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Increasing Student Athlete's Knowledge on Stress Management, Self-Identity, and Managing
Relationships

Hannah Haveman

A Capstone project for the Bachelor of Arts in Human Development and Family Studies

Increasing Student Athlete's Knowledge on Stress Management, Self-Identity, and Managing Relationships

Introduction

The transition from high school to college can be really difficult, then when you add the pressures of being a student athlete, the pressure and stress can become debilitating. Many collegiate student athletes are unaware of stress management techniques that could improve overall mental health, as well as their relationships and life after sports. Without stress management techniques depression, anxiety, poor eating habits, and strained relationships may occur, as well as decline one's level of play. An increase in knowledge of how to handle stress in healthy ways can help athletes develop healthier romantic relationships, aid in the process of self-identification after they are completely done playing and increase their mental and physical well-being. To address this issue, I have created a lesson for the women's volleyball team at California State University, Monterey Bay in Seaside, California.

Need Statement

Some collegiate student athletes may not have the tools to handle the many stressors that being a student athlete brings, and may experience challenges with anxiety, depression, a lack of self-identity, hardships in relationships, and unhealthy coping mechanisms. Therefore, learning how to identify signs of stress, how to balance a relationship, and explore their identity separate from being an athlete may lead to an improvement in college student athlete mental health during one's career and also after they stop competing in college athletics.

According to Dufour (2020), there is a limited number of resources for college students who are dealing with mental health issues. Although there are often different mental and physical health resources provided for the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I

athletes, NCAA athletes in Division II or III schools do not have the same access to mental health services (Sudano, 2018). Without these resources, student athletes are less likely to seek help and problems can linger or even worsen. Due to the stereotype that athletes are too strong to have mental health issues, not having the proper resources further instills this stereotype in student-athletes' minds.

Some of the stressors that student athletes experience are similar to their non-athlete peers but are often magnified due to their high expectations and busy schedules. A common cause of stress is the lack of sleep that athletes get each night. This causes fatigue which can lead to problems in their ability to perform in school and on the court. A lack of sleep can lead to needing naps during the day or being unproductive and thus leading to time management issues and falling behind in class. The transition from high school level classes to college level classes is also another cause of stress because college courses often require more time and effort.

Athletes who are in Division II or III often have to get jobs as well because they are not offered as much scholarship money. Each of these stressors can begin to pile up, but these don't include the stressors they experience while playing their sport. Unfortunately, one stressor that was often reported by student athletes was the stress that their coaches brought forth (Cosh & Tully, 2015). This can include a lack of coaching skills, being uncaring, and making one feel as though their skills are incompetent.

Due to student athletes having much of their time being consumed by school, athletics, and possibly part-time work, student athletes may have challenges in sustaining healthy romantic relationships. Having high demands to perform athletically and putting effort into practices and competitions can leave little time to attend to a romantic partner, and a partner may feel as though they are not a top priority (Jowett & Cramer, 2009). This misunderstanding can cause

strain on a relationship, increasing stress in one's personal life and may be reflected in one's ability to perform in their sport. This phenomenon is often referred to as “spillover,” which is when negative attitudes, behaviors, or thoughts can begin to drip into work life instead of staying within one's personal life (Jowett & Cramer, 2009). Having the weight of a romantic partner's negative thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors in one's mind can directly translate into their performance as an athlete. It was found that there are negative effects on sport satisfaction and also an increase in depressive symptoms when looking at the occurrence of spillover (Jowett & Cramer, 2009). Understanding spillover and the effects it can have on one's romantic relationship can help student athletes better manage the many moving parts in their lives.

Student-athletes also report high levels of personal, social, future, and career uncertainty (Fraley et al., 2020). Due to the fact that most athletes that have made it to the collegiate level, have been playing sports for much of their lives, this devotion to a sport can cause one to form their identity into being strictly an athlete. Although this is not necessarily negative, when one stops playing at the collegiate level, and they no longer receive reinforcement of their identity as an athlete, the transition to life afterwards can be confusing. According to Fraser, Fogarty, and Albion (2008), identity can provide a sense of meaning while motivating certain behaviors, which can then serve as a reference point for future decisions. If someone has identified as an athlete their whole life, retirement can cause identification confusion. With little to no spare time to find other hobbies, interests, and likes, the transition away from competitive sports can feel like an identity crisis trying to rediscover oneself. In one study done, both male and female athletes rated physical ability as an important aspect of their self-identity, and although this can be continued after one retires, not having the same competitive atmosphere to push physical ability, can be a difficult transition (Fraser, Fogarty, & Albion, 2008). Learning about oneself

outside of their sport is an important aspect that will contribute to one's mental health during and after their athletic career.

