

Unfinished Endings: Narratives of the Transition Process of Retirement for Elite Athletes with a Physical Disability

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Abstract

For an elite athlete, transitioning out of sport and into retired life can be a complex process as controllable factors (i.e. preparation, strength of identity, coping ability, etc.) and uncontrollable factors (injury and/or termination) shape the whole experience. These factors create a unique experience for all types of elite athletes. However, research on this topic seems to focus less so on athletes with a physical disability. Therefore, it is the purpose of this project to understand how former elite athletes with a physical disability adapt to life beyond their athletic career. Using holistic form narrative analysis, six former Paralympians discussed their experiences with retiring. It was found that three narrative paths emerged, revealing three approaches taken to adapt to post-sport life. The narrative of “the competitor” approached retirement as a challenge at which to complete and succeed. The narrative of “the voyager” approached retirement as a continuous journey of trial and error in discovering what best works. Lastly, the narrative of “the page turner” approached retirement as a time to further grow and enhance as a person in new domains of life. These three narratives demonstrate that importance of pre-planning, separating identity, having an adaptive coping strategy, and a favourable attitude towards retirement can characterize a positive outcome with retirement. Additionally, the three narratives reveal that re-shaping a sense of self requires building off past identities. This was accomplished by breaking down their sport identity and modifying it based on the approach for retirement taken by each participant. It is recommended that further studies of narrative analysis and retirement be developed to enhance and discover new narratives for this population given the limited number of studies on this topic.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Dreams of many young athletes aspiring to make it to the higher levels of sport include fantasizing about what it would be like to make it to that level and what they would accomplish (Elferink-Gemser, Jordet, Coelho-E-Silva, & Visscher, 2011). That dream could include standing on the podium holding a gold medal, scoring the championship goal, or simply representing their nation. In capturing that dream, athletes dedicate countless hours of practice in hopes of reaching their athletic goals. For those that are fortunate to make it in elite athletics, there is a heavy focus on establishing a status within their sport as soon as they enter. This is evident when athletes set out to achieve accolades within their sport, endorsing brands or products that reflect who they are and their excellence, and managing the critiques from various sources in the media and from fans. A consequence of elite sport is that athletes who have reached the golden age in their careers are replaced by younger, faster or stronger athletes or are forced to retire due to unforeseen circumstances (e.g., injury). It appears that the time spent within elite sport can be a finite and uncontrollable entity that can see athletes leave sport quicker than first imagined. Therefore, questions arise about how elite athletes adapt to life after sport once their career ends.

This notion of transitioning out from elite sport to retirement has been explored within social psychology since the 1960's (Park, Tod, & Lavalley, 2013). Pioneering work during that time showcased the true reality some former athletes endured. Such examples of hardships seen in the past for elite athletes retiring from sport include: a drop in social status and adjustment difficulties (Weinberg & Arond, 1952); insufficient job skills and proficiencies (Hare, 1971); limits in the scope of opportunities for non-

college educated athletes (Haerle, 1975); and sustained alcohol dependency to cope with the traumatic change (Mihovilovic, 1968). Clearly, these foundational studies depicted a pessimistic view of athletic retirement.

Those early studies presented an opportunity to philosophically question what retirement is and what it involves. Scholars outside of the sport field conceptualized retirement as a one-step decision (Wylleman, Alfermann, Lavallee, 2004). The various conceptualizations were based on either the social gerontological perspective in which retirement was seen as a natural consequence of aging, or the thanatological perspective that views retirement as a sudden means to an end, or rather, a form of dying (Park et al., 2013). Evolving from those ways of thinking, theories were developed that were more centered on sport. As a result, the view that retirement was a transition process has become more accepted. Various models like the Athlete Career Termination model (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) and the Athletic Career Transition model (Stambulova, 2003) demonstrated the interplay of antecedent factors related to retiring. These factors explore what leads athletes to retire and demands of the transition, such as how coping skills and support structures affect athletes' experiences internally and externally. The models demonstrated the subjectivity of outcomes where many paths differ depending on the unique situation of the athlete. From here, a division in the retirement process is noted as being either enjoyable for some or problematic for others. However, probing deeper to understand this phenomenon is needed in an effort to develop a more empathetic concern for those athletes who are on the problematic end of the transition spectrum.

Performing a brief examination of the surface-level factors affecting the transition process reveals a significant amount of information. To begin with, sport itself presents a conundrum for athletes facing retirement. For one, the nature of elite sport is centered on giving up one's free time for dedicated practice (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007). Other actions focus on improving the branding of one's own or the sponsor's image. Given the significant amount of time dedicated to sport and a lack of personal time, it would appear that a re-learning of them self becomes necessary when transitioning out of their career. Programs like the Game Plan initiative, developed by the Canadian Sport Institute, address this concern partially in helping the athlete prepare for retirement. The program offers the ability to enhance specified wellness domains for athletes that include education, networking, health and wellness, and career management (Canadian Sport Institute, 2018). However, these offerings only go so far when addressing the adverse reality of transition. Changing from an elite athletic state to a non-elite athletic state is no easy task.

Influential mechanisms from a societal level as well impact the perception of the transition process unto the athlete. With being an elite athlete, comes more recognition in day-to-day life. Given that their matches or events are broadcasted to the world. With being televised and having this presence in popular media, elite athletes are watched at all times. When an athlete retires, the general population gets the chance to dispel some of the ambiguity surrounding what athletic retirement is like. Sadly, through various media outlets, there can be a heavy bias in the stories produced favouring reports on shocking or controversial themes. Examples of this include documenting the battles with illicit drugs former NHL player Chris Nilan struggled with or how NFL linebacker

Terry Tautolo fell into homelessness. These stories influence not only the perceptions the general public have of retired elite athletes, but also the perception that elite athletes have of themselves, and what is to be expected of them (Beamon, 2012). Therefore, to truly understand the impact retirement has on the identity of the athlete, the stories that are written to grab the readers' attention only portray a small sample of the retirement experience, as many different types of stories exist. Richer understandings can be achieved through actual retellings of former athletes' experiences that go beyond the surface level factors, as opposed to the interpretation of the experience by the media and others.

The academic literature that examines the retirement experience of athletes provides a more thorough understanding of what occurs. The literature has revealed findings that categorize the experience into two ways. The research has shown that many athletes experience dread or struggle to cope in life without sport (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). However, research has also discovered that some athletes experience the opposite of those feelings if a well thought out plan to retire was given. Specifically, if athletes rationalize the free time they will gain or if they feel satisfied with their career accomplishments, the adjustment becomes much easier (Coakley, 1983). Clearly, understanding the athlete and their story is crucial to developing an appreciation of how the experience of retirement can differ amongst every athlete. This is especially the case for elite athletes with a physical disability as their presence within this literature is small.

Although athletes with a disability have gained more recognition in the sporting world, the construct of elite athlete at the societal level is still synonymous with the non-disabled athlete. Evidently this notion is seen within the body of literature as few works

are centered on the perspective of the elite athlete with a physical disability (Smith, Bundon, & Best, 2016; Bundon, Ashfield, Smith, & Goosey-Tolfrey, 2018). The most recent piece focused on addressing athletic retirement for elite athletes with a physical disability has come from over 20 years ago (i.e. Wheeler, Malone, VanVleck, Nelson, & Steadward, 1996). General assumptions around athletes with a disability are that they are not as dedicated or focused as their able-bodied counterparts and do not develop a strong tie with their athletic identity (Martin, 1996; Wheeler et al., 1996). This lack of exposure to this population creates a gap in understanding how the transition process of athletic retirement affects them.

For the purposes of this study, a definition of the elite athlete with a physical disability was used that aligns with the definitions of physical disability by Cochrane (2014) and elite athlete from Swann, Moran, and Piggott (2015). An elite athlete with a physical disability (EAWPD) is defined as: an individual who has membership in institutes that are professionally, internationally, nationally, or regional based for experienced sport ability of the highest standards that also uses specified actions to accommodate an impairment for competing. A prime example of this definition can include para-sport athletes that represent their country or province/state in competitive rankings of adaptive sport. Exploring the stories of EAWPD provides a seldom explored and unique perspective on the retirement experience. Through the types of narratives expressed, raw expressions of the challenges faced become essential to not only understand the process, but to offer the opportunity to help improve the process of retirement. In fact, a recent recommendation from Guerrero and Martin (2018) asks

researchers to explore perceptions about adapting to the retired self for former athletes with physical disabilities via narrative analysis.

Given that I am not an individual who has competed in para-sport, one of the ways to understand the experience of something foreign is through the listening and analysis of narrative. For generations, the passing of knowledge and spreading of customs all came from the telling of stories (Fludernik, 1996). Academic researchers have used this principle when listening to stories, and when analyzing the stories and characterizing what has been revealed. For instance, Frank (1995, 1998) uncovered three types of narrative when listening to the stories of recovery from terminally-ill patients. Chaos, restitution, and quest narratives embodied the thoughts and feelings of individuals who were ill experienced when facing a catastrophic change in their daily lives. Building on the work by Frank (1995, 1998), Smith and Sparkes (2005) considered how the same narratives of hope characterized the experience of life for elite rugby players who acquired a major spinal cord injury. The expressions of hope by the injured rugby players characterized how their injury has affected them whilst in recovery and were indicative of how their futures were formulated. Though these studies are pivotal in their discovery and implementation, very few studies address the characterization of life after sport with a pre-existing physical disability and playing in the elite ranks of para-based sport through narrative analysis. Thus, it was the aim of this research to uncover the types of narrative retired EAWPD experienced when transitioning into retirement and what those narratives reveal.

Purpose

The purpose of this proposed research was to explore, using narrative analysis, the processes elite athletes with a physical disability experience when re-shaping or re-affirming their sense of self through retirement and beyond. It is hoped that the findings will offer guidance to athletes and organizations when facing this career milestone. The main questions for this intended research were, “What type of narratives are expressed by athletes when experiencing the transition into retirement?” and “How do these narratives characterize the quality of their experience?”

Significance

This research probed the type of experiences EAWPD endured once retirement begins post-career. The implications of this research can include a variety of benefits for elite athletes with a physical disability. Firstly, this research can offer a voice for this population through revealing their lived experience to help others in similar situations and provide an opportunity to reach larger audiences. Secondly, this research can help organizations adapt policy and structures to better cater to the needs of those athletes who represented their sport, province or country. Finally, this research can contribute to the understanding the power of telling one’s story can have in shaping behaviour; specifically, the story teller can help solidify their place in the world, and the audience can create positive change through what was disseminated through those narratives. It is with hope that this research can help sport governing bodies, coaches and athletes through the retirement process and to provide a reference point for athletes to help inspire purpose in life after sport.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature on the subject of athletic retirement presents research in a dichotomized fashion – it either explores the negative experiences of retirement or looks at the positive components of it (Baille & Danish, 1992; Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Wylleman et al., 2004). Theories from decades past have been borrowed or developed in an attempt to better conceptualize the process of athletic retirement. As more research has developed, literature and models have been created to suggest that retirement from athletics should not be trivialized as a one-time event but seen as a process that is multidimensional and subjective in nature (Baille & Danish, 1992; Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; McPherson, 1980; Wylleman, et al., 2004). This review of literature includes four components. The first component will consider the various models for athletic retirement that have been developed over the course of time. The second and third components of this literature review have been structured from a model developed by Stambulova, Stephan, and Jäphag (2007) to organize the information surrounding the process of transitioning out of elite sport. The second section will outline the research about the retirement transition process itself and the various factors affecting it. The third section outlines the research made about the cultural context of the transition process of athletic retirement. These two sections shall explore both positive and negative pathways commonly seen within the literature related to the transition process. Finally, the fourth section will explore what is known about the experiences of athletes with a disability. This last section provides context as to why understanding the situation for athletes with a disability is vital to developing a narrative for retirement.

Models for Understanding Athletic Retirement

The conceptualization of athletic retirement has produced many frameworks over the course of time (Wylleman et al., 2004). Wylleman et al. (2004) have noted that models that were incorporated from other disciplines, not predicated on the sporting context, have been subjected to scrutiny and dismissal by many authors studying athletic retirement. This was especially the case for models that used either a social gerontological perspective or a thanatological perspective.

Social gerontology. Social gerontology can be thought of as the social elements of growing older. This approach to explaining athletic retirement includes six main tenants that include: activity, disengagement, subculture, continuity, social breakdown, and exchange theory. Among these, social breakdown (i.e., experiencing negative external labeling about age) and exchange theory (i.e., rearranging life to favourable conditions in return for what the person does) are the main explanations for retirement consideration (Gordon & Lavalley, 2012). A focal component of this understanding, in the context of retirement, is the effect of life satisfaction (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Rosenberg, 1981). From this perspective, in hopes of having the best experience possible, the choices for when and how to retire are made in relation to what is expected in post-sport life. For example, if the person feels that he/she needs to stay in sport longer to achieve the quality of life they desired, he/she is more likely to remain in sport. One such determinant, age, is a crucial factor for retirement decision from the social gerontological perspective. However, sport itself differs from other occupational settings as elite sport does not have a mandatory retirement age (Fernandez, Stephan, & Fouquereau, 2005).

Though elite athletics lacks a mandatory age or time frame for retirement, the careers of elite athletes are short lived. Gearing (1999) notes that the average soccer player's career in the UK spans on average, "eight and a half years" (p.46) while the sport of gymnastics sees athletes retire in their late adolescent stage of life (Warriner and Lavallee, 2008). Wylleman and Reints (2010) suggest that various sports see athletes retire in the adult years between 24 and 30. In fact, athletes who continue to compete into their thirties are considered as 'Veterans' (Tulle, 2008). Clearly, with athletes leaving their career with so much of their life ahead of them, adopting a mindset that they have accomplished everything they have set out for the entirety of their life would be illogical, as social gerontology infers. As discussed by Blinde and Greendorfer (1985),

Social gerontological concepts have been useful in explaining successful adjustment or scores on life satisfaction scales for those who experienced a full occupational career. However, these same concepts may not be applicable to the chronologically young sport retiree who must face the social as well as the economic realities of a second career. (p.88)

Therefore, when viewing retirement of athletics from a social gerontology standpoint, one would assume that retirement is a one-time event that corresponds with the end of the working life, which evidently is not the case for this population as much of their life remains ahead of them.

Thanatology. Thanatology refers to the study of death but is flexible in its terminology. Death can be viewed from a social perspective where a person is regarded

as dead socially, but is still alive biologically (Lerch, 1984; Rosenberg, 1981). This notion of social death has been referenced with some of the negative retellings athletes have when they experienced leaving their sport. For instance, in the work of Blinde and Stratta (1992), college athletes described the traumatic struggles they endured, and these struggles were considered similar to those commonly referenced when experiencing grief. Though these responses are indeed valid, they represent the reflections of those athletes and would not be fair to state that everyone experiences retirement this way. For example, the work of Martin, Fogarty, and Albion (2014) highlights the duality of retirement perceptions with the following statement,

On the negative side, loss of identity and loss of prestige are obvious hazards to be negotiated. On the positive side, increased free time, freedom from injury, and freedom from stresses associated with competition are likely benefits (p.106).

Coakley (1983) and Curtis and Ennis (1988) characterize this stage as an opportunity of rebirth to explore who they are, or re-structure their sport identity in to a coach/manager identity if they maintain employment in their respective sport. A study by Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) discovered that 75% of their study participants still participated in sport at some level. This finding stands in contrast to the notion of viewing retirement as a total termination because athletes can still participate in sport when they formally retire. Therefore, as Blinde and Greendorfer (1985) put it, “a thanatological approach may be an overly negative portrayal of the actual sport retirement experience” (p.88). To conclude, adopting a one-size-fit all approach to athletic retirement, as seen with the thanatological approach, only reveals a specified perspective that does not resonate with

all elite athletes. To truly appreciate all components and perspectives of retirement for athletes, an appreciation of all sides and stories must be considered.

