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## Kobe Bryant And Psychological Emotional Experience

Kobe Bryant defined the Los Angeles sports culture. His legacy brought people of all races, ages, and genders together as one to enjoy the sport of basketball. At just 18 years old his career in the NBA kickstarted where he played for the Los Angeles Lakers for twenty years following his retirement. He was recognized for his athletic abilities with multiple MVP awards, even more All-Star appearances, and leading his team to the championship finals multiple times (and winning!) Bryant also won an Oscar for Best Animated Short Film in 2018 for his written narration of "Dear Basketball." He is the only player in the National Basketball Association (NBA) to have both of his numbers retired, number 8 and number 24. From representing the United States on the Olympic basketball team to 18 All-Star appearances, Bryant's talent was unmatched and he was guaranteed one of the greatest leaders and players to step foot on the basketball court.

Bryant was also an active member in the community, especially when it came to teaching the game of basketball to young athletes. After his retirement he was a full time coach to his daughter Gianna Bryant's basketball team within the Mamba Academy where they dedicated to creating a positive impact for underserved athletes and young women in sports. On the way to a game at his own sports academy in Thousand Oaks, Kobe along with his daughter Gianna Bryant and seven others were killed in a fatal helicopter accident in the city of Calabasas. On January 26, 2020 at the age of 41, Kobe Bryant's life tragically ended. His death affected millions and I can remember it felt like the world took a pause on everything and it was a moment of worldwide grief. Athletes, celebrities and fans young and old in LA and everywhere else felt a painful loss that Sunday when the news broadcasted the devastating accident that ended Kobe Bryant's career. The psychological emotional experiences of grief, loss, and mourning will be applied to the topic of the accidental death of the legendary Kobe Bryant.

The first psychological emotional experience I will be outlining is grief. Psychology Today defines grief as "the acute pain that accompanies loss." Grief is a major part of the human experience, it reveals our vulnerable side, and vulnerability is strength. Most people are familiar with the 5 stages of grief which include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance whether it's "prolonged" or "acute." Researchers have discovered that grief can be unpredictable. Many may not go through all five steps of grief, and some may take longer than others to reach acceptance, but in the end all humans go through the same process of grief at least once in their life and felt a sense of loss during unpredictable times. According to Psychology Today, "No one is immune to loss and grief, and yet, we're ill-equipped to deal with this universal experience" (Meekhof, 2020, par. 4).

As stated before, vulnerability is strength and expressing grief digs deep into our emotions and allows humans to show another side of themselves that we usually hide from others. "Becoming comfortable with speaking about grief and sadness allows us as human beings to better understand the deep emotions often harnessed to loss," author Kristin Meekhof (2020) says, "When we allow ourselves to show softness, to bend to someone's heartbreak, we give dignity to their vulnerability and our own" (Psychology Today, par. 7). Grief can be contagious, especially when more than one person has a connection between the object that they lost, in this case, the death of Kobe Bryant. Individuals young and old shared a similar grief from

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Bryant's death internal or external, whether they cried about it, shared their favorite stories, or visited a memorial in LA. Meekhof says, releasing tears contributes to expressing grief, and we are able to distinguish between tears of grief versus tears of joy (par. 6).

Next is the emotional experience of loss. Similar to grief, loss is when an individual is no longer with a significant person in their life. Despite the fact that myself, along with thousands of other fans did not know Bryant on a personal level, he made a significant impact on our journeys as a charismatic leader and a role model. People deal with loss differently just like grief, sometimes people take it harder than others while some may find it easier to cope with loss. According to the article, Attachment Styles and Reactions to Grief and Loss, Dr. Hal Shorey illustrates attachment styles' impact on how people grieve and react to loss. The four types of attachments he discusses for how people deal with loss is anxious attachment, disorganized attachment, secure attachment, and avoidant attachment. He says, "anxious/preoccupied styles will be heavily impacted by loss and that the associated negative feelings will last longer" (Shorey, 2020, par. 10). People with this kind of attachment typically have heightened levels of intense anger for a duration of time regarding the situation." On the other hand people who have avoidant attachment deal with loss completely differently. Dr Shorey (2020) says, "Those with avoidant/dismissing styles may appear to cope better with grief after a loss...Yes, they are likely to acknowledge less distress and are less likely to admit negative feelings to others. They are likely to suppress their unwanted feelings and externally appear fine" (Psychology Today, par. 11).