Given that stress management, romantic relationships, and self-identity all play vital roles in one's day to day life, these are particularly important to address in a collegiate athlete setting. The stress that athletes experience due to the high expectations to succeed in all aspects of their lives can be anxiety inducing. With these topics of concern, I have created an interactive lesson on stress management, self-identity, and managing romantic relationships for the CSUMB women's volleyball team in Seaside, California.

Theory

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory is based on a view of human agency in which individuals are working actively on their own development and proactively making things happen by the way they act (Pajares, 2002). Being a student athlete in college requires one to make many different decisions and do certain actions to help oneself be as successful as possible in one's sport. This can also lead to a difficult transition after one is done playing and must find an identity other than being an athlete, which they have most likely identified as since they were children. Based on Bandura's theory, personal factors, environmental factors, and behaviors all impact each other. Personal factors are in regard to cognition, affect, and biological events. Environmental factors include one's surrounding atmosphere or a place they spend a lot of their time. Behaviors are the way in which one acts towards themselves and others. For example, if a student athlete is experiencing relationship difficulties in their personal life, that will show in their behavior, which could then impact their abilities to perform their best in competition. This interaction among the components also works in the opposite direction as well. If an athlete were to go to counseling to get help in their personal life, they then could see improvements in their

behaviors towards others and an increase in their skills on the court. In the process of learning about how each aspect correlates within each other, it is important to recognize one's self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is one's judgments of their own capabilities to plan and accomplish different courses of action in order to fulfill different roles or duties they may have (Pajares, 2002). As a result of an individual no longer being an athlete, it can cause some confusion on what they define their capabilities outside of their sport to be, leading to a lack of self-efficacy. For these reasons, my lesson will help student athletes better understand how the many aspects in their lives can play a role in their mental health, relationships, and life after they are done playing.

Consideration of Diversity

The participants included in this project were the current California State University, Monterey Bay women's volleyball team. Therefore, all participants will be women between the ages of 18 to 22 and also a student-athlete. This sample is not representative of the population from which they come because the project only includes CSUMB women's volleyball players and excludes students who are not student-athletes, men, and women from other sports. The content of this project could be applied to any collegiate team of athletes, no matter their sport or their gender because the content is about mental health. However, the content is tailored to women somewhat because of the inclusion of the impact of personal relationships on performance, which men may be less affected by. It could look the same to those who are younger that are in high school and playing a sport because they are most likely experiencing the high pressure to perform well in many aspects of their lives as well. Although this content could be applied to those who are older in some ways, if they have advanced to professional play, they have most likely figured out how to balance each of these aspects in their life. If I had the

opportunity and the resources to include more athletes that play different sports, that would have made this project much more inclusive.

Learning Outcomes

I intended to provide one 60-minute lesson to the California State University, Monterey Bay women's volleyball team.

By the end of the project, participants will:

1. Indicate at least one stress management method, other than playing their sport.
2. Identify one way that you may replace volleyball after you have finished your collegiate career
3. Explain two characteristics on how to maintain a healthy relationship

Method

I created a one-hour workshop for the California State University, Monterey Bay's women's volleyball team on how to manage stress, build self-identity, and maintain healthy relationships. First, via Zoom, I introduced myself and let the team know why I was there and what I would be covering during that hour. I used this presentation throughout the hour to deliver the information. See Appendix A. Within the first slide, I asked them to rate the current amount of stress they were feeling based on a scale from 1-10 with 10 being the highest. Then I ask them what they would rate their stress level while they are in the midst of their season. I had them answer both of these questions via a google form. See Appendix B. This took about 5 minutes. Following this exercise, I put them into breakout rooms to discuss different stress management techniques that they currently use. After this I asked a few people to share and then I went over different stress management techniques to help inform them of more ways that they can help themselves. These techniques included deep breathing, positive self-talk, healthy sleeping habits,

journaling, going to counseling, and seeking more support from parents, coaches or trainers.

Then they each answered a multiple-choice question asking which of the previously mentioned techniques they would be most likely to implement into their own lives.