Career transitional models. A third type of conceptual framework was developed to represent what athletic retirement entails. Transitional models were used as they, “suggest that the athletic career termination should be seen as a transitional process rather than as a singular event” (Wylleman et al., 2004, p.11). Here, transition can be viewed as an occurrence which alters the opinions athletes have about themselves and the world around them and changes their schema simultaneously (Schlossberg, 1981). This amendment coincides with retirement as it requires the person to re-position him/herself about what they know so far in life and adapt to his/her new situation. From here, a model developed by Schlossberg (1981) about human adaptation to transitions looks at three factors: the individual, the individual’s understanding of the transition, and the features of the setting (Gordon & Lavalley, 2012; Pearson & Pepitas, 1990; Schlossberg, 1981). This is often regarded as the four “S’s’ that include: the self, the situation, the support, and the strategies (Gordon & Lavalley, 2012; Schlossberg, 1981, Stambulova et al., 2007). This model is unique in that it looks at factors that are holistic to the individual from thought, bodily, and environmental perspectives.

Though that model is instrumental in uncovering the experiences of athletic retirement, it does present some barriers. The biggest barrier is that it is not a sport-specific model – it was designed to look simply at transitions in a general sense. The model has the potential to miss specific attributes unique to the athletic experience. In order to address these limitations, models for analyzing athletic retirement were developed by sport scholars.

Inherent to the lives of elite athletes is the sense of self they create and establish during their career. This notion of athletic identity is defined by Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder (1993) as, “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role” (p. 237) and this identity holds strong social power in the ways athletes experience life. At the same time, sport has the ability to create heroes and ideals for society and possesses the power to ensure athletes conform to specified and limited roles (Baille & Danish, 1992). The role of the athlete is complex. The athlete not only sets out for the achievements of goals he/she sets during his/her career, but also has a responsibility to others outside of sport based on the role bestowed upon him/her. These important factors are noted in the frameworks that conceptualize athletic retirement.

Athletic career termination model. A pivotal model developed by Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) characterizes career transition for athletes in five parts. The first component addresses the causal factors for transition including: age, injury, de-selection and free will. The second part looks at the developmental factors related to adaption to career transition including: developmental contributors, self-identity, perceived control, and personal, social, and environmental factors. The third component addresses coping resources including: coping strategies, social support, and pre-retirement planning. The fourth component looks at the quality of the transition, specifically if it is a healthy or distressful response. The final component discusses intervention strategies that include strategies focusing on cognitive, emotional, behavioural or social organizational realms.

Examples include: transferable skills, career counselling, or sport psychological consulting (Fisher & Wrisberg, 2007; Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008). This framework further

emphasizes the point that retirement in athletics consists of multiple dimensions working on the individual that affects his/her decisions and pathway into their post-sporting lives.

Athletic career transition model. Stambulova (2003) developed a model as well, focusing on the effect coping plays in career transition for athletes. Specifically, transition demands require the athlete to use the coping skills and resources he/she have to face their transition. To cope effectively requires a balance between the resources available and barriers about the transition. This balance then leads to an effective coping solution for the retiree if sufficient time and energy is used wisely to determine what those resources and barriers are. However, if the absence of this balance exists, a state of crisis will occur for the individual (Kadlick & Flemr, 2008). Similar to the Athletic career termination model, the Athletic career transition model demonstrates that transitions in an athlete's life involve multiple factors in how it is to be perceived and is a process rather than a simple action.

Transitional stage models. Other models have been created that incorporate different philosophical positions coupled with many psychological concepts. For instance, Torregrosa, Boixados, Valiente, and Cruz (2002) created a model of retirement for Olympic athletes using a grounded theory approach. The model consists of three stages: Initiation-Training, Maturity-Performance, and the Anticipation-Realization of retirement. The initiation stage sees training to become a top-level athlete as pinnacle and no image of retirement is established. The maturity stage sees the athlete develop into an elite player and a vague image of retirement is formulated along with concerns about other factors such as education and an unexpected retirement. Finally, the anticipation stage sees the athlete slowly decreasing in results coupled with a balance

between roles of their old self and their new self where a clear image of retirement is developed.

The premise of transitional stages also appears in other models as well. Wylleman et al. (2004) created a developmental model that looks at transitions that athletes will experience at various stages in their lives. The four levels include: athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic influences. On the far right of the model, retirement is seen to range in the 30 to 35 age range. The challenges faced in the four levels see discontinuation of the sport, adulthood influences, family factors and vocational/professional occupation trials respectively.

Trans-theoretical model. Park, Tod, and Lavallee (2012) incorporate the Trans-Theoretical model by Prochaska and DiClemente (1984) with elite Korean tennis players. Their findings revealed that these athletes use similar stages that the trans-theoretical model suggests (i.e., pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, and action) and that the majority of the athletes are not truly ready for retirement. Athletes who spent a long time in the contemplation and preparation stages tend to delay the transition as long as possible. Thus, adopting approaches that are non-conventional demonstrates that athletic retirement is still a field that is filled with mystery. To uncover the breadth of experiences and understand what is occurring, different perspectives are required. Therefore, opening up to other forms of approach will generate a better depiction of what athletic retirement entails.

Amalgamated transition model. Among the collection of other models, one model has incorporated aspects of many different models to best represent the

complexity of the athletic retirement experience (known here as the “amalgamated transition model”). Stambulova et al. (2007) drafted a model that combined the framework of the athlete career termination model (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), the athlete career transition model (Stambulova, 2003), and the human adaptation model to transition (Schlossberg, 1981) with an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This model presented the transition process of retirement while also factoring in situations exclusively felt by the athlete individually. It also includes factors beyond the control of the athlete that exist within the cultural context of transitioning out of sport. Specifically, the transition process involves: determining the conditions for retirement; the influence of pre-conceived notions about the transition; factors affecting coping ability; coping mechanisms; and the outcome. This process and the outcome of the transition are also influenced by cultural conditions specific to the athlete’s circumstances (Stambulova et al., 2007). Figure 1 below provides a visual depiction of this model on the following page.

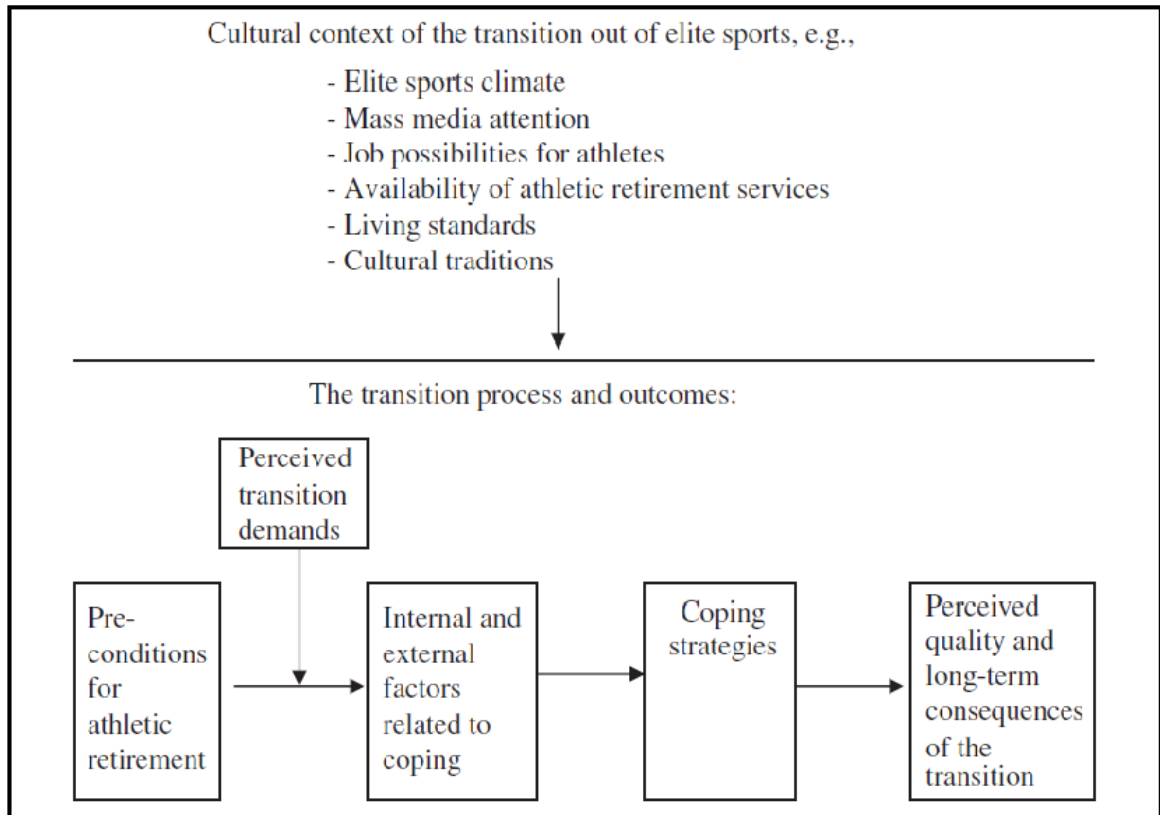


Figure 1: Amalgamated Transition Model (Stambulova et al., 2007)

At this point, it can be gathered that understanding athletic retirement has developed from many different perspectives. Athletic retirement is seen as a process that involves many complex elements and has evolved from being categorized as an end within itself to being regarded as a transition from one part of life to another. The models presented in the literature emphasize how antecedents can help shape the path of retirement, yet other components affect the experience of retirement as well. As Knights, Sherry, and Ruddock-Hudson (2016) note, “it is inevitable that an elite sporting career will come to an end, and the way in which it ends plays an influential role in the athlete’s transition experience” (p. 304). Thus, understanding retirement requires an appreciation of an athlete’s life before the transition. The model by Stambulova et al.

(2007) provides a better conceptualization of an athlete's reasons for retiring as it explores the before, during and after process of the transition.

The Transition Process

Stambulova et al.'s (2007) model of transition has a pathway that contains four factors which shape the experience of the transition and impacts the total outcome respectively. The four factors include: The pre-conditions for athletic retirement, perceived transition demands, internal and external factors affecting coping, and coping strategies. From these four factors the athlete will experience an outcome of high or low quality, depending on how the superseding factors are influenced. Given that the literature about athletic retirement coincides with the process of Stambulova et al.'s (2007) model, it shall be used in this paper to organize and present the information gathered about athletic retirement.

Pre-conditions for athletic retirement. The literature reveals that elite athletes' pre-conditions of retirement are quite diverse. For instance, pre-conditions to retire can be performance related such as lack of success or de-selection. Psychological pre-conditions for retirement can consist of a decrease in motivation for the athlete to continue in his/her sport. Likewise, psycho-social factors, including family issues also shape the intention of retirement (Blinde & Stratta, 1992, Werthner & Orilick, 1986). Economic factors (i.e., financial stability) and academic factors (i.e., obtaining vocational training) as well shape the choice for retirement (Gearing, 1999). Specifically, if the athlete feels that he/she needs to obtain a steady job and get the required education to attain and fulfill that job, he/she is more inclined to retire from sport. Finally, physical reasons such as having a significant injury and being of older age

as well impact the choice for retirement (Ceci Erpic, Wylleman, & Zupančič, 2004; Wylleman et al., 2004; Moesch, Mayer & Elbe, 2012).

Choices for or against retirement are influenced by circumstances that are either voluntary to the athlete, (i.e., retiring on their own terms) or involuntary (i.e., forced to retire) retirement (Wippert & Wippert, 2008, 2010). It should also be noted that factors exist to push or pull an individual toward leaving sport. Push factors are seen as the negative factors which force an athlete to transition. For example, an athlete may no longer experience their sport as being fun. Pull factors are the positive factors which help make the choice to transition such as being able to spend more time with their family. The work of Fernandez, Stephan, and Fouquereau (2005) expands off of the work of Mullet, Dej, Lemaire, Raïff, and Barthorpe (2000), who identify two additional sub-factors in countering push and pull factors to remain in sport. Anti-push factors relate to attachment in staying within a specific context and not making the transition out, such as staying because of the strong bond with their fans. Anti-pull factors deal with the costs and risks perceived for the future and why athletes should not make the transition, such as remaining in sport because they do not want to lose their network with their teammates. Out of the two factors, it appears that anti-push factors (i.e. enjoyment or staying for the social climate of the sport) create the most difficulty in the choice to end one's career (Fernandez, Stephan, & Fouquereau, 2005). Overall, the antecedent factors and preparedness for retirement have the power to shape the discourse of elite athletes' lives once their sporting career comes to an end.

Perceived transition demands. Along with the pre-conditions for retirement, the perception of what the process can entail can be taxing, especially if the demands are

not anticipated. This aspect of the process can be even more strenuous for the athletes who do not consider how difficult the transition can be and are solely focused on the present times of their athletic career. For example, athletes who participate in artistic-based sports like ballet or gymnastics struggle with identity formation in retirement. As Lavalley and Robinson (2007) uncovered, the demanding and perfectionist culture of gymnastics inadvertently creates athletes that think unilaterally. Essentially, because gymnastics is a very involved and time-demanding sport, the athletes dedicate all of their resources to it, and consequently, were not given much opportunity to develop themselves in other domains. Thus, once retirement came for these adolescents, many had a hard time adjusting to the world outside of sport and demands such as making new friends and adapting to a more open schedule (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007). Warriner and Lavalley (2008) note that high athletic ties to sport can create substantial problems once the transition is made. They note, “This extreme investment tended to hamper the accomplishments of developmental tasks integral to the process of identity formation” (p.311). The world of ballet requires a strong dedication in the mastery of skills, similar to gymnastics, and once retirement was met and dancers had to re-learn life outside of their previous routine, a crisis of identity was felt (Roncaglia, 2010). Therefore, it appears that athletes who do not anticipate the demands of retirement when leaving their respective sport can experience devastating effects from a cognitive and emotional standpoint.

Similar to not preparing for the demands of retirement, it has been discovered that athletes who place high value on their athletic identity (Brewer et al. 1993) have a hard time with adjusting to life after sports as well (Ceci Erpic et al., 2004; Grove,

Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997; McPherson, 1980; Ogilvie & Howe, 1982; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). With the extreme investment elite athletes put into their sport, the opportunities to identify as something other than an athlete are sparse. The athlete may feel confused and unsatisfied once their career is over because they lacked the hindsight of planning post-career and were unable to separate themselves from their sport. This is especially true if the athlete feels that they have not achieved goals they have set out for themselves. University athletes were found to feel that they had left unfinished business prior to their termination and that adjusting to civilian life was seen as the dying of themselves (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). Olympic athletes were found to have a better adjustment if they achieved their goals, had a good relationship with their coach, were injury free, and had financial and family support compared with athletes who were lacking in any of those areas (Baille & Danish, 1992; Werthner & Orlick; 1986). In fact, a study by Ungerleider (1997) discovered that with Olympians in the United States, “not having the skills or the emotional and educational resources outside of sport left them in a prolonged state of resentment and depression when they left sports” (p. 1294).

