up to this interview, you were invited to participate via phone call, and signed an informed consent form that outlined the interview process and the condition of complete anonymity for this study. We will begin with reviewing the Letter of Invitation, Informed Consent Form, the Participant’s Bill of Rights, and the Audio Release form. Then after reviewing all the forms, you will be asked to sign documents pertinent for this study, which include the Informed Consent and Audio Release form. Next, I will begin the audio recorders and ask a list of questions related to the purpose of the study. I may take notes as the interview is being recorded. If you are uncomfortable with me taking notes, please let me know and I will only continue with the audio recording of the interview. Finally, I will stop the recorder and conclude our interview session. After your interview is transcribed, you will receive a copy of the complete transcripts to check for accuracy prior to the data being analyzed. Please remember that anytime during this process you have the right to stop the interview. If at any time you do not understand the questions being asked, please do not hesitate to ask for clarification. Are there any questions or concerns before we begin with the questions?
Background Questions:

1. How many years were you a Major League Baseball closer?
2. Can you please share with me a personal highlight of your career in Major League Baseball?

Content Questions: The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the similarities that exist in the descriptions of Emotional Intelligence methods utilized by retired successful Major League Baseball closers to appraise, express, regulate, and utilize their emotions to perform successfully in high pressure situations.

Appraisal

1. Can you please describe any mental methods you used to appraise your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
2. Can you please describe any mental methods you used to appraise your emotions in the preparation for your performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
3. Can you please describe any physical methods you used to appraise your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
4. Can you please describe any physical methods you used to appraise your emotions in the preparation for your performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

Expression

1. Can you please describe any mental methods you used to express your emotions in the preparation for your performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
2. Can you please describe any mental methods you used to express your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
3. Can you please describe any mental methods you used to express your emotions in the preparation for your performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
4. Can you please describe any mental methods you used to express your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

Regulation

1. Can you please describe any physical methods you used to regulate your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
2. Can you please describe any physical methods you used to regulate your emotions in the preparation for the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
3. Can you please describe any mental methods you used to regulate your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
4. Can you please describe any physical methods you used to regulate your emotions in the preparation for your performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

**Utilization**

1. Can you please describe any mental methods you used to utilize your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
2. Can you please describe any mental methods you used to utilize in the preparation for your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
3. Can you please describe any physical methods you used to utilize your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
4. Can you please describe any physical methods you used to utilize in the preparation for your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?
## APPENDIX G

### Qualitative Interview Question Development Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Question(s)</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1 What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to</td>
<td>IQ1 Please describe any mental methods you used to appraise your emotions in the</td>
<td>Source 1 Salovey and Mayer’s work on the appraisal and expression, regulation and utilization of emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explain the methods they use to appraise their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
<td>performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
<td>Source 2 Literature Review – Multiple Sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2 What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to</td>
<td>IQ2 Please describe any mental methods you used to appraise your emotions in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explain the methods they use to express their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
<td>preparation for your performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IQ3 Please describe any physical methods you used to appraise your emotions in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IQ4 Please describe any physical methods you used to appraise your emotions in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>preparation for your performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IQ5 Please describe any mental methods you used to express your emotions in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>preparation for your performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IQ6 Please describe any mental methods you used to express your emotions in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q7 Please describe any mental methods you used to express your emotions in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>performance of your performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

171
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ3</td>
<td>What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to regulate their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ4</td>
<td>What descriptors do successful retired Major League Baseball closers use to explain the methods they use to utilize their emotions in the performance of their closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ8</td>
<td>Please describe any mental methods you used to express your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ9</td>
<td>Please describe any physical methods you used to regulate your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ10</td>
<td>Please describe any physical methods you used to regulate your emotions in the preparation for the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ11</td>
<td>Please describe any mental methods you used to regulate your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ12</td>
<td>Please describe any physical methods you used to regulate your emotions in the preparation for your performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ13</td>
<td>Please describe any mental methods you used to utilize your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ14</td>
<td>Please describe any mental methods you used to utilize in the preparation for your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ15</td>
<td>Please describe any physical methods you used to...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ5 What similarities exist in the descriptions by retired Major League Baseball closers regarding the appraisal of emotions, expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, and utilization of emotions in high pressure situations?

IQ16 Please describe any physical methods you used to utilize in the preparation for your emotions in the performance of your closer responsibilities in high pressure situations?

No response was asked from study subjects for RQ5. This RQ was answered via researcher analysis.

Notes:
1. Each research question must be addressed.
2. Interview questions should tie directly to a research question.
3. Each interview question should have a source/rationale for asking it that ties directly to the purpose and research questions of the study so the information acquired addresses the purpose and research questions.