Following this I provided them with a simple definition of what exactly self-identity is and then to solicit discussion about identity post-college, I asked the participants to make a list of identities that they perceive of themselves in order from 1 to 10, with one being the identity they see in themselves the most. I gave them some examples such as female, daughter, artist, musician, student, etc. Then I spent about 10 minutes on this section of the presentation, discussing why it is important for each person to know who they are without their sport so that when they are done, they do not experience an identity crisis. I gave them some ideas for how they may fill this gap, such as competition, camaraderie, routine, joining a women's group, and coaching. After this, I put them in break out rooms to further discuss and brainstorm ideas with each other of ways they may fill this gap. During this breakout time I joined each breakout room to ask each person what number being an athlete was on their list. Following the breakout room, three people shared ways they feel they may fill that hole in their identity when they are no longer a collegiate athlete.

The final topic that I went over was how to maintain a healthy relationship while being a student athlete, because being an athlete can add more obstacles in a relationship. I asked each person to think of three characteristics of a relationship that could lead to issues. I had them all send their thoughts in the chat at the same time, so that they were all able to come up with ideas on their own. Then, I went over some of the common themes that I noticed in their answers, and ones that were mentioned more than once were a lack of trust, poor communication, and dishonesty. This took about 5 minutes. Following that, I explained that there is often spillover

from work, which is their sport, to their personal lives and how that can have a negative impact on relationships. Finally, I explained why trust, communication, commitment, realistic expectations, and 'I' statements are key components to maintaining a healthy relationship. Afterwards, I explained that a google form will be sent to their email to fill out regarding different questions about their experiences with relationships. See Appendix C for the google form. To end the lesson, I did a quick recap on each of the three topics they learned about and how they each may be intertwined. I thanked them all for their time and encouraged them to put some of the tools that they learned today into practice.

Results

Learning outcome one was that participants would be able to indicate at least one stress management technique other than playing volleyball. I believe that this outcome was met. Before starting this section I asked them what their current stress level was and what their stress level was during season. See Figure 1 and 2 for results. After my presentation, I administered a survey. On the survey, there was one question asking which stress management technique they would be most likely to begin using. 25% of participants said they would be most likely to start using meditation, 25% said they would plan out each day for better time management, 25% said they wanted to improve their sleeping habits, 13% said they would begin journaling, and 13% said they would ask their parents/coach/trainers for more support. See figure 3. These responses were consistent with the content I presented, however, none of the participants said they would work on positive self-talk or seek professional help.

Learning outcome two was that participants would identify one way that they may replace volleyball after they have finished their collegiate career. This outcome was only partially met because only three participants were willing to share what they discussed in their

breakout sessions once we came back as a whole group. Although when I entered each breakout room for a few seconds to ask them where athlete was on their list, I heard them all talking about ideas but did not ask them all for concrete answers. Therefore, I don't know exactly what the other five participants decided would be the best replacement once their collegiate career is over.

The third learning outcome was that participants describe at least one characteristic on how to maintain a healthy relationship. I asked them to list three characteristics of a relationship that could lead to issues. The most common characteristic of a relationship that could lead to issues listed was a lack of communication. See Table 1 for all responses. At the end of the presentation, I sent out a google form and each participant responded to several different questions about relationships. One question was "what are two characteristics to maintain a healthy relationship." All eight were able to describe two characteristics of healthy relationships that I discussed in my presentation; therefore, I feel as though this outcome was met. See Table 2 to view their responses to this question. To understand more about their relationship and stress interaction, I also asked participants if they had been in a romantic relationship during season. 44.4% said no and 55.6% said yes. Then I asked, "whether you have been in a romantic relationship or not during season, which aspect do you feel decreases the most in your relationship(s) during season?" The answer options that I gave were communication, commitment, trust, having realistic expectations or there was no difference. See Figure 4.

Discussion

Overall, I feel this project was successful. Each participant was engaged throughout the presentation, added to the discussion, and learned a lot of useful information. Taking into consideration Bandura's Social Cognitive theory, I was able to clearly explain how one's environment, personal factors, and behavior can affect each other and how these can affect one's

stress, relationships and identity. Because each participant has her own life stressors and coping mechanisms, it is hard to know if each of the options that I gave as stress management techniques would be useful to each individual. Therefore, although I think that the seven options (as seen in Figure 3) included were sufficient, more options could have been provided to have a wider variety. One thing that I found to be interesting was that although all of the participants knew that stress among athletes was common, it didn't seem as though they knew just how prevalent it is. I stated that "approximately 71.8% females reported feeling overwhelming anxiety, 47.6% reported feeling so depressed that it was difficult for them to function, and only 28.4% of females reported being diagnosed and treated by a professional in the past 12 months" (Lopes Dos Santos et al., 2020, p. 3).