For athletes with disabilities, this strong tie to athletic identity can be even more problematic than with their able-bodied counterparts. Martin (1996) notes that significant development of athletic identity can be more pronounced for these athletes as they generally have less social contact with others outside of sport and have a reduced opportunity for career mastery enhancement. In fact, swimmers with disabilities noted that if they had to leave sport, because of an unexpected factor, they would be extremely depressed (Martin, Adams-Mushett, & Smith, 1995). Interestingly enough, athletes with a spinal cord injury (SCI) were seen to have a lower rating of athletic identity compared

to able-bodied athletes. SCI athletes generally have a broader self-concept because of their acquired loss, resulting in less reliance on one type of identity (Tasiemski, Kennedy, Gardner, & Blaikley, 2004). However, it should be reinforced for athletes that have a pre-existing physical disability with a strong tie to their athletic identity, athletes will have a hard time adjusting to life after sport given that they hang on to only one form of self. To conclude, for a fruitful transition out of elite sport, the perceived demands of the transition aspect requires athletes to effortfully prepare and distance them self from their athletic identity. If dedication is not given in this area to help foster a new sense of purpose, athletes will have a fractured identity and will find the transition difficult.

Internal and external factors related to coping. The next portion of the transition phase deals with how adept athletes are with their coping abilities both internally and externally. A significant factor contributing to the difficulty or ease of the transition is the athlete's readiness to retire. A study conducted by Roberts, Mullen, Evans, and Hall (2015) notes that, "a readiness to retire may be a more appropriate indicator of the quality of adjustment to life after sport than the commonly held involuntary vs. voluntary debate" (p.943). The literature reveals that athletes who are unprepared for retirement, who leave sport for uncontrollable reasons like injury or deselection, struggled with adopting a new sense of self (Blinde & Greedorfer, 1985; Ceci Erpic et al., 2004; Lavallee, Grove, & Gordon, 1997; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Consequently, if an athlete is removed suddenly from sport or experiences a disruption to their sense of normalcy and routine may cause harm to the mental well-being of the athlete. This can include: identity crisis (Allison & Meyer,

1988); loss of self-worth (Svoboda & Vanek, 1992); decrease of self-esteem (Alferman & Gross, 1997; Ballie & Danish, 1992); decline of self-satisfaction (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Greenforder & Blande, 1985); emotional problems (Wylleman, De Knop, Menkehorst, Theeboom, & Annerel, 1993); signs of distress that include depression and hostility (Wippert & Wippert, 2010); feelings of unaccomplished athletic goals (Werthner & Orlick, 1986); and alcohol and drug abuse (Mihovilovic 1968). In fact, the percentages of traumatic transitions from retirement have been quite astounding. Studies from more than 20 years ago found traumatic retirement ranging from ranges of 70% to 80 % of athletes (Miholovic, 1968; Weinberg & Arond, 1952; Ogilvie & Howe, 1993) to ranges of 13-15% (Wyllemann et al. 1993) in the past 20 years (Wyllemann et al., 2004). A study conducted by Webb, Nasco, Riley, and Headrick (1998) discovered that 48.6% of former university students characterized their transition from elite sport as difficult.

Not all experiences with the transition into retirement are negative, as internal dispositions play a large role in the outcome. To some, leaving sport can be recognized as a simple shaking of identity for a short period of time (Stier, 2007). College athletes felt this shake up especially if they retired well before they graduated and did feel a loss of identity along with a loss of comradery with their teammates. Yet, if the retired athletes were fortunate to make it through to their graduation date, they were found to diminish their held athletic identity prior to their end date and had a better quality of transition (Lally, 2007). Diminishing athletic identity for these athletes was accomplished by investing more into their scholarly self as a result of pressures about what to do next (Lally, 2007). This idea highlights the importance of establishing different identities prior to termination, which signifies a readiness to retire.

Other external factors play a part in quality of experience for elite athletes retiring. For instance, athletes being informed in person that they were dismissed in person versus not being informed from a person affects the quality of the transition (Wippert & Wippert, 2008). Athletes who had the opportunity to discover and discuss why they were being dismissed saw lower stress responses, better sleep, and less avoidance of their problems with the transition in comparison to athletes who did not have that opportunity to discuss their dismissal (Wippert & Wippert, 2008). Thus, the athlete possesses the ability to shape the retirement experience if they prepare to some extent with variance on controllability of external factors.

Coping strategies. Not only are the situational demands of the retirement process crucial to the ways in which it is experienced, but coping mechanisms are pivotal in the quality of retirement. It has been noted in the literature that athletes who adhere to an avoidance or emotion-based style of coping had difficulties in the transition (Grove et al., 1997). This, coupled with a strong sense of athletic identity, saw athletes rely on denial, disengagement and venting of emotions. If this was prolonged for too long, serious psychological problems were experienced (Grove et al., 1997). This notion is also related to the timing of the retirement. Specifically, the period of one month to five months post retirement sees the biggest decrease in physical competency and self-worth and is characterized by feelings of crisis (Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, & Delignieres, 2003a; Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, & Delignieres, 2003b). If these feelings are prolonged with maladaptive coping styles, the athlete cannot make a healthy transition. Consequently, forced retirees often use defensive styles of coping, while voluntary retirees tend to use more active styles of coping (Alfermann, 2000).

A study by Stephan et al. (2003b) saw a change in self-perception of the retired athlete if they employed an adaptive coping style within five to eight months post retirement. Strategies like exercise and setting valued goals in a new area of focus (i.e., a new job, education, etc.) during this time period cements the fact they are no longer associated with the sport and are able to accomplish things outside of sport. After 1-year, retired athletes can have an increase of subjective wellbeing if they have a better sense of control of their lives followed with an active engagement in leisure time physical activity (Stephan et al., 2003b). Thus, coping style is indicative of the quality of retirement athletes will experience. Hanging on to the past and not seeking to actively change from one's old self can result in a poor adaption to life outside of sport and leave the athlete feeling empty.

One pre-emptive coping strategy to help ease the retirement transition is for the athlete to adopt dual careers. Dual careers are defined by sport organizing bodies in three pathways (Pallares, Azocar, Torregrosa, Selva, & Ramis, 2011). The first path is regarded as a linear trajectory in which the athlete is fully dedicated to sport. The second is a convergent trajectory where sport is the top concern but is coupled with occupational or educational pursuits. The third pathway is referred to as a parallel trajectory, where sport and other pursuits (i.e., higher education) run in sync with each other to elicit a more well-rounded sense of self. Former Olympians that engaged in either convergent or parallel paths were found to be more conscientious of retirement planning, had a strong belief for retiring on their own accord, had different forms of self, had a better idea of social support, and had autonomy in their decision making (Torregrosa, Ramis, Pallares, Azocar, & Selva, 2015). Thus, separating one's self from

his/her athletic identity prior to the retiring of his/her career was seen as a crucial benefit for experiencing a positive transition.

For athletes with a disability, the concept of loss is prevalent through the transition process in three ways. Psychological loss is represented in the diminishing of one's athletic identity (Martin, 1999). Social loss sees the athlete being further removed from their teammates because they are removed from sport and various structural barriers (i.e. transportation) that limit the opportunity to see each other (Martin, 1999; Wheeler et al., 1996). Physiological loss sees the athlete with a disability having a reduced chance for maintaining a high level of exercise which can result in other negative health outcomes (Martin, 1999). A significant drop in maintaining fitness for this population can further impact a chronic overuse injury or develop a 'secondary disability' (i.e. cardio-vascular disease; Martin, 2005).

To deal with these changes in their lives, various counselling recommendations are in place. One recommendation is to offer education and counselling for retirement prior to and after the transition (Wheeler et al., 1996). A second recommendation is to have the athlete channel his/her focus in other areas of their lives to inspire purpose (Wheeler et al., 1996). Overall, having support is quite crucial to this population in dealing with the transition into retirement. Thus, the strategies athletes employ to cope with the transition plays an abundant role in the outcome from the experience.

Perceived quality and long-term consequences of the transition. The four factors outlined above all lead into the overall outcome of how the process is experienced. As was noted previously, the outcomes can be either positive or negative.

Negative causal factors like leaving sport due to injury or dismissal, having a strong athletic identity when leaving sport, and adopting maladaptive coping styles sets the athlete up for failure. These causal factors can contribute to identity crisis, diminished confidence, or substance abuse. Achieving goals that are prioritized in an athlete's career and retiring with feelings of satisfaction contribute to an easier transition (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Sinclair and Orlick (1993) discovered as well that transitioning out of sport once rather than coming back out of retirement and then retiring again, having options available after sport, and consulting a professional more attune with sport were seen to aid in a positive experience from the transition.

Framing life after sport as the opportunity to establish a sense of normalcy also helps with a positive transition (Allison & Meyer, 1988). For athletes who still have a strong connection to their athletic identity, opportunities to be around sport can help establish normalcy and smooth the transition. Opportunities such as coaching, managing a team, or being involved politically for sport can accomplish this for both able bodied athletes and for athletes with disabilities (Martin, 1996). The quality of the transition falls unto the abilities of the athlete and those immediately surrounding them. As was seen, access to resources from both internal and external standpoints is notable for easing into retirement for elite athletes.

Cultural Context of the Transition

The model created by Stambulova et al. (2007) depicts additional influences external to the retired athlete that shapes his/her experience overall. The factors that were listed include the type of climate the athlete is in and the various social economic opportunities available. It should be noted that these factors have the potential to sway

the experience of retirement in either a positive or negative direction. They are not solely predicated on offering one possible type of outcome every time which demonstrates the subjectivity of the lived experience of retirement. The following sections will highlight existing literature related to the various cultural components affecting the transition experience.

Elite sports climate. The elite sport climate factors relate to the dominance sport and sport systems have in the shaping of lived reality. In one sense, the popularity of the sport has the ability to shape the athlete's perception of retirement. For instance, hockey players in Canada were found to hold onto their athletic identities longer as a result of the consistent influence of fan interaction, with many athletes being recognized by fans in everyday situations (Lagimodiere & Strachan, 2015). In contrast, rugby players found an easier transition to their occupational identity as they were less recognized as an athlete in everyday situations. Sport type is also seen to influence the quality of experience. Specifically, in individual sports like women's tennis that foster less of a sense of comradery, retirement is not seen as a negative outcome. Rather, when former athletes retired either through voluntary or involuntary means, they were happy to be removed from that socially chaotic environment and hoped to have a normal life afterwards (Young, Pearce, Kane, & Pain, 2006). Individual sports that require athletes to build their own self-sufficient coping skills during their career can elicit an optimistic experience with retirement because they are prepared to handle stressful situations already.

Mass media attention. Though retired athletes may feel that their time in the spotlight will come to an end once they reach retirement, their celebrity status in

actuality may never really leave. Webb et al. (1998) argues that abandoning the public athletic identity is harder to overcome than developing a private athletic identity. In a review of media stories in the popular Australian press about two former Olympic medalist swimmers, Cosh, Crabb and Tully (2015) discovered that the conception of identity post sport can occur without the agent partaking in it. Through their review, themes were discovered about how these swimmers were regarded. Words like ‘former’ or ‘fallen champion’ were used to describe them in moments of crisis. Select words like ‘father’, were disregarded in the news coverage and the athletes attempts at re-identification in their pursuit of family life or new work life were pushed aside.

Interestingly, another factor about the influence of mass media relates to the type of vernacular associated with the transition in everyday reporting. An article by Crocket (2014) attempts to dissociate the idea that dropout is the same as retirement. It is suggested that the term ‘retirement’ should be associated for those who were able to sustain a healthy career and retire voluntarily. The term ‘dropout’ should be used for athletes who were forced to withdraw from sport due to unfortunate circumstances, like injury. Crocket (2014) suggests that it provides an opportunity for the process to be more truthful to the athlete’s experience rather than just putting all who transition under a single umbrella term as the media does. Additionally, factors that are associated with dropout specifically deal with conflicts of interest and conflicts with people. This is especially evident in youth sport where instances of dropout can be seen when there is a lack of fun, quarrelling with the coach, and lack of playing time (Weiss & Williams, 2004). This, in practice, can provide reassurance to former elite athletes. Given that, their experience would coincide with a more specified category and proper aid and

resources could be adjusted to cater to the specificity of experience. As is evident, the media can impose barriers to the athlete in their formation of the new self when transitioning into retirement.

Job possibilities. Upon the completion of their athletic career, the focus on obtaining a new career can be quite taxing (Gearing, 1999). This is especially evident for the athlete that has to consider providing support for his/her respective family and achieving financial stability (Stambulova et al., 2007). Though the above point may suggest that the experience of retirement is distressing, it must be stated again that negative reactions are not reflective of all athletes. Retirement is a process that is characterized by subjectivity. The work of Coakley (1983) attested to this notion. Coakley (1983) notes that collegiate athletes were able to grasp the inevitable change in identity when leaving interscholastic sport, as the transition was formulated as being a part of growing up to graduate and enter the labour force and move on. Lally (2007) also discussed that elite athletes are able to appreciate that elite sport was able to provide leverage to gift them with an education to pursue a career in the occupational world. As well, a dissatisfaction with sport can lead to an opportunity to explore other avenues that are meaningful for an athlete. The work of Boiche and Sarrazin (2009) emphasize this point about satisfaction such that when an athlete decides to leave their sport, they create the freedom to try new things without the demands of training and competitions.

Likewise, positive experiences with retirement appear to vary across nations, especially when it relates to obtaining employment. Compared to Lithuanian and Russian athletes, German athletes reported planning for retirement earlier and had shorter times for adaption to the transition (Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte,

2004). They were concerned with obtaining an occupation when they choose to retire and was more so the case if they were terminated. Thus, establishing a concern for obtaining employment affects the quality of transition from sport. Regardless of national context, athletes that engaged in pre-retirement planning to determine what they wanted to do, especially with vocation, are found to have: a higher appreciation of their athletic career, more favourable emotions with retirement, and use more active styles of coping versus defensive-emotionally based strategies (Stambulova et al. 2007). This confirms the importance of being ready to retire as it helps assist with a smooth transition to retirement, especially when exploring job opportunities.

Availability of services. Athletes may seek out additional services to help cope if they find they are struggling with the effects of the transition post-retirement. The work of North and Lavallee (2004) uncovered all of the transition programs that were created resulting from the demands from sport psychologists and athletes at the time. Canada was the first group to create a transition program to help athletes plan for retirement in 1985. The United States followed after with programming for career assistance designed to help Olympic athletes during the transition. From 1991 until the time the work of North and Lavallee (2004) was published, other first world nations developed similar programming. However, the question of these programs' effectiveness was raised by Gorley, Lavallee, Bruce, Teale and Lavallee (2001), who discovered that the program created by Australia saw only a 0.7% consistent usage of the services, with 86% of athletes surveyed across 48 sports being aware of its existence. Other nations have lack structured systems of support as well. For instance, Stambulova et al. (2007) highlight that Sweden provides a nationally-based support network from sport

development centers to help with some emotional aspects. Likewise, some recruitment agencies in Sweden exist for former elite athletes to locate jobs, but a formalized national program does not exist to help retired athletes and many employers take preference on the education of applicants rather than their former status as elite athletes. Thus, for countries that have support systems for athletes leaving sport, there is recognition that getting the athlete to use the services available is a struggle in itself.

Cultural values appear to have a significant factor for the transition into retirement for elite athletes and the use of services as well. The literature reveals that nations that prefer privatized systems have very few services for their elite athletes. In Poland, athletes who are left to their own devices without resources (i.e., financial) to aid in transition are found to have more negative feelings about retirement when considering leaving sport (Kuettel, Boyle, & Schmid, 2017). This is in contrast to collective societies that offer resources and are more involved with helping the athlete move into a secondary career, like Denmark and Switzerland (Kuettel et al., 2017). Thus, countries that offer retirement services and how involved those services are, impacts the quality of transition some athletes will experience. Not having these resources and services set in place and not being proactive puts the athletes in considerable harm and damages the reputation of the sport system.