Mourning is defined as the response to a loss and grief. Experiencing a loss is emotionally draining and can cause an incline in mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, or typically an eating disorder. Mourning a loss helps me commemorate loved ones despite the fact that I knew there was absolutely nothing I could do to bring them back. According to Dr. Robert Berezin's article, Mourning – Death, Loss, Trauma, and Psychotherapy, "there is an emptiness that always remains, as the pain of loss can never completely heal. At best, by grieving our loss we can allow it to live on and be enshrined as a loving memory where it belongs. Once an attachment forms it can never be undone. It enters our world as a monument to the living. All loss leaves scars" (Berezin, 2015, par. 1). Researchers encourage individuals to mourn a loss because it aids in the healing process of grief. Dr. Berezin says that, "mourning is the universal process of the brain that generates recovery and change" (Berezin, 2015, par. 3). Different people have different relationships to Kobe, or apply different principles while mourning this loss. It should not be important to judge people based on the duration it takes them to grieve a loss, but it is important however that we continue to remember the memories and meaningful moments of a life.

From a personal perspective, the death of Kobe Bryant took a toll on myself as well as my family. I grew up in LA and in a Lakers fan base household, so when I found out that news that Kobe had died I was devastated. I found myself going through the five stages of grief after Bryant had died. I was first in denial when I saw posts about his death on social media. I could not believe it, I was awestruck, one of my favorite players who inspired me to play the sport of basketball, was no longer alive. Second, I became angry at the situation. I asked questions such as "Why couldn't the helicopter pilot wait for the weather to improve?", "Why did it have to be Kobe?", and "Why did he have to fly on that helicopter that day at that time?" The next stage of bargaining I felt as if it was connected to my anger where I asked those "what if" and "if only" questions. The following stage of depression was something that I found myself to be stuck on for a while. I was mourning Bryant's death for a long duration of time, and I couldn't

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bring myself to go to LA to visit his memorials because I knew how much it was going to hurt me. I would watch old photos and videos of Bryant being a well rounded athlete and leader, and it was so overwhelming for me, but I couldn't find myself to look away. My entire social media page was filled with Kobe Bryant posts and I experienced a deep depression. I wanted to heal and recover from his traumatizing death but reading posts about how he was such a compelling, influential player brought me to tears. There was one news post in particular where the anchor gave a touching speech about Bryant and how he was a "girl dad" because he was a father to 4 girls. Watching that video put into perspective that life is unpredictable and we should cherish the moments that we have on this Earth because it can come to an end at any time, any day. My sister and I like to call my father a 'girl dad' as well because all his kids are girls, and we use that term as a way to have Kobe's memory live throughout our household. I noticed that I felt a deep depression for quite a while, however according to Lori Bolden's article on grief and grieving, she says, "the authors discuss the normalcy of feeling depressed and affirm the idea that feeling such things are necessary for the healing process to begin" (Bolden, 2007, page 236). The final stage of acceptance was a relief for me, I was no longer mourning and I wasn't experiencing a deep depression, yet I still felt a little hurt at the loss of Kobe and his daughter Gianna Bryant, but eventually I came to accept the reality of their death. I continue to remember his legacy and his "mamba mentality" that shaped me to be the basketball player I am today.

2020 has taken a huge toll on many of us, myself included both mentally and physically. Just at the start of the year we faced a devastating loss that affected millions. I never met Kobe Bryant but I felt as if I knew him. According to Psychology Today, "Research has shown that African-Americans also often feel linked to one another that what happens to one person is viscerally felt by every other" (Franco, 2020, par. 5). Grief is a complicated process that brings both positive and negative feelings about the deceased. Mourning a loss shows vulnerability is strength as long as we take time for ourselves to recover and heal from the pain of a loss. The psychological emotional experiences of grief, loss, and mourning is significant to the human experience and helps us cope during a crisis.