Given that the participants were all on the women's volleyball team, I feel this limited the diversity of the participants, but this project could be applied to men and other sports as well. One thing that could be researched further is how these same topics may have different outcomes depending on gender and sport. Another factor that I included that may not have been as relatable to all participants was when I spoke about relationships. Although I did include an example for those who may not have ever been in a romantic relationship during volleyball season, or ever, it may have not been understood the same for those who could not relate.

If I had the opportunity to do this project again, I would have liked to create another way for them to answer the question "how will you replace volleyball once your collegiate career is over" in a way that allowed me to be able to better analyze it. I also would have liked to include more interactive activities that would have been more engaging for them, but I feel as though the poll and google forms were the best options to collect data virtually. Although I do wish these aspects could have been implemented, I still feel as though they learned a lot of important

information that they could incorporate into their everyday lives as student athletes.

With more athletes understanding how to better manage their stress, the more they will be able to accomplish not only in their sport but also in their personal lives. Learning how to balance each of the roles that they have as a student athlete can be difficult, but it is just as important for them to learn who they are without their sport. Being able to identify who they are once they are done playing will leave them feeling as though they have not lost a piece of themselves, rather that they have grown with their experiences and their relationships. With this new knowledge, my hope is that each participant has gained a deeper understanding of how to manage their stress, develop healthier relationships, and identify who they are as a person rather than just an athlete.

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*Table 1**Name three characteristics of a relationship that could lead to issues.*

Characteristic	Amount of times mentioned
Effort	2
Support	2
Unity	1
Honesty	4
Having the same values	1
Communication	7
Accountability	1
Respect	1
Similarities	1

*Table 2**List of responses to “what are two characteristics to maintain a healthy relationship”*

Characteristics	Amount of times mentioned
Communication	4
Support	2
Trust	2
Respect	1
Honesty	3
Effort	1

Figure 1

Current stress level on a scale from 1-10 (1 being the lowest)