Living standards. It is quite apparent that nations differ in resources and quality of life. In Fiji, where the standards of living are quite abysmal, former rugby players note that life after their professional career is difficult. Not only do factors like employment and skill development shape the pre-dispositions about retirement, but athletes who leave sport due to an unsuccessful sporting career are subject to humiliation

and ridicule in their country, as rugby is an important cultural piece of Fiji (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2014). The sport model in Fiji is not structured in a collective sense in its design for athletes, as the athletes are meant to fend for themselves. Kanemasu and Molnar (2014) discuss that the free market system for players used by Fiji results in a constricted welfare system that leaves many without social service, and leaves players and communities to absorb the costs of player development. Because of this, when the players who do not stay long in the professional ranks retire, they often find themselves in an inequitable state. Kanemasu and Molnar (2014) suggest that this inequity can be combated with education, counselling, and formal support structures to help with the transition at any stage. Thus, the quality of life a nation builds for their inhabitants plays a huge factor in the choices the people are able to select. For rugby players in Fiji, if they are unable to establish themselves as a top elite athlete, they are subjected to few opportunities available and incur a large amount of debt for themselves and for their community.

Cultural traditions. Cultural beliefs about the retirement process also impact the duration of transition. Swedish athletes hold onto being referred to as an athlete for longer once they retire. This is as a sign of satisfaction with their career even though they stopped playing. Consequently, keeping this status and allotting time to reflect on their career can limit their opportunities to find a job if they reflect for too long. French athletes, in comparison, are encouraged to find work after sport retirement and undertake a professional identity, thus having a faster transition process (Stambulova et al., 2007). It is interesting to see that the Swedish athletes report more positive reactions to retirement, in comparison to former French athletes. In fact, it was discovered that the

majority of French athletes work within the sporting context and keep in contact with former teammates in comparison to Swedish athletes. They are holding on to their old identity, which conflicts with their ability to develop a new sense of self, where the Swedish take time in considering the path in which they wish to follow (Stambulova et al., 2007) creating a more positive outcome in their post-sporting career lives.

An athlete's home country is found to impact the rationales for athletic retirement and explains some of the difficulties some athletes experience. For instance, female athletes in Denmark report family related reasons for retirement more so than males as starting a family in this country is of high importance (Moesch et al., 2012). As well, former athletes of Denmark cite that a decrease in motivation, health concerns, and family issues were prevalent in considering retirement. Financial strain dictated a premature retirement, and family reasons were indicative of a later retirement.

In summary, the process of retirement is a complex entity that holds boundless possibilities in how it will be experienced. Some athletes may have an experience of retirement that is plagued with negative outcomes. Loss of confidence, emotional damage, and dissatisfaction with life are possible reactions for an athlete. This is especially so if the athlete lacks the preparedness to move on from sport or cannot separate from their athletic identity to create a new sense of self for both team and individual based sports. Conversely, for some elite athletes, retirement can be a positive experience. It appears that planning ahead, diminishing their athletic identity prior to termination, accomplishing goals during their career, and having a strong system of support from an immediate and official level can support a favourable path after sport. It appears that the context for retiring (i.e., being forced to retire as opposed to retiring on

their own accord) as well as the resources the athlete possesses (i.e., having proactive coping strategies) dictates the outcome of the experience. As can be gathered so far, the transition into retirement from elite athletics emphasize the uniqueness of experience based on mechanisms and antecedent factors, both within the control and outside the control of the elite athlete. The plethora of responses to this experience demonstrates how the human condition varies from person to person. Thus, to understand how a particular situation has the power to strengthen or deprive an individual, the individual's thinking and sense making of that situation, or their narrative, becomes pivotal.

Experiences of elite athletes with a disability

Extracting a narrative on the experience of retirement is crucial to understanding the lived experience of elite athletes with a physical disability. For one, this population has endured a great deal of struggle in dealing with the societal stigma the general public has with disability (Tasiemski, Kennedy, Gardner, & Blaikley, 2004). The traditional medical model mechanistically categorizes individuals as ill if they present biological symptoms that deviate from the perception of what is characterized as being healthy. A 'disability' by the traditional medical model, is a form of severe illness that places the disabled in a state of irrationality in their physical and social lives (Robillard, 1999). Simply put, employing this label from the traditional medical model creates a discourse for those with a disability that they are less than the common man. These understandings of illness and disability from the traditional medical model shape the perceptions of the non-disabled population as being an incompetent actor, as well (Robillard, 1999). These discourses formulate that individuals with a disability have something wrong with them and present a problem for society. Attempting to break away from this discourse

becomes very difficult as that way of thinking has been embedded heavily within society from the built environment to social interaction (Brittain, 2004). However, sport provides an alternative way of thinking about disability to counteract society's narrow disposition towards living with a disability.

It was not until the post-World War II era that the introduction of sport as a means of rehabilitation gained considerable attention. Dr. Guttman of the Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Britain is credited as forming sport opportunities for people with disability that were sustained from World War II, which then culminated into the Paralympics and organized disability sports of today (Dieffenbach & Statler, 2012). However, sport itself presents some concerns in its utilization. Sport as understood through a sociological sense is regarded as an institution that is, "the modern project of producing desirable and normalized bodies" (Cole, 2002 p.441). In this sense, traditional sport contradicts the involvement of an athlete with a physical disability through hegemonic devices. Specifically, sport has been designed to test the entire physical capabilities of an individual. As a result, because an individual with a disability is limited by comparison in complete mobility, they were unable to participate fully in traditional sport situations (Promis, Erevelles, & Matthews, 2001; Berger, 2008). Therefore, sport itself was adapted in order to account for the differences in ability and access to their able-bodied counterparts.

As adaptive sport has evolved through this evolution of the para-sport movement, research has uncovered that athletes with a disability share some similarities to their able-bodied counterparts. For instance, participants in para-sport cite that sport for them provides a sense of internal satisfaction, the joy of being on a team and its

camaraderie, improved physical conditioning, and increased self-efficacy just like able-bodied athletes (Berger, 2008). Other examples of similarities for athletes in para-sport and able-bodied sport revolve around stressors of competition. Such examples of this include coaching behaviour, pressure to win, chaotic team environment, weather and travel delays, concerns of body image and confidence, injuries, lack of social support, and maintaining performance levels (Dieffenbach & Statler, 2012; Arnold, Wagstaff, Steadman, & Pratt, 2017).

On the contrary, there are unique experiences that are exclusive to being an athlete with a disability. From a motivation standpoint, elite athletes with a disability were found to engage in their sport for different reasons compared to their able-bodied counterparts. Such examples include playing sport for pure enjoyment purposes, being more task oriented when setting goals, and demonstrating a more purpose-related motivation to achieve goals rather than for financial gain when compared to able-bodied athletes (Kämpfe, Höner & Willimczik, 2014). Unique to para-sport is its ability to get athletes to transcend their dispositions about themselves. This is made possible through the rules of the adapted sports where athletes are able to better understand and nurture their identity with their disability in a more affirmative manner. This was accomplished by breaking through barriers and pushing onward to develop their capabilities through playing sport (Berger, 2008). Referring back to stressors, athletes with a disability have cited that coaches who lack knowledge about disability cause a great deal of concern as they provide instruction and communication that is not plausible for the athlete to act out (Arnold et al., 2017; Dieffenbach & Statler, 2012). It has also been noted that the minimal amount of dedicated training facilities for disabled athletes and the lack of

accessible access for other facilities provides a significant source of stress for many athletes hoping to make it to the elite level (Dieffenbach & Statler, 2012).

Another significant source of stress has been the representation of para-sport within the media. Using the Paralympics as example, the number of athletes that have attended those Games has increased over the years, yet there still is a disproportionate amount of coverage within media, leaving those elite athletes feeling under-appreciated. The *New York Times* was noted as printing 10241 more articles of the London 2012 Olympics in comparison to the 2012 Paralympics (Tynedal & Wolbring, 2013). Oddly enough, in the limited number of stories about the Paralympics, a narrative of heroism is generated regarding how the individual has overcome what they have been dealt with to lead a 'normal' life (Tynedal & Wolbring, 2013). This notion of the 'supercrip' presents a duality of perspectives. The more optimistic view on using this title reveals that disabled athletes who may not fall into the category of the 'supercrip', may still find those stories as a source of inspiration and can create a more positive understanding of disability for everyone (Hardin & Hardin, 2004). However, the other view of using a 'supercrip' narrative in the media can present a false sense of adequacy. These stories can set expectations too high for those with an acquired disability. This is evident when individuals under rehabilitation become concerned with their healing path not matching that of the 'supercrip's' or that it is hard to live up to (Hutchinson & Kleiber, 2000). Likewise, using this type of heroic narrative in the media encourages lack of societal reform for inclusivity and reinforces systems of domination as it is perceived that all individuals with a disability are able to do what the 'supercrips' are able to endure and accomplish (Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Berger, 2008). In an athletic sense, super hero

attributions are found to further marginalize those with other types of disabilities, as only the identified elite of para sport are regarded as being just like the average athlete in non-disabled sport. Others that do not push the boundaries or those who are not a Paralympian, are then regarded as being different and vulnerable (Tynedal & Wolbring, 2013).

The media as well has demonstrated favouritism to specific disabilities. Athletes who represented Great Britain at the London 2012 Paralympic Games noted that advertisement campaigns that utilized the ‘supercrip’ title were of athletes that became disabled through some form of acquired trauma. However, disabilities that are congenital, like cerebral palsy, were not found within these advertisements which create a sense of inadequacy with the para athletes whose disability differs from the ‘supercrip’ (Bush, Silk, Porter, & Howe, 2013).

As can be gathered, the experiences of sport for athletes with a disability generate some unique perspectives. For one, these athletes have comparable stressors and motivations for succeeding in sport to able-bodied athletes but are subjected to harsher stereotypes and barriers to their sport. Presence in the media (Berger, 2008; Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Hutchinson & Kleiber, 2000), accessibility (Dieffenbach & Statler, 2012), and even questioning if para sport is a legitimate form of sport (Fitzgerald, 2012) are some of the many examples of obstacles elite para athletes endure. Once it comes time to leave sport, these athletes are faced with another set of struggles to endure. Discoveries within the literature have found that former athletes not only deal with coming to understand life outside of sport, but also are exposed to the saddening reality of oppressions and ableism that everyday individuals with disability endure.

Athletes have cited that these types of oppressions were absent to them when they were an athlete and they forgot how devastating it can be (Smith et al., 2016). While there is some understanding of some experiences of athletes with disabilities, there is a significant gap in the literature related to transitions. An assumption cannot be made that athletes with disabilities experience the transition from elite athlete to retirement similarly to able-bodied athletes. It is possible that aspects of the amalgamated model are relevant, but their experiences may demonstrate that there are different factors that influence their transition. Therefore, to truly understand how EAWPD respond to the experience of transitioning out of elite sport, an appreciation of how to understand narrative and narrative analysis is needed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides background information about narrative analysis. First, a background about the methodology of narrative analysis introduces the concept of narratives and what it entails. What follows is a review of athletic retirement narratives to set the context of what is apparent in the literature. Next, a section about the data collection process and analysis is explored, outlining the approaches and actions to be taken for this report. Finally, the last portion of this chapter outlines how reliability will be maintained and what the limitations and ethical considerations are anticipated for this project.

Narrative Analysis

Background. Storytelling, a part of human history and culture for centuries passes on traditions, offers learning experiences, and creates relationships amongst each other. Narrative has evolved from being a representational re-telling of an event, to being regarded as a way of social ontological and epistemological thinking. This conceptualization regards narrative as the way humans understand the world and how the self is constituted because humans come to know of their position in the social world through stories created and told (Somers, 1994). In fact, according to the study of personology (Barressi & Juckes, 1997), a person requires the ability to be aware of experiences and be able to contemplate on the effect of those experiences. As such, being a human involves being able to communicate about an event that was experienced. This is usually done in a story format that has a start, middle, and an end. The describing or recounting of an event usually results in meaning being assigned to the event or parts

of it so that the person sharing the event can learn and grow. Coinciding with narrative, outcomes of personal learning and growth are apparent in much of the classical stories of the western world where the main actor/focal person has experienced a negative turn of events and rises up to overcome the challenges to reach a goal (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001; Singer, 2004). The audience, in listening or viewing these tales, develops an understanding of the trials and tribulations the main actor/focal person endured and takes away key messages or morals. Therefore, the essence of human behaviour involves thinking, identifying, visualizing, and developing morals based on a narrative structure (Sarbin, 1986) as the stories created, learned personally, or from cultural influence (Brockmeier & Harre, 2000; Znakov, 2009) formulates the schema in which a person operates.

Sense making. Though it would appear that the above section presents the use of narratives as a regurgitation of information gathered or declared, narratives in actuality allow for complex cognitive processes to work when confronted with questions about social life. For one, the use of narratives provides the chance to make sense of experiences (McAdams, 1995; Singer, 2004). Having the chance to speak about an experience gives insight in respect to relatability between the author and his/her audience, provides a sketching of time and space, and formulates what has occurred and how it has affected the teller in a story style (Somers, 1994). Essentially, describing an experience in a story-like retelling offers the opportunity for the storyteller to rationalize the experience for the listener and affirm the storyteller's code of personal ethics or their narrative habitus (Frank, 2010). The narrative habitus, defined by Frank (2010), is the interplay of individual dispositions and perceptions generated through stories. The

ability to rationalize experiences through the storied narrative of positive encounters like helping others, or negative experiences like death, can help inspire purpose for the lives of the individual. This in turn can distance the individual from succumbing to existential dread about the meaninglessness of situation, giving hope that things have purpose (Znakov, 2009). Narrative also fills in gaps in empirical events where the subject is able to re-organize what had occurred into a structured understanding, in respect to their cultural norms and context (Znakov, 2009). For example, talking or writing about an emotional, moving experience, like separating from a spouse, lays out how that experience is affecting them presently and then sets up a guide for how they should respond.

While a narrative is able to make sense of events, it can also change. In fact, a narrative is fluid in its nature because as the agent learns lessons or gains new insights, he/she allows for the rebuilding of the story. The author has the ability to select words that best describe the experience from what was newly learned, rather than continually recycling the past versions (Singer, 2004). Consider the world-view of a person from childhood in comparison to adulthood. As one matures and experiences similar objective events like playing hockey, an adult may be able to conceptualize what hockey means to him/her in a more descriptive manner as opposed to his/her childhood self. Hockey for the adult could represent a time to escape from reality while the child could simply see it as being a fun thing to play. Both depict that hockey is enjoyable but are described in different manners. If the nature of narrative remained static, the opportunity to convey deeper meaning for experience would not exist. Therefore, as more experiences accumulate over time, the subjective sense making ability or narrative habitus (Frank,

2010) is modified as more open or more specified depending on what is put into it. Thus, making sense of ordeals through a narrative not only strengthens the narrative habitus (Frank, 2010), but helps position the agent in the social world. This positioning of social life relates to a key aspect of being human - identity formation.

Identity creation. Identity is strengthened by narrative through the ontological work of characterizing the person through the experience. As discussed through the sense-making ability of narrative, hearing or using a narrative about an event allows the user or listener to establish connections about the event and use those connections to position him/her in a larger social context. Through this positioning from events and experiences, a discourse is formed about what is both meaningful and special to the person and narrative makes this comprehensible (Hammack, 2008). McAdams (1995) discusses that to truly understand someone, beyond characteristics and worries, his/her identity must be learned, which can be gathered from his/her life story. Interestingly enough, the type of narrative expressed demonstrates the orientation of identity. For example, the work of Bauer and McAdams (2004) discovered narratives about transition which focus on personal mastery and saw a heavy focus on ego development. This was contrasted with transition narratives about personal growth in relationships where a heavy focus on social-emotional development was seen. The authors discovered that those had narratives which focused on social-emotional development saw greater subjective well-being for participants. Thus, narratives possess the power for individuals to formulate identity internally from their individual experiences and externally from larger cultural experiences and stories (Frank, 2010). This occurs as they are able to determine what is meaningful to them and how they wish to act. Interestingly, Somers

(2004) has noted that if a person is unable to formulate a narrative about his/her self, he/she appears to have a fractured sense of identity. Though the challenge of developing a life story can be hard for some, the narrative process can serve to help mend the broken identity into something whole.

Healing practice. Healing can occur through narrative as it reveals the innermost feelings towards a personal situation or understanding which in turn can relieve the individual from the burden of holding a story in. Listening to a song or poem about love or viewing a melancholic piece of art allows for the audience to relate to what the person who has created the art is attempting to portray. At the same time, showcasing an expression of art also presents an opportunity for the creator of the art to publicly share his/her feelings in a social context. Narratives about life or a particular series of events can present an opportunity for the story-teller to heal from an experience as well because narratives give insight to the inner workings of an individual when coping with an ordeal (Butcher, 2004). Speaking out loud about an event gives the story teller the chance to let out his/her emotions and to receive feedback from others to validate how he/she feels or determine a course of action. In fact, individuals in therapy who are able to vividly recall a memory and extract meaning from it are very likely to demonstrate a positive outcome from therapy (Blagov & Singer, 2004). In summary, narratives about life or an event act as a conduit for growing and healing, as it can provide people a chance to reveal their feelings and make sense of the experience. Singer (2004) best encapsulates narrative as a healing practice with the following,

To learn and grow may involve acknowledging what has been lost or what never will be, but this acceptance may allow for a better long-term adjustment and more judicious life choices that lead to greater happiness in the long run (p.446).

In closing, narratives offer a multitude of benefits. Narratives provide the opportunity to heal and move on from an event, solidify a sense of identity, and make sense of an experience. With all of the offerings narratives can provide, an outline of how narrative analysis works to explore phenomena is detailed below.

Narrative analysis in practice. The versatility of this particular qualitative approach is not constricted by boundaries of specific fields. This type of approach can be employed in practically any situation where a story can be gathered. Some narratives can be about teaching, participating in a particular intervention, relationships, and even illness (Patton, 2002). Narratives can be derived from a re-telling of an official, invented, first-hand, second-hand, or culturally common story (Schank, 1990). Clearly, an abundance of stories resides in the world, but there are still many stories that have yet to be told. In respect to the sport, recreation, and leisure fields, much of the narratives are about a re-telling of period in their lifetime.

Getting people involved in group exercise and creating a narrative about their experiences of mental illness has been noted as having a profound effect, given that mental illness can deny an individual the joy they once had in their lives. As Carless and Douglas (2008) uncover, “problems with thought processes, communication, social withdrawal, and/or inactivity can together conspire to deny a person with serious mental illness the opportunity to both create and share stories of his or her life” (p.5). Gathering

those who are experiencing some form of mental illness and sharing their experiences allows for the transcending of constraining forces people may feel in their everyday lives as they are able to express how they feel people to come together and create a network of support. This same study uncovered a narrative of action where individuals are able to get out and have a purpose. A second narrative of achievement was found where people were able to succeed in the goals they have established. The third narrative was about forming a relationship with others and feeling valued and a part of the team (Carless & Douglass, 2008). Creating an opportunity to express a narrative provides a way to manage their symptoms and create a coping strategy. The use of narrative can be brought to teachings of sports management as well. Narratives about pain, disability, body satisfaction, and coming-of-age (Reinhart, 2006) provide those in the field with better insight to create better policies for their organizations based on what has been told.

Narrative analysis is an approach that is very conscientious of the word choice used to describe experiences. In scientific literature, the terms narrative and story are sometimes used interchangeably and can cause some confusion for the reader. To prevent this confusion, the work of Tsang (2000) identifies the major difference between story and narrative. Tsang (2000) goes on to say, “Story is used to describe phenomenon, and narrative is to describe the method” (p.45). Thus, when establishing the terms to be used for the research, it is suggested that researchers using narrative analysis are explicit about what they mean to capture and not combine the two. For the purposes of this project, narrative was used in reference to the analytic portion of data

collection. Story was used when specifically discussing the response to questioning from the interviews.

Not only do narratives provide tremendous opportunity to grow and learn for the author, the listener or reader holds a great deal of power. In a basic sense, as Fludernik (1996) states, “Readers actively construct meanings and impose frames on their interpretations of texts just as people have to interpret real-life experience in terms of available schemata” (p.9). Therefore, interpreting the data is just as important as the data itself. A critical component of analyzing data from narrative is an understanding of voice. Tsang (2000) deals with the idea of voice in simply stating that we all have many voices as a person, but that we come from specific backgrounds that create these voices. Tsang (2000) states, “no voice is an entity unto itself: unitary, separate, singular, coherent, and whole” (p.48) so when presenting the results, the researcher should select a voice that is reflective of the message he/she want to get across for the sake of the participant.

Another key component of this approach is keeping the participants’ words at the fore front as it is their stories while the researcher is the critical messenger. Frank (1998) puts this best in his recounting of people suffering severe illness that, “the story you are hearing needs no change... hear exactly what story she or he is telling. Everyone is a storyteller, but few of us are sufficiently reflective about what stories we tell, in our lives and words” (p. 37-38). For those with a physical disability, a group that is marginalized in voice (Frank, 1995), narratives possess the power to legitimize adapted sport (Perrier, Smith, Latimer-Cheung, 2013) and shape the conception of self. This is accomplished in how the individual appraises him/herself as an athlete (Perrier, Strachan, Smith, &

Latimer-Cheung, 2014) and how new hope for life is characterized after acquiring a spinal cord injury from sport (Smith & Sparkes 2005). It is using these stories from the individual experiencing the phenomena that reveal the actual goings-on. A deviation by way of not using the words expressed from the speaker shatters the lived experience and does not give a real depiction of how he/she feels.

Traditional methods of narrative analysis are devised to funnel the content of the participant's story to reveal an interesting theme from it. The work of Somers (2004) notes that four types of narrative dimensions exist in analysing stories: ontological, public, conceptual, and metanarratives. Ontological narratives are the narratives that the agent uses to make sense of the world. Public narratives center on groups surrounding the agent that can include their family or teams. Conceptual narratives are devised to bridge ontological and public narratives to explain social forces, like patterns in business. Finally, metanarratives are the largest dimension of story that address high macro level processes, like classism. For the purposes of this project, the ontological dimension of narrative was explored as it revolves around the agency of the individual, since the author is attempting to understand the narratives used for the restructuring of identity post-elite athletic retirement.

Essentially, when analysing the data as well as presenting it using narrative analysis, the researcher should remember to be empathetic to what the participant has shared as it may not have been the easiest thing to discuss. By incorporating a solid transcribing process and looking for key themes that appears through the data, along with an empathetic and proper voice will elicit a solid backing for analysing. To conclude, narrative analysis is a qualitative process that critically examines an inherent

factor of being human. This research was focused on presenting the stories of each participant as clearly as possible. By doing this, not only is the presented analysis a true reflection of what was discussed but the extracted themes are an honest evaluation of what was discovered. More on the methodology to be used for this study will be elaborated later.

Narrative and Athletic Retirement

As discussed, constructing a narrative about a person's experience offers the opportunity to develop an intimate understanding of that person's construction of the world. Gearing (1999) notes, "identification of one's own personal myth assists in the process of life story-making which enables the individual to achieve its identity" (p.44). As was mentioned previously, to tell a story of significance demonstrates the power to which the sense of self is formed. This is especially crucial for athletes when modifying their sense of self as they retire from their playing career. Lavalley et al. (1997) discuss the influence narratives have on the athletic world in stating,

The benefits of using a narrative methodology may also extend beyond the type of information obtained. Both the opportunity to develop an account and the quality of the confiding activity may have a strong relationship to healing (p.143).

Developing an account of an individual's experience serves to aid the individual to transition into something else and can help heal the fractured sense of identity some may experience when leaving elite sport. Likewise, this methodology also gives the researcher a more detailed grasp of the phenomenon occurring. To date, many studies on

athletic retirement looking to focus on quantitative measures to extract experience with numerical significance to quantify experience with pre-constructed measurements (Park et al., 2013). As a result, the literature that is concerned about the journey of athletes when transitioning into retirement is minimal. A literature review by Park et al. (2013), highlighted that the majority of studies on athletic retirement lack diversification in research design and only the work of Gearing (1999) which used narrative analysis was included in their review as significant.

The limited amount of research on athletic retirement using a narrative analysis approach sheds an interesting light on the retirement experience. For instance, the complexity of retirement is definitely expressed through narrative and the unique dispositions around it. The work of Gearing (1999) with former professional soccer players discovered that the range of causality to retire affected their process in negative or neutral ways, yet all were focused on attaining employment as their career ended. The stories of the athletes ranged from: having a fractured sense of self, keeping sport close to life as it was essentially all they knew, wanting to try something new as they had been with the sport for a long time, and setting their mind on a new goal but feeling bereaved at the same time (Gearing, 1999). This spectrum of feelings was found in another study in which athletes varied from catastrophizing life to looking fondly over their playing days while still recognizing the bad stuff that occurred when they played (Denison, 1996). Therefore, the accounts of stories from athletes about retirement relate to previous findings in other types of studies; however, the data collected in the studies that used an analysis of narrative convey a more emotional and realistic tone for the audience which can develop a deep feeling of empathy towards the participants being examined.

Narratives are able to express the experiences about large and complex issues, like gender. A gender difference in narrative was present with elite female Finnish runners when retiring (Ronkanien, Watkins, & Ryba, 2015). Through accounts of narratives in their final years of sport, female runners in Finland were found to adhere to a strong performance narrative and did not see much of a future after sport. As a result, once their sporting careers came to an end, they did not pursue sport further (i.e., coaching), as did their male counter-parts. Female athletes conceptualized loneliness as harder and relied on more emotion-based coping but did not receive much support. Male athletes saw loneliness as a positive experience leading to increased self-knowledge as opposed to catastrophizing identity seen in the females (Ronkanien et al., 2015).

The sport of golf for women has been noted to have athletes invest in a performance narrative for their career. This type of narrative, as discussed by the work of Douglas and Carless (2006) states that, “to be successful a woman must be single-minded in her drive, must resist other facets of life, and must regulate relationships. So, total is the focus on sport performance that the person and the job become inseparable” (p.20). It should be noted that adhering to one type of narrative that controls all aspects of life can be a huge issue, especially when circumstances, such as retirement, means the person will not have the capacity to identify solely with it (Frank, 1998; Smith & Sparkes, 2005). This point was explored with female golfers once more, who identified with having a “performance narrative,” but experienced a “narrative wreckage” when having to face retirement (Douglas & Carless, 2009). Upon experiencing this wreckage, an asylum was sought out to help develop a new sense of self through a more relational narrative. Specifically, prioritizing events with heavy significance and seeking

hospitalization were the outlets used to develop this relational sense (Douglas & Carless, 2009). Thus, narratives when used are able to express unique factors experienced about retirement in relation to perspectives about being a specified sex in that environment.

Narratives as discussed possess the ability to help individuals move forward from a situation. If individuals feel that it is best to remain silent about their experiences in attempts to not be rejected from their social group, it can lead to reactions of poor mental health (Crossley, 2000; McLeod, 1997). Therefore, allowing athletes the opportunity to share their whole experience with retirement offers the chance to help move on in their transition process. This is even more so the case for athletes with physical disabilities because they have been under represented in this type of methodology for exploring athletic retirement (Wheeler et al.,1996). Therefore, a narrative analysis will be employed to better understand how identity is restructured post-retirement. Specifically, what types of narratives are expressed for EAWPD when experiencing the transition into retirement and how do those narratives characterize the quality of the transition?

Sample and Selection

There were two major criteria for participation identified for this research project. The first criterion was that the participants must have competed at the elite level in any adapted sport, either representing a team provincially, nationally, or scholastically in university sport. The second criterion was that the participants must have been retired from their sport for a minimum of one year. This allowed time for the calming down phase of the transition (Stephan et al., 2003a). Participants were not excluded from this project based on the type of physical disability they had. Though differences in disability

were present (i.e. acquired vs. congenital), it was the purpose of this project to understand the experience of the retirement. Learning about the differences in retirement through the stories of participants with different backgrounds was pivotal in understanding the subjectivity of experience with retiring from elite para-sport. A total of six participants, consisting of three males and three females who were former Paralympians, were interviewed. They resided throughout Canada. Due to distance constraints, interviews over the telephone were utilized during this project. The minimum sample size of six participants was based on suggestions in the work of Creswell and Poth (2017) for establishing a fair size within the domains of qualitative research.

Participants were recruited through contacts made with the Executive Director of Parasport NB and close acquaintances at the University of Toronto. Information outlining the project's significance and scope was communicated in a face-to-face meeting and through electronic communication. From there, athletes that Parasport NB and my colleagues from the University of Toronto had identified as being potential participants were contacted by email. They were invited to participate and were provided with an information letter. For those who wished to participate in this research project, a phone meeting was arranged to converse about additional information related to the study. A time and date to do the interview was set. Prior to the interview starting, I reviewed the necessary documentation (See Appendix A, B, and C). Three athletes from Atlantic Canada participated in this study, along with two athletes from Ontario and one from one of the Canadian Territories.

Data Collection

This research explored two questions. First, what types of narratives were expressed for elite athletes with a physical disability when experiencing the transition into retirement and moving on from it? Second, how do these narratives characterize the quality of their experience? In exploring these questions, a narrative analysis approach was used. The most common method for gathering narrative data is the interview. An interview can be semi structured where pre-outlined open questions are used in an effort to guide the participant in answering the research questions. However, the unstructured interview is a much more appropriate tool for this project as it is quite lenient in its question structure. The focus of an unstructured interview is on an idea, but the participant dictates what is to be answered versus the researcher's manipulation of questioning (Henderson, 2006). Using unstructured interviews allows for the freedom for participants to express their situations as they best see fit, as they are not confined to responding to specified questioning. Thus, unstructured interviews allow for a more open process for the collection of data which in turn best coincides with the tenants of narrative analysis. In a simpler sense, unstructured interviews represent a blank canvas for the participant to express him/herself as opposed to semi-structured interviews which allow somewhat constrained expression as they are 'colouring within the lines'. For the purposes of this paper, the principles of unstructured interviewing were incorporated into a guide used to help elicit a story, specifically, free association narrative interviewing.