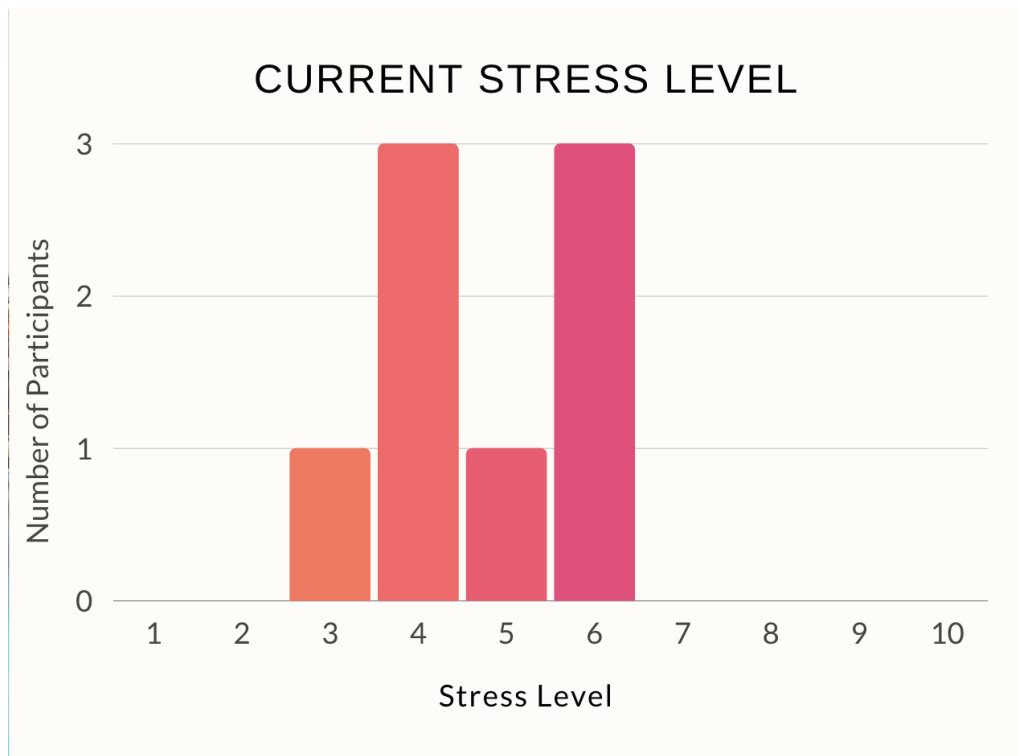
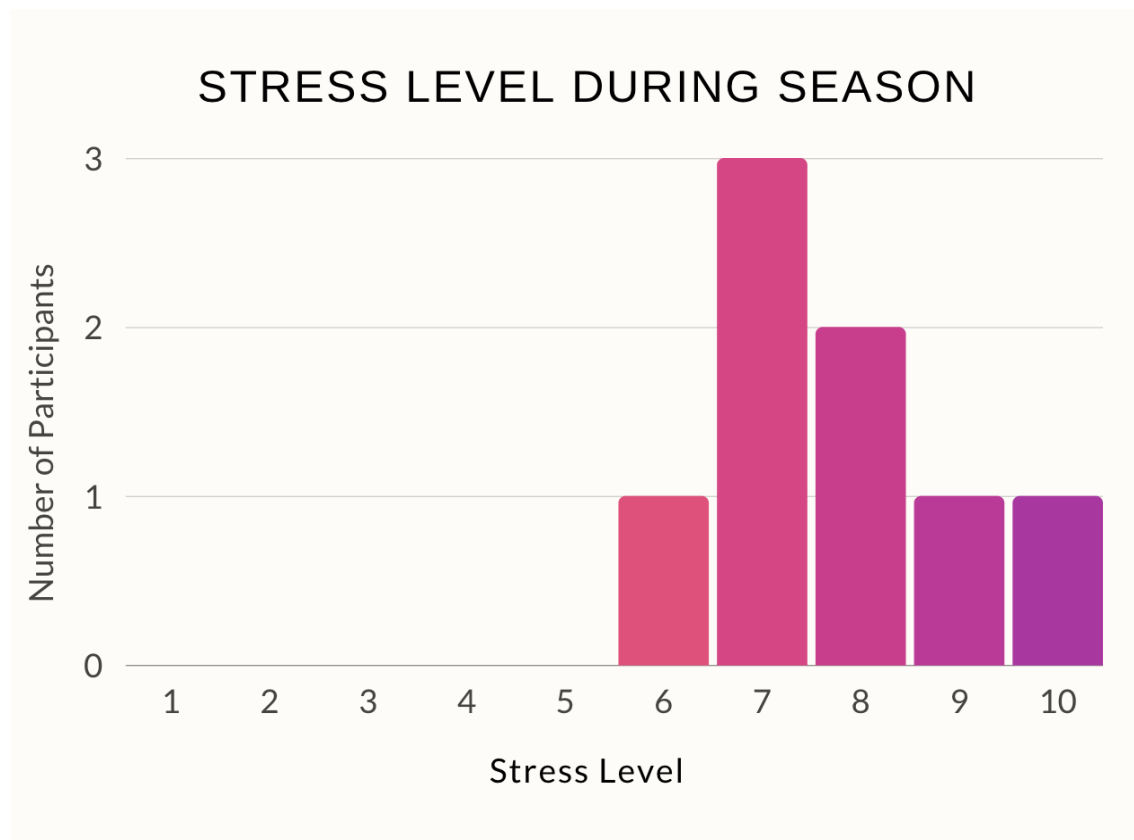


Figure 2

Average stress level during season on a scale from 1-10 (1 being the lowest)