A set of interview questions was drafted to stick to the theme of identity restructuring (see Appendix D). Examples of this include: what did being an athlete

mean to you? What did you discover about yourself as you've transitioned? etc. The interviews lasted an average of thirty-five minutes. All questions fell under the guide of free association narrative interviewing and specifically used the suggestions made by the Biographical-Interpretive model (Rosenthal & Bar-On, 1992; Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). This particular model for interviewing focused on the principle of 'gestalt' where the entirety of the story is much more important than its details (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). In eliciting the participants, 'gestalt' Hollway and Jefferson (2008) highlight four pillars that should be used when using the Biographical-Interpretive model for interviewing. First, the topics for discussion in the interview were open-ended. Secondly, questioning attempted to elicit a story from the participant. For instance, topics were formulated for expression to flow (i.e. "tell me about how..."). Thirdly, I avoided asking 'why' questions when exploring a topic in the questioning. This effort was made because 'why' questions typically evoke more conscious processes to rationalize why they are feeling a certain way, and using them presents a disconnect from how lives are lived everyday. If the participants did not intellectualize their stories prior to the interview, using 'why' questions can result in responses that present hollow perspectives not attune to the subjectivity of the participant (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). Finally, the researcher followed up with the participants' order of events making sure that the information gathered was recorded correctly and respected what the participant stated. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Interesting points of non-verbal communication were incorporated into the data. Through the assignment of pseudonyms, the participants remained anonymous through the writing of the report.

Data Analysis

Narrative analysis is not an approach that is heavily centered with specified rules and instructions. However, Riessman (1993) created five levels of analysis that provide recommendations in a broad way. As Riessman (1993) suggests, the first level begins with who is to be studied and how will the data be presented. After that, the data are collected, transcribed, and analyzed with finer detail and are then written to reveal what has been discovered. Derived from these guidelines, the method of holistic-form narrative analysis was developed by Lieblech, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zibler (1998). This model for coding data best coincided with the purposes of this research, as it focuses on what stories are being told and what narratives are being used to structure the stories about athletic retirement for elite athletes with a physical disability.

Holistic-form narrative analysis provided a template of when engaging with the data for coding. Specifically, I first immersed myself in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts of the data collected from each participant. Next, I wrote my initial impressions of the transcribed data in a separate journal. I then identified plot developments and the dynamics/themes of the plot. This was accomplished by highlighting the identified points of interest on the transcripts and then categorizing the points identified in another document. Upon completion of identifying plots and themes, I consistently re-told the initial story to confirm themes discovered. This was accomplished by writing out major themes identified after the first round of reading, and then re-reading the stories for three more rounds to either modify or solidify the themes found. This helped formulate structure with a graphical depiction, and to cluster themes (i.e. creating plans, setting goals, adaptation, etc.) to discover deeper themes (i.e.

personal growth, self-discovery, moving on, etc.) in a typology leading into a finalized analysis. This model was used to maintain my focus in depicting narrative themes through the participants' stories. Building off of this model, the results were written in an employment style. In describing themes pulled from the data collected, the data were presented in a story-like manner highlighting the beginnings of each participant's sports journey. As well, the middle portions included the reasons for their retirement and the retirement process itself. Finally, an ending of where each participant was in their life at the time of the interview and their reflections about their experience was collectively displayed in the narratives identified.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Verification methods were undertaken for this report that follow the five verification strategies identified by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002). The work of Morse et al. (2002) identified that methodological coherence, having an appropriate sample, concurrent data collection and analysis, thinking theoretically, and theory development are the crucial underpinnings for developing qualitative research that creates validity and reliability within research. Methodological coherence deals with the research question being matched with the appropriate analytic procedures. This step recognizes that things can change over the course of the collection and analysis for the data, which results in the refinement of processes or even the method itself. For this research project, the methodology of narrative analysis remained constant from the beginning. However, questions were modified in later interviews for clarity purposes. Specifically, the order of questions 12 and 13 were switched in the first interview to what is seen in Appendix D. Questions 12 and 13 were adjusted to the order seen in

Appendix D for the remaining interviews. Once the analysis was completed, the direction for the discussion was created. Having an appropriate sample means having participants who best positioned to answer the research questions. For this research project, six former Paralympians were interviewed who each had varying backgrounds and stories about retirement. This brought unique and interesting perspectives about that experience.

With concurrent data collection and analysis, the main focus was establishing what is known about the topic and what the audience will learn from the research. Given that this research project was novel in its design, information about athletic retirement for former elite athletes who have a physical disability is presented with previous empirical knowledge about athletic retirement and what is involved. Those concepts and themes are then presented through narratives from the perspectives of the participants.

Thinking theoretically involves re-confirming that what has been presented in the past is linked within new research in an incremental manner. For this report, while the narratives presented are novel and unique, each narrative reveals underlying themes and similarities of concepts that have been established from previous works. Lastly, theory development considers what has been identified in the research and how that data fits in to a broader and more conceptual understanding. In this report, the use of narrative can be somewhat ambiguous for developing a concrete theory, but the analysis of the data collected sheds a new perspective on established theories and findings from previous academic papers.

In addition to the five processes for establishing validity and reliability in qualitative research, clarifying research bias was a major priority in establishing the trustworthiness of this research. In clarifying researcher bias, a major procedure was performed to help distance myself from allowing my own personal experiences and biases from interfering with the data collected. This major procedure to clarify research bias was to create a journal to record post-interview thoughts and feelings about the data and keeping this separate from the data. This journal was used to reflect on biases. Declaring my ‘baggage’ allowed for the unconscious thoughts to become conscious through introspection (Ortlipp, 2008). This allowed me to look deeply at how questions are being asked and where to ease away from relating personal understandings when conducting the analysis. It was my intention to use this journal as a means to diminish any biases I felt were present, and to not incorporate these biases as a part of the data. I also brought any concerns I may feel about being biased and potentially misinterpreting the data to my supervisors.

Ethical considerations

Throughout the project, any participant had the freedom to refuse to answer any question or request to withdraw from the study without any consequence to them. The identity of the participants was protected in creating pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Any revealing information about a person was removed as transcripts were developed. In addition to the documentation provided to the participants after showing interest in participating, I discussed the research in detail over the phone to help alleviate any concerns that they may have had. As well, the initial phone meeting

provided additional information about the forms of consent and other ethical concerns they may have had. Prior to and after each interview, I informed the participants that if they had any concerns in respect to ethics or any questions at all, that I was available to be contacted at any time or and the contact information of my supervisors were provided as well. This research received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board at the University of New Brunswick-Fredericton.

Chapter 4: Participant Profiles

The purpose of this research project was to explore how the re-affirmation of self is formulated for former elite athletes with a physical disability when retiring. This was accomplished through understanding what types of narratives exist for this transition and how those narratives shape the process of experience. However, to provide context of how those narratives came to fruition, an introduction of all six participants is warranted. Introducing each participant not only provides some context about what athletic retirement involves and what can occur with it, but also helps to explain how each participant differs and how their stories help formulate the narratives identified. Each profile will outline the journey of each participant of when their athletic career began all the way through to their departure from their respective sports. In respecting the anonymity of the participants, their names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Jack. A 46-year-old male, Jack was a former para-sailing athlete. Prior to an accident, Jack was a very active individual. After the injury left him paralyzed, a decision was made to continue his passion for sport given his new circumstances,

I knew there was like the Paralympics, so I knew there was para sport out there and so when I was in the bed in the hospital, I was thinking what the hell am I gonna do now. And obviously, I gotta play sports, I love sports. I thought I should find a sport that I like... Actually, my physiotherapist got me involved in sailing. She took me sailing the first time... I was hooked.

Upon discovering this new-found passion, Jack decided to pursue the higher levels of para sailing. This was all motivated strongly by the opportunity to travel and see the world,

I'd say that the travel was my...at the time... was my motivating factor because I had a really good friend that lived in Australia and I thought that this would be a really cool way to go over and visit them there. I mean I love the whole Paralympics and I watched the Olympics when I was growing up and wanted to do that. But really, I didn't frame it that way in my mind, I was thinking more it would be a cool way to travel.

In fact, travel was a major component, not only for sustaining his career, but also was how his career started,

After learning how to sail at home, I came back home and I was snowed in for like three days, and I thought this was ridiculous, like why would I live in here [laughs]. So, I moved to the pacific coast of Canada where all the disabled sailing was happening. So, I went out there and that's when I joined the team. I didn't really know much, I was just trying to be part of the team, but I had the strength and the ability. So, I just started learning from my teammates. And we did Paralympics together and then I went solo for the next few games. I finished of my career back with the team in my last games.

For a career that was sustained for over more than 15 years, it was made apparent that the status of being an athlete meant a great deal to Jack. This was evident in discussing what being an athlete signified to him, "I guess for me its all about becoming the best of

your abilities. For me being an athlete means that your good mind, body and soul. Everything is in harmony and you are making the most out of you know, your ability.” Clearly, engaging in para-sport provided Jack an opportunity to develop into an enhanced version of himself, in the wake of his acquired disability.

Though Jack was able to enjoy a long career in the sport of para-sailing, the time came to transition out of sport:

I was gonna try to retire anyways. The [next Paralympics] came and I felt kind of obliged that I should compete and then I ended up back with the team and then I kind of all of a sudden was going to another games. So, after [that one] I was like...I gotta... it's time to get a normal life.

However, prior to following through with retiring on his own terms, the governing bodies of the sport itself made that decision for him by terminating sailing from the Paralympics,

So, it was made official because they took Paralympic sailing out of the Paralympics. Every four years they re-evaluate all the sports and there is a lot of competition to stay in and sailing had 32 countries competing, but it dropped to 29. So, they decided to pull it out.

Thus, Jack's exit from sport is an example of transitioning out of sport through involuntary means. In closing, the story of Jack's career in para-sailing revealed an individual who loved sports and embodied the joys of competing and the fruits of labour that come with being an athlete. Yet, it was the termination of his sport at the Paralympic level which forced him to move on from being an athlete.

Bruce. A 75-year-old male, Bruce was a former track and field athlete in wheelchair racing. In contrast with Jack, Bruce acquired his disability in the early stages of his life. Yet, Bruce never let his condition deter him from engaging in physical activity or sporty pursuits with his classmates,

I got polio at the age of four, which paralyzed my legs. I grew up mostly wearing braces and walking with crutches and I really built up my upper body strength. I did a lot of walking when I was a kid. So, I really built up my upper body... When I was growing up as a child I would play baseball with the rest of the kids, soccer with the rest of the kids, and I was all doing this on my feet with my braces and crutches. And I really didn't compete well with them. So, my first chance of playing wheelchair sports, you know everyone was on an equal playing field as me which felt really good.

In fact, Bruce's introduction to wheelchair-based sports came from a close friend who, like Jack, was also paralyzed,

The biggest thing in my life was meeting up with my friend, who got hurt in an accident and was in a wheelchair. We, together, started playing wheelchair basketball. Mostly playing amongst ourselves, shooting in the back-yard kind of thing, on the playgrounds or whatever... that was at the end of the sixties which was also the time I went out west to compete for the national team.

It was also noted that at the time Bruce tried out for a spot on the national team, the development of a para-sport model was in its very early stages. As well, much of his opportunity in making it to the national team, outside of his natural talent, was due in

part to the support from the provincial government in sending athletes to travel and compete,

It was early in its infancy at that time. There was no great amount of coaching or anything like that. Most of it was simply a matter of it really not taking much effort on my part. And I mean everything was paid for, which was perfect for me as I didn't have any money. So, they were going to pay and all I had to do was, you know, show up. ...it was quite easy making the team. At that time, we didn't really have a good system in place. There was only a few of us and all of us made the team [laughs].

When discussing Bruce's track and field career, which lasted seven years, it was very apparent that sport meant quite a great deal to him, especially when starting out,

It was my natural athleticism that got me by I suppose. I got into track because, the thing I liked about it was that it was very fast. I mean I only weighed 111 pounds and I was so strong. Speed, that was my big thing. Honestly, I found it quite easy to dominate in pretty much everything I did. I did track and threw implements, you know, discus, javelin. I just basically won all my races all my events so I guess I developed this kind of attitude that I was invincible [laughs].

In fact, sport with its competitive nature and the network it creates, was also the underpinning that drove him to reach for the highest levels of wheelchair athletics as opposed to other motivating factors, like travelling,

My fault was I loved to compete so much that the travelling and checking out the sights and stuff like that wasn't really important. Fact of the matter is I wasn't

really turned on by it, when I went to [first national competition in a new city], I was in the gym. I would be in the gym or on the track, I wasn't interested in going out and seeing [the city]. That's just the way it was I guess. I regret it now... I got to meet a lot of world-class athletes and got to compete and talk with them...that I mean was really great for me. I just loved that others I talked with could relate at the same level as me.

Interestingly, upon reflecting about what being an athlete meant to him, a very profound rationale was elicited about how important competing was and how it surrounded all aspects of his life,

Athletics was, you know, just number one. You know, I didn't do anything else, like watch tv or something. I just raced or played wheelchair basketball. If there wasn't a game on or something going on, me and my buddy would go wheeling around and race around the city. Just it was everything.

Despite his deep affection for racing, the decision to transition out of athletics was made through factors beyond his control. In Bruce's case he was forced to drop out due to changes in financial backing,

The reason that I think I stopped with track was, we used to go to nationals which was funded through the government and they took the funding away and made it a real chore to do it. So, now I had to go around raising money to go or pay yourself. And that became prohibitive to a point where I said, you know, I really can't afford to go. With flying out there, and they always seemed to be out west, and get a hotel for, you know, for 2 weeks and then fly back... I couldn't

afford to do that. So, that's the reason I retired just case I couldn't afford to without that government funding. It just died out.

Bruce is the second case of transitioning out of sport via involuntary means. Specifically, it was through termination of the funding initiatives from the provincial government that forced Bruce to remove himself from competing in wheelchair athletics. In closing, the story of Bruce's athletic career showcases an individual who lived and breathed competition. The perks of being an athlete were always secondary to Bruce, as training, playing and being active were always a priority. Yet, it was revealed that the end of funding would also lead to the end of his time as a wheelchair racer.

Anthony. A 52-year-old male, Anthony was a former track and field athlete. Anthony sustained a double arm amputation from an accident at very young age. However, having been a very active youngster prior to the accident, his newly acquired disability did not deter him from maintaining his physical activities and adapting to play,

I became an amputee when I was 11. I was a really active kid before my injury. Soccer, baseball, hockey, cycling, you name it. We were out the door playing and being active all-day long. I played in organised leagues in our community as well. Then I had my accident which, resulted in an amputation of both arms above the elbow. So, the sports world changed a little bit for me. But I did keep up with hockey for a year. I went back and played in the minor league system and played with adaptive equipment.

Differing from the previous participants, Anthony made his entry into para-based sport through a local club from his hometown, as opposed to recommendations made from friends,

I was pursued by the local disabled sport club which, at first, I wasn't really interested in participating in. I had gone back and was playing able-bodied sports, but through the encouragement of my parents, I gave it a try and saw that it was a competitive environment which I liked. They had quite a robust sports program and quite a big group of athletes involved, probably 30 or 40 of us. Which was really unheard of, especially today with how the landscape has changed. They had coaching, they provided coaching services throughout the year and in the summer with summer students. So, it was very organized, and they provided funding for us to compete, so that was really helpful.

This local club became the catalyst in pursuing the highest level of para-based competition. The club, at the time, brought on the opportunity to compete in the regional games which in turn brought the chance to compete at the provincial and national level. This was the case for Anthony, as his love of competition and seeking out unfamiliar territories was a major component of his motivation for getting into elite sport and why track and field meshed so well:

Well, there was the caveat of travel that was a big interest. It was fun, it was a new peer network. You know, remembering I became an amputee when I was 11. I wasn't born that way. It offered all those other things like self confidence and learning opportunities and character stuff like believe in yourself that comes

with sport. And that was a little more pertinent and was important to someone who lost a lot of that after their injury. So, did it serve a therapeutic value for me? Probably a little bit. And that really wasn't the hanger that I hung my sports coat on, it was more of the competitive side and I really like that. Always was a competitive kid, the ability, the venue, the opportunity to challenge myself to get better as a track athlete and as a high jumper as well, you can very clearly measure improvement. With team sports, you win medals or such and you are improving but it is a clear-cut objective for track athletes, its easy to see did I run faster today then I did yesterday, and that spurred me on as well. And I had a lot of great encouragement, coaching, funding...so the support system was there for me.

Clearly, it is evident that sport played a vital role for Anthony leading to a career of more than 10 years as a Paralympian. Not only did sport provide an opportunity to become a better person athletically, it allowed him to become a better person in other domains of his life.

When it came to the closing out of Anthony's athletic career, the inevitable seemed to catch up to him as he aged. Yet, at the same time an unforeseen occurrence shaped the decision to transition,

I'm never one to make excuses, but [towards the end] the training kind of caught up to me with rest level...and nagging injuries were affected by the training. I made the decision that that was it, I had one more race left in me and that would be all. I was done after those [last] games and never looked back. I mean it was

really frustrating, in leading up to those games, I was training with a hamstring injury. So, everyday you are not training, your competitors are and it kind of took a toll that way on knowing that I could defend that [record] if I was healthy. Even in my mid twenties, of course the field is getting younger and younger all the time, so all those guys that I have been running with over those years, still a few remained and a few retired. But I was still kind of beating them. Then, the new crop came in and they were pretty quick.

The story of Anthony presents the third case of transitioning out of sport through involuntary means. In this situation, prolonged injury forced Anthony out of defending his record in the next Games. Combined with the fact that he was competing with individuals younger and quicker at the time of his injury, this as well made it harder for him to stand out. Thus, both injury and growing older ultimately led him to not continue with athletics at the elite level. In closing, Anthony's athletic journey from joining the local club to representing Canada in the Paralympics was based upon enjoying the competition and remaining true to himself and what he stands for. However, his mental strength as an athlete outlasted his physical strength as he was forced to retire due to injury and was forced to tackle new hurdles in a different domain.

Katherine. A 43-year-old female, Katherine was a former rower. Her story differs from the past three participants discussed so far, in that sport was not a major component of her life prior to her acquiring her visual impairment.

I got started in sport pretty late in life. And I didn't find out I had a visual disability until I was [a teenager], so going through school, I was never good at

anything athletic, gym classes or anything that was vision related. So, I thought sport was something that I just couldn't do and would avoid it at all costs [laughs]. After losing a lot of vision when I got older, I was looking for something to get me out of the house and become more independent. And, I turned to sport for some reason, I don't know why, because I hated it my whole life [laughs].

Though not an active youngster, getting into sport became very valuable to her in her life. This was especially due to being encouraged to participate, which was something that was absent during her school years:

So, I turned to sport and I found the sport of rowing which I loved because it was so freeing, but also the people involved at the rowing club were just really good at solving any issues that I had and made it possible for me to do it. I remember from my past people telling me "Oh you can't do this" ... Yeah like giving me accommodations, you know go do this by yourself over here and sort of be included. Yeah, so rowing was the sport for me.

In discovering this new-found love for the sport, moving up into the higher levels of sport was surprisingly quick for Katherine. Through either her natural ability or dedicated personality, Katherine created a career in elite rowing that lasted for more than 5 years. Katherine even came out of retirement for a second stint in para-rowing for a few more years to fill in at the last minute for an athlete who got an injury,

So, I moved pretty quickly up into the national team. After one year of training, I was in my first international race. So that was pretty crazy to go that quickly. So,

then I competed for a few more years on the national team with a break in-between. I competed until [my third Paralympic games] and then I decided to retire to spend more time with my family and my kids. Then, I was asked to come back. They had an issue with one of their athletes last minute who couldn't go to worlds and asked me if I could step in. So, I did and we ended up qualifying for the next Paralympic games.

Though many great successes were had at the nationals, worlds, and Paralympics throughout her career, it was the failures made in the sport that kept Katherine motivated to always strive to be at the top of the elite sporting world,

I think it was that failure in my first Paralympics and just remembering that feeling of putting in all that work and you finishing last and totally not expecting that. We were expecting so much better. It was such a disappointment. So, going forward whenever something was tough in the training or I felt like I didn't want to push myself, I remember that feeling...remembering how it felt and then I knew I had to push way harder than I ever had to before to overcome that. Which is what drove me forward.

It is interesting to note this, given that prior to getting involved in the sport of rowing, Katherine was never involved in sport. So, the experiences of competition were completely novel to her. Yet, her motive was to compete against herself and others. This demonstrates how sport can elicit characteristics within an individual that the person may not have known were in them. This notion was also noticed when Katherine reflected on what being an athlete meant to her, especially with setting goals,

What I can say about what I love about being an athlete is I love goal setting because you have this ultimate goal in the distant future of what you want to achieve and then you can break it down into your daily goals or even the goal right at this moment. So, I love that feeling of, achieving a goal in that minute you know you are getting closer to that distant goal. I think it makes it very concrete, you know exactly what time you have to get or what technical aspect you have to achieve and knowing that you are moving a little bit closer is really motivating for me.

Therefore, it is clear that the role of being an athlete demonstrated a turning point in Katherine's life to move beyond her disability, but more importantly it allowed her to become a more determined version of herself.

The background of Katherine's athletic career has been a unique story thus far. Not only did she differ from the previous three in respect to coming into sport rather late in life, her transition out of sport was unique as well. She was the only study participant to truly retire on her own accord,

I would say it is mostly because of family and the lost time sport takes away from your family, especially when you have kids. I think also my career pushed it. I think there is no way to put in that training and have a career at the same time. So, I think at some point you got to make that choice especially as you get older. I would love to...If I was a millionaire keep going [laughs].

Though it would seem that external pressures of family and job responsibilities were the deciding factors in transitioning out of sport, Katherine made that choice on her own.

Katherine differs from the last participants as she expressed she was ready to retire, decided when she was going to retire, and did it for her own personal reasons that were not forced upon her. She made the decision to transition herself. In closing, Katherine's athletic story shows that its never too late to try something new, even if you hated it before. In her case, it was rowing that not only gave her a reason to get out of the house but awoke the competitive spirit within her. Rowing was the avenue for her tenacity and drive to flourish, which led to a long career in sport and the ability to know when it was time for things to move on and retire, not once but twice.

Lori. A 34-year-old female, Lori was a former swimmer. Unique to Lori's story is that she was the only participant from this project who had a congenital disability as she was born with only one leg. However, that did not stop her from trying a wide variety of sports. She also had strong encouragement from her parents, "I grew up in a household where being active was of big value and encouraged me and my brother to both always be involved in different activities". In fostering a love of being active, her journey brought her out to try swimming, which would be a life changing decision,

So, I swam most of my life in lessons or just for fun, but back then I was in a lot of different sports leading up to that point...I got involved in competitive swimming because of my love for swimming. I didn't know that Paralympic sport had existed, and I had, you know, no really big dreams or desires to go to the Olympics or anything. I just really loved swimming and I like to push myself and see what I can do. So, it wasn't until my first year of swimming that I found out about para-sport. And at that point I pursued both streams the para-side as

well as the mainstream side... and I moved up pretty quickly through the ranks in both sides.

In fact, Lori's motivation for pursuing elite level swimming was simply of just going along with the process of becoming a better swimmer as opposed to giving up everything to become the top athlete,

I just kind of went year by year. I really...I think I am more of a rare case where I didn't have massive goals and then worked towards them. Its...I work towards something because I loved the process, and then ended up being good at it [laughs]. I really enjoyed training and being part of a team and pushing myself, and then before I knew it the results were kind of coming in on their own. And its also very motivating and exciting when you do well at something. So, I guess my motivation was just the love of the sport. Swimming is an individual sport but you train as a team and it makes a really big difference in your own training in the environment that's around you. I loved being part of a team and with a group of people that loved to push themselves.

It was the admiration of sport that carried her through quite a successful career that lasted well over 10 years beginning in her teenage years.

Getting involved in elite level swimming at such a young age had quite the impact on her life in two major aspects. One major aspect that she reflected on was how everything in her life at that time revolved around being in the pool,

I mean it's a huge part of your identity when you do something that often. You know, my group of friends were people I swam with. And I spent most of my

time at the pool, at school, or sleeping. So, there is not much else going on, so it gave me something to strive for.

For Lori, being an athlete also dealt with how she perceived the world. Given that everything in her life was measured from training to competing, she interpreted life as living each day to complete something. Essentially, swimming created a purpose for her every single day,

It gives you that purpose and something to wake up and feel passionate about, like you have something to accomplish that day. So, for a really big part of my life, it was my identity I would say. It was the lifeforce within me for a long time. Swimming is a very measurable sport, there is no sensitivity about it. It was something that every single day you had: feedback on, measurable goals, and a support system. Like, every day you know how to measure if it was a good day or a bad day based on your performance in practice. So, when you step away from that, you don't know how to measure if a day was good or not, or if it was productive or knowing what you can improve upon.

Thus, it is evident to see that engaging in sport was more than just a pastime for Lori. Identifying as an athlete not only allowed for a long career in sport, but essentially it was her identity. This comprised a significant part of her formative years.

When it came time to transition out of the sport, Lori had an interesting experience to say the least. Her experience of retiring was affected by both voluntary and involuntary factors. The voluntary factors to retire were made based on a well thought out understanding and rationale,

It is not the most black and white thing to be able to describe, but I think a lot of things contributed to it but...emotional burn-out was a huge part of it. I think performance anxiety was a big part of it and feeling that I accomplished my goals. Yeah, because I always wanted to keep swimming as long as I was learning and growing. I felt like I learned and grew as much as I was going to within that time, so it was time to move on to something else...I also did not feel really supported by the national team. I do not feel Swimming Canada was helpful in my transition period.

This lack of care shown by Swimming Canada is where the involuntary factors played a role in the timing of the transition. This lack of care was especially evident in being forced to continue swimming for contractual reasons and lack of communication felt between the governing body and her coach,

I felt I could have stayed in longer if I had more support, but I had deteriorating relationship with my home coach. I also wasn't feeling a strong connection with the governing body of Canada. So, there wasn't a lot of incentive to work through my emotional burnout or anxiety. I actually wanted to retire earlier than I did. There was a situation with Swimming Canada where they had given funding for me to train, and I didn't realize it was stipulated on going to a competition a year away from when I wanted to retire. They said I would have to pay all the money back if I didn't go to this specific competition. So, I had the choice to make of retire now and pay back thousands of dollars or keep going with my heart is not really in it. I knew I was kind of winding down, but at the same time I recognized I did not want to leave the sport on a low note.

Here, Lori identifies external factors shaping the decision to retire. Although the conscious choice made by Lori was to leave the sport, the timing of that decision was ultimately decided by factors in the hands of other individuals and groups.

In summary, being an active individual, Lori's entry into elite sport was second nature. Having been born with a missing limb, she never let that decide the boundaries of what was possible. With great support from family, she was able to enjoy a host of different sports before committing to swimming. With a mindset of loving the process that the sport brought, along with an incredible maturity and ability from a young age, she entered the Paralympic stream of swimming in her mid teens and continued for a successful career that spanned well over 10 years. That incredible understanding of herself allowed for her to decide when the time came to move onto something new. However, shaping the decision were external factors that kept her in the sport longer than she would have liked.

Ariana. A 45-year-old female, Ariana was a former wheelchair basketball athlete. Prior to become paralyzed as a result of an accident, Ariana grew up in a household that loved being active. From her standpoint, everything before her accident with respect to being active was seen more as a recreational pursuit. From her accident though, Ariana's strong mental fortitude is what breathed life into her competitive career in wheelchair basketball, but also gave a new lease on life,

I was in [an accident] that put me in the wheelchair. So, basically, I became a full paraplegic. And as a result of that you get a social worker and all that sort of stuff. So then, I just figured it was time to focus on...trying different things and

doing things for myself. I was more the type of person who didn't focus on what they couldn't do, but I wanted to focus on what I could do. And then somebody came to talk to me about wheelchair basketball. I tried it for a couple of hours and got my first basket, and I was hooked from that moment on.

That first basket was for sure the catalyst in Ariana's career. In fact, Ariana went on to play wheelchair basketball for well over 10 years with experiences in the Paralympics, national and world events.

Interestingly enough, having not competed in competitive sport prior to her accident, it was being a part of a team and working towards a common goal that motivated her to pursue the highest levels of wheelchair basketball,

It's funny because you do it once as a rookie and for me...it ignited something more. For me it was, I knew I could be better. So, that pushed me to want to be better and earn the spot as a starter. So, that pushed me a lot. I love team dynamics, and in wheelchair basketball, yeah you can be a star, but you still need a strong core to actually succeed at the international level. It's not like you can rely on just one person. So, it was like trying to create the strongest core possible and learning to basically highlight our skills and our abilities and minimize the areas that we weren't so good at and always becoming better. So, for me, that pushed me.

Being a part of a team resonated deeply. So much so that when reflecting on what that role of athlete meant for her, Ariana realized how monumental that time in her life was,

It was only after I stopped playing that it truly came out. That being an athlete was the only thing I knew. Like, yeah ok, I didn't do competitive sports until I was [a teenager], but I never asking the question "what am I doing today". I always trained, whether it was physical training, individual training here or mental training there, or video analysis and stuff like that. It was who I was. It was my identity, and that was one of the things I struggled with after. When I was doing public speaking, my first public speaking engagement after I stopped playing, I introduced myself, but I stumbled. I stumbled for a fraction of a second there because I didn't know how to introduce myself. I didn't know if I was saying...previous team Canada athlete, previous Paralympian, previous [medalist]. I didn't know what I was.

Clearly, being an athlete was a crucial component to Ariana understanding who she was. Given that after her accident, wheelchair basketball occupied a major portion of her life, it is no wonder that she struggled with identifying who she was after she stopped competing.

It was this shaking of identity that was a tough part when it came time to transition. This was made even more difficult in the fact that Ariana left wheelchair basketball after sustaining too many concussions,

Being a starter on the team and being still one of the strong team members, the fact that I got my 2 concussions really changed my status. I still competed with the team, but it took three months for those concussions to heal. I recovered, I played; things were going well. And then basically, somebody clipped my wheel

and sent me flying and I got another concussion. For that one, I knew right away. I was dizzy, I was nauseous, my head was pounding and I looked at my husband and said “I need to go home”. We drove home and it was night time and the lights were bothering me from the traffic and the cars and stuff like that. I came home and I showered and I couldn’t even touch my head to be able to wash my hair. I saw physiotherapists after, did acupuncture, saw doctors and those things. I finally went to a neurologist, with the full intent of coming back in time for world championships the following year. I even changed my chair setup so I wasn’t sitting so loose and then it just couldn’t happen. So, I missed world championships...the risk was if I had another concussion, the neurologist said I would have a high chance of permanent symptoms.

Ariana is another case of transition via involuntary means. Differing from termination of programs or funding, Ariana was forced to leave sport due to severe injuries sustained while playing. Had she continued to participate in wheelchair basketball, possible life-long damage could have occurred. In closing, Ariana’s athletic journey demonstrated an individual who strived to be the best she could be. Although, not a highly competitive individual before acquiring her disability, wheelchair basketball awoke traits unfamiliar to her such as a love of working as a team and working to be the best unit they could be. However, her hard and assertive playing style was consequently met with a number of concussions forcing her out of sport and into new walks of life.