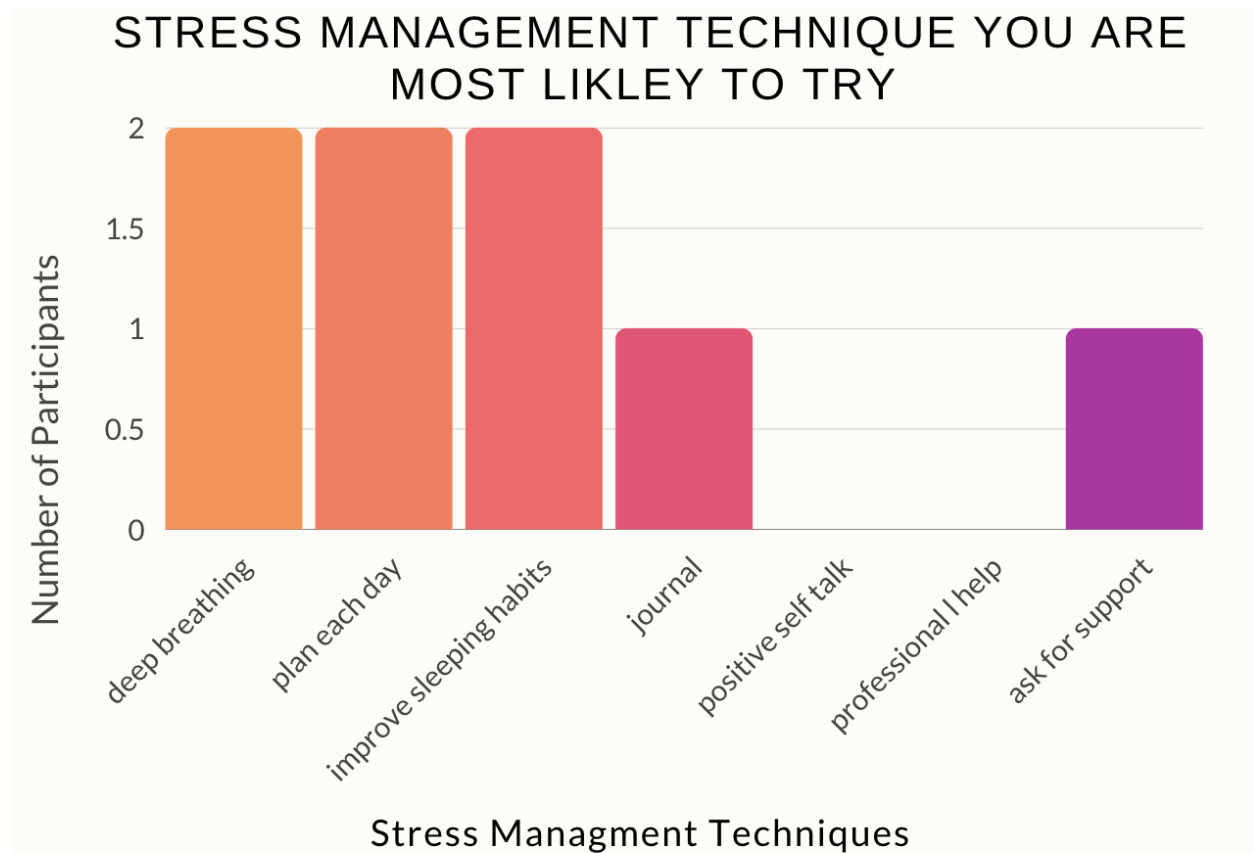
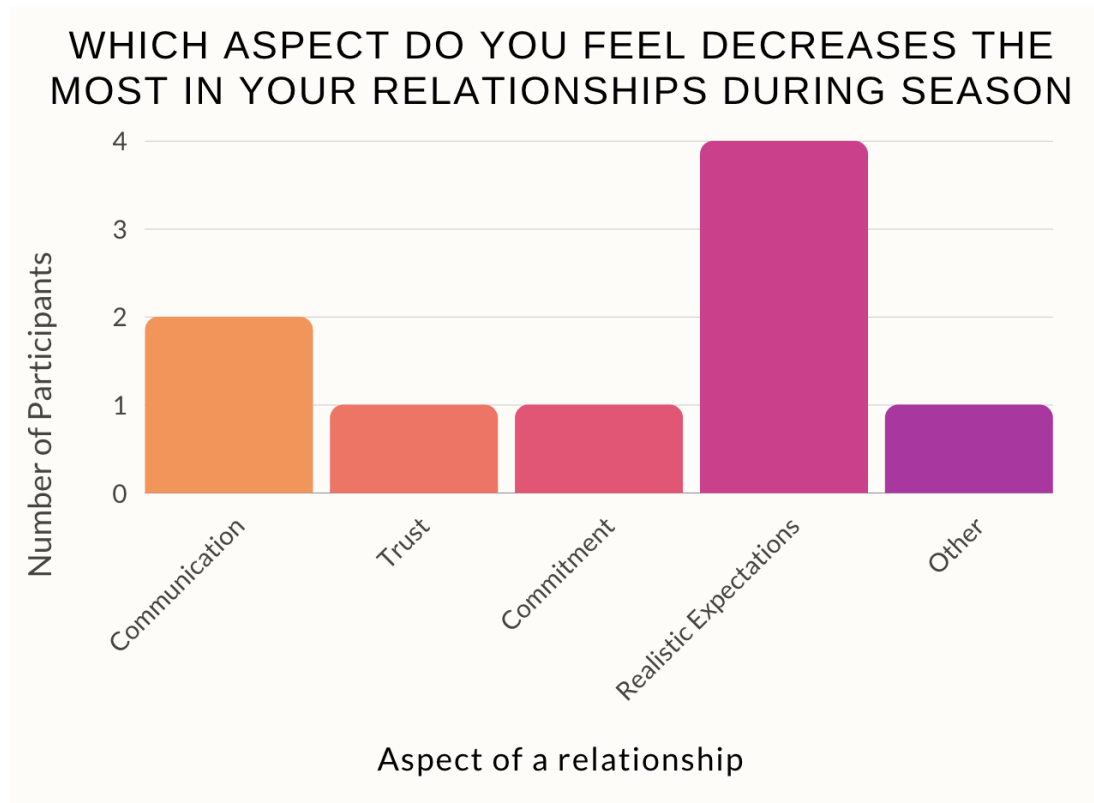
*Figure 3**Responses to which stress management technique they are most likely to use*


Figure 4

Responses to “whether you have been in a romantic relationship or not during season, which aspect do you feel decreases the most in your relationship(s) during season?”

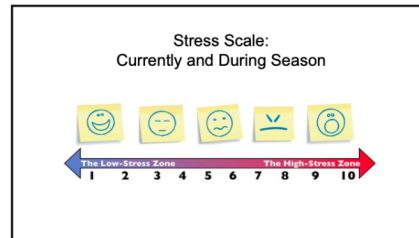


*Appendix A**Powerpoint on How Stress Management, Self-Identity, and Managing Relationships Affect**Student Athletes*


Increasing Student Athletes' Knowledge on Stress Management, Self-Identity, and Managing Relationships




Hannah Haveman



Techniques to Manage Stress




- Practice deep breathing
- Positive Self Talk
- Healthy Sleeping Habits
- Journal
- Go to counseling
- Support from parents, coaches, trainers
- Plan each day









<https://www.menti.com/9ero5ozbhz>
Code: 44 69 42 0

Self-Identity

- Personality traits
- Ability
- Physical characteristics
- Interests
- Hobbies
- Social roles




What are your identities?

Female 	Daughter 	Artist 
Student 	Helper 	Musician 

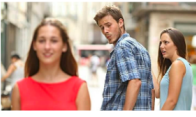
What could fill that missing piece?

- Competition
- Camaraderie
- Join a group with strong women
- Routine
- Working out
- Coach



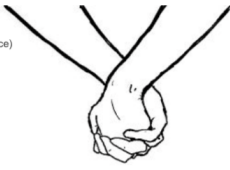
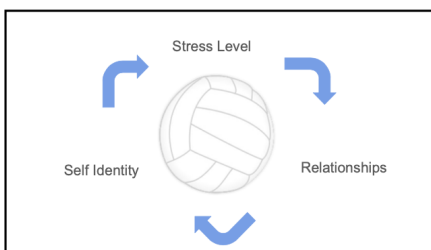
Type in the chat...

Three characteristics of a relationship that could lead to issues



Maintaining a Healthy Relationship

- Trust
- Communication (face-to-face)
- Commitment
- Keep realistic expectations
- Use "I statements"

YOU GET A THANK YOU!

AND YOU GET A THANK YOU!

AND YOU GET A THANK YOU!

EVERYONE GETS A THANK YOU!



Appendix B

Current stress level google form sent to participants



Stress Level

Current stress level

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10

Appendix B continued

Stress level during season

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

☐ 6

☐ 7

☐ 8

☐ 9

☐ 10

Submit

*Appendix C**Relationship Experiences google form sent to the participants*

Relationship Experiences

* Required

Name two characteristics on how to maintain a healthy relationship

Your answer _____

Have you been in a romantic relationship during a collegiate volleyball season? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Appendix C continued

Whether you have been in a romantic relationship or not during season, which aspect do you feel decreases the most in your relationship(s) during season? *

☐ Communication

☐ Trust

☐ Commitment

☐ Realistic expectations

☐ No difference

☐ Other: _____

Submit