Chapter 5: Results

It was the purpose of this research to understand how former elite athletes with a physical disability experience the transition process of retiring and re-shaping their sense of self through their narrative. After engaging in the process of holistic-form narrative analysis with the six transcripts from the interviews, three narrative types emerged from the data which are the competitor, the voyager, and the page turner. Each narrative type takes into consideration the factors leading up to why the participants transitioned in the way that they did. Likewise, the narratives outline the approaches that the participants took when facing retirement. This chapter explores the narratives identified and outlines the themes that underpinned each.

Narratives Identified

The competitor. The narrative of the competitor takes the approach of treating the retirement process as another competition or sporty pursuit. Specifically, themes that are traditionally associated with sport were identified by the participants under this narrative type in dealing with the transition. This narrative type approaches retirement as a challenge to tackle, as the participants of this narrative asked themselves, “What is next!”. Jack, Bruce, and Anthony were the ones whose stories of transition gave life to this narrative type. In breaking down this narrative, three sub-themes – eagerness, awareness, and performing – emerged to create the foundation of this narrative.

Eagerness. The first sub-theme of this narrative revolves around how quickly the participants made the transition to retire. With a quick decision made to retire, each participant of this narrative emphasized that clear cut goals were made right after

retiring. Each “competitor” was forced to retire through involuntary circumstances that included termination of funding, termination of the sport itself and injury. Such instances of these clear-cut goals for retired life included seeking out work as in the case of Jack and Anthony,

I really wanted a job. Needed a job. So, that was gonna be the big difference I thought. So, I was really lucky I got a job right out of [my last Games]. So, for me, that was kind of everything. Like, I decided what city I was gonna live in and I needed a job that was, you know, kinda meaningful and with purpose...Everything about being an athlete is about living with a purpose you have a clear goal and you are driven. I needed something like that to replace that old goal. [Jack]

* * * * *

I had sights set on the working world. I started a company shortly after finishing school and a couple of short-term jobs. And much of what we do is about Paraspport, and Paralympic sport, I was able to carry that passion into my work world, not everybody can and that can make it more difficult. So, yeah that helped for not looking back. [Anthony]

The eagerness of moving on from sport was not solely about entering a new field all together, like in Jack and Anthony’s case. Bruce’s quick transition period saw him stop competing in one sport to try out another,

I just stopped doing it and...or it just became so infrequent when I would race, I mean I’d still go out occasionally and race but racing locally wasn’t that exciting

as I never really had any competition. I retired from that completely at the national level from that with track and then I got into wheelchair basketball recreationally. When I transitioned from the elite sport world, to competing in wheelchair basketball, I became part of a team. And its not the same thing you know in racing you are all by yourself. Win or lose it's all by yourself. But yeah, wheelchair basketball, that became my focus.

Thus, a unique factor about this narrative is the eagerness to get into something new. For the three participants, retiring from sport created a new focus of finding something to replace their old routine of training or competing with something they would not have the time for prior to retiring.

Awareness. A second sub-theme to the narrative of the competitor is the effect awareness had on the three participants with respect to retiring. With awareness, two paths exist in this type of narrative. Awareness can be perceived as something similar to strategizing a play when facing an opponent. Jack notes, being aware of retirement involved informing himself about the upcoming challenges with the transition out of sport and being mentally prepared for it. He relates it to going over a game plan in sport,

Well... I knew it was coming for quite awhile. I've read all the literature about people going into different stages with this and that... Yeah like I must say that before I retired I did a lot of mental preparation. So, it wasn't like I worked my ass off and then I come all this way to ask what do I do now? So, then I thought, well you have been out of the workforce for forever and these are big things that

are going to affect your life. You better get ready for some serious stuff. So being mentally prepared was a big-big deal.

The second path of awareness deals with being aware of how the individual perceives themselves. Bruce recognized that developing his self awareness came from being surrounded with others in the same scenario,

I'd think so I was frustrated, I hated everything about the government, like I kinda blamed it on them that they chose to stop funding wheelchair sports...But yeah, I was kind of eased up in a way cause my friends around here would go to the nationals together kind of all basically stopped at the same time. So, the people I was competing with that I befriended over the course of my career were still there. So, I guess it kinda took some of the edge off it, off the pain.

Additionally, being aware of what could occur in the transition process was at the forefront of Anthony's mind. This was mainly due to slowing down and appraising who he was and what needed to be done,

Well, its challenging, time consuming, sometimes frustrating...and on the other side of it there is all the great stuff that comes with it. As much as you know that it is time to wrap up, there is a void. For my last two quadrennials, that was 8 years of a commitment that really dictated your lifestyle. Your lifestyle changes dramatically and that is very hard to prepare for. So, you are kind of looking for things to do next. I knew I wanted to get my business going, start a family, so I had all those things to replace it. And I think that is probably what happens so

often with athletes who come out of retirement, especially Paralympic athletes that didn't have anything to replace that and it became their identity.

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With me the moments of glory were wonderful, but I don't believe it was ever my identity, like that's who I would always be, that Paralympian was all I have to be, I kind of recreated that as a writer as a publisher, as a dad, as a neighbour and just invested time in other challenges. They are all like races in some fashion, like with my business there was that competitive aspect to it and that hard work and long days...so I guess I kind of transitioned from one genre, one venue to another.

Thus, a major underpinning to this narrative is recognizing the amount of work required to create a fulfilling outcome. The three participants note that being aware from either the education about retirement, or being self aware from self-appraisal or through friends is crucial to setting one's self for success in retired life.

Performing. The final sub-theme to the narrative of the competitor is the absolute need to be active on and off the playing field. This sub-theme consists of two components. The first component of performing was recognizing that the participants all maintained their activity levels after they left elite sport. The second component of performing deals with performing well in other avenues outside of sport. These two forms of performing are explored below.

It became apparent from the interviews that all three participants who represent this narrative were sport driven. In having this sport driven personality, seeking out new activities was a must. Competing, as Bruce and Jack note, is an obsession,

It's all about competing [laughs]. I mean, I have to compete, it was everything, I don't know how I could have been better off. I got to compete at a high level, like I said growing up and playing with the other kids, you know, I was the last one picked on the team and then go to not only being eligible to making the team, but to become the number one pick of the team. It gave me an opportunity to travel and see the world. I can't really envision my life without athletics, I probably would have been in jail without it. I found out about myself that if I wasn't doing one thing...I would try something else. And even now as long as I am competing it is life. [Bruce]

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So, I've kind of gone from one sport to the next after sailing, but I have no pressure on me as well. I don't care if I do well or not. I just love setting goals for myself and achieving them and getting better and testing myself and seeing what things work, you know, it's a great feeling...I'm very competitive I like goals and I like moving. I just find that I need to incorporate sport in my life because if I don't, I think I would go crazy [laughs]. Yeah, like I need it. [Jack]

For Anthony, he as well sought out a new activity to keep up his activity levels.

Although, his desire to perform in sport was more at recreational level as opposed to elite,

I wanted to try something different, so I got into [a team sport], which was a complete departure from that sort of isolated track and field training. I did that for about roughly 20 years post retiring from the games. So, I had to fill that thirst for activity, thirst for competitiveness. So yeah, I turned it over that way, and I don't think that was a plan when I retired, the plan was to give myself a break from the time commitment, that kind of training required and move on. I would say you can still find competition in other sports in the recreational lens. If you are a runner there is always that aspect of competing against yourself and others there if that is what you need. Identify what things you are missing, if you are missing something competitive you got to find something that can pick it up.

Thus, in dealing with the transition of retirement, the narrative of the competitor highlights the importance of performing in sport and recreation. Interestingly, the desire to continue being active in sports did not leave after the participants retired, but each participant found a pace of competition that was suitable for each participant's wants or the needs.

The second component of performing is performing in avenues outside of sport. In this case, the participants note that performing did not stop when they got off of the court, the track, or out of the water. The values they learned from being an athlete translated into their personal and working lives. These include: setting goals, working hard, and creating a legacy. Today, for Jack, performing involves doing more activities that focuses on him as an individual as opposed to representing his country. With that, comes some internal reflection as to what the next task will be,

It's been about [a while] now and I, miss the travel and the thrill of competition and the being in shape [laughs]. Like all the services, and everything they provide you like the free stuff is all that is pretty sweet at the time and I didn't even know it. So now I'm trying to find like a purpose or a goal that makes me motivated, which is hard. Because before you're going to the Paralympics, you're going to represent your country so there is no problem with motivation, like you work your ass off if you want to perform... Yeah but now its like you are performing for yourself. And sometimes its not easy to find that motivation sometimes.

However, it should be noted that even though Jack is looking for new motivation after working in his job for some time, the experience of retirement is not as daunting as it was perceived,

If I could characterize retirement to how I feel about it now, I guess is that it's OKAY [laughs]. Yeah, okay... it's not like I'm loving it or its god awful or like how it's not as bad as everyone makes it be like. So, I'm going to say it's kinda like, it's quieter. I thought it was going to be like more depression and like feelings of loss. I still have those feelings sometimes, but it doesn't last long – like nothing I need to worry about. So yeah, I think it wasn't so bad, like maybe its because I got the job so quick that's the difference.

Thus, the element of performing in new aspects of life is a key component of this narrative. It should be noted that performing does not have to be purely vocationally

based. Performing for Bruce still meant competing in sport at a level he was comfortable with,

As much as I have loved competing, at the elite level, I found that it was more important to me to just compete. So, when I went from elite athletic status to everyday, it wasn't that hard of a transition... I found that if it wasn't one thing it...I would try something else.

In combing these two differing pathways of performing through this narrative, Anthony best encapsulates how, no matter what is done after sport, life can be viewed as a game. It is how an individual plays the game of life sets people a part from being successful to that of wasted potential,

When I'm doing public speaking, I talk about what I learned on the track. I really carried a lot of that on what I had learned from those days as training and competing to my work and my business there is no doubt about it. Just setting that bar a little higher or get a little faster everyday. And I was always reaching for that, you know that carrot...setting that carrot out in front of my nose something to chase. Something to challenge...the rewards of accomplishing success in business I find is similar to success on the track. One of the biggest lessons I have learned is that any given day, the only person you can control, in terms of performance, is yourself. You can look to your left and see who is in lane 1,2, or 3 and you can look to your right in lane 6,7, or 8 and you can't control what they are going to do, but you can control how you race.

Thus, a crucial underpinning seen in this narrative type is setting out to conquer tasks, no matter what they are, to the best of their abilities from a performance mindset.

Performing in a new sport, a new job, or something new all together requires a competitive train of thought. In this case, conceptualizing the experience as being a part of the grind and working hard to do your best spills over from what was learned in sport to the activities these three participants are doing today.

Summary. Three participants emphasized that their experience of retiring from elite sport was approached in the same fashion as their days of training and competing. Three sub-themes created the pillars of the competitor narrative. The first sub-theme addressed how eager the participants were to start a new path. In dealing with the quick forced decision to retire, the participants of his narrative approached retirement as something familiar. Specifically, retirement was approached like training for the next competition right after finishing an event, a tournament, or a big race. The second pillar related to the awareness of the transition process itself. Similar to studying film tape or a game plan, these three athletes prepared for retirement, albeit quickly, by either studying the literature about retirement or by talking to others. Additionally, all three became self aware in addressing what they needed to do for transitioning by realizing what was needed for them and separating their identity from sport in some cases. Lastly, performing in sport and in life creates the third pillar of the narrative of the competitor. The first component, performing in sport, notes that all three participants had a yearning to be back in sport in some fashion as they felt incomplete by not competing. To fill that void, new sporting endeavours were pursued in either the recreational or competitive sense to not only keep up activity levels, but to help achieve new personal goals. The

second component of performance, showed that performing does not have to stop when athletes get off of the playing surface. The morals learned from sport were used to help conquer tasks in both work and life after retiring from elite sport. Therefore, conceptualizing the retirement process as another sporting endeavour creates the narrative of the competitor.

The voyager. The narrative of the voyager takes the approach that retirement is an uncharted path that can lead in any direction. To be more specific, the themes surrounding the experience of retiring through this narrative involve getting lost in uncharted waters, but eventually redeeming one's self and establishing a new path. This narrative type approaches retirement as exploring one's self and opportunities, in asking "What is next?". This particular narrative comprised only one participant of this research project, Katherine. Three sub-themes of: expectations, adrift, and open-minded comprise the narrative of the voyager.

Expectations. The first sub-theme of this narrative looks at the adjustment factor of re-evaluating what is needed for transitioning out of sport. Initially, the pre-emptive strategy for Katherine's transition involved determining what the major components of the transition would involve,

Yeah there was some support...the whole plan initially was to retire after my third Games. I was thinking about it and there was talks about what you can do to prepare but I thought it wasn't going to be a problem for me because I have a family and I had a career to go back to, I was a teacher.

Prior to actually experiencing retirement, the hardest part of retiring for Katherine seemed already taken care of. Although, once the decision was made to retire, things were much different than anticipated,

I thought the problem with retiring is figuring out what you are going to do afterwards so I thought that was all set for me. And it was really hard. That was not the solution to retiring, it was really difficult.

It appears that Katherine's pre-contemplations about retirement were not so straight forward as anticipated. Adding to this, one of the major shocks of retiring for Katherine was finishing her last race much lower than expected. Along with placing low, Katherine discovered that maintaining her activity levels and managing stressors at her old job and with her family were unanticipated and very hard to handle,

So, in my third Games, again we had finished lower then we had hoped, so not only was I retiring, I was retiring after not meeting the goal that I wanted. So, I definitely say I was depressed. We were working out 3 times a day with 2-hour sessions and when it came to down to being retired...I didn't have time to do a 2-hour workout. So, I figured what's the point of doing it. What is the point of doing a 20-minute run when I'm used to doing 2 hours...so I ended up doing nothing.

Thus, it was apparent for Katherine that actually experiencing retirement, when getting back to her career, her family, and exercising was more daunting that she thought. Therefore, having a lack of expectations for retired life can lead to a difficult transition process, which create the first sub-theme of this narrative.

Adrift. The second sub-theme of the voyager is the idea of being lost in the journey. Here, two major factors emerge in this sub-theme. First of all, Katherine did not perceive the demands of the transition,

In thinking that I had my life together with the family and the career. I thought I could easily transfer over to that and that it would be no big deal. And that was a surprise when that wasn't enough to bridge the gap. Even with working out, I thought I would look forward to that, like "Oh I can't wait until I'm able to lift weights and it won't be as stressful and I can do it for fun". But in that time, I kept thinking like "what's the point of doing this if I can't do it for 2 hours".

Being adrift did not solely involve plans not coming to fruition. Being adrift also meant not having a guiding purpose. Having dedicated so much time and effort to being an athlete, Katherine's identity and lifestyle from that point was so heavily invested in being an athlete that she did not even realize who she was after. This adrift identity, was also affected by the fact that her last competition was her worst performance in her career, which all together brought her into a depressive state. In an effort to combat this, she sought out others and learned about their experiences. Interestingly, she found out from those who had left sport on higher notes expressed how scarily isolating life can be after sport,

What really rang through to me was when I was talking to another athlete who won gold, He was saying that...when you are in your sport, its like your sport is telling you everything to do. What to eat, what time to get up, you know, it circulates everything...And then once that is gone, you've got no structure.

Thus, a major facet of the narrative of the voyager was understanding that even when a path is charted, an individual can still be led into unknown territories. Adrift for Katherine meant being lost in having a course of action for retired life and lacking a purpose in living out everyday life.

Open-Minded. The third pillar of the voyager deals with remaining open through the experience. This involved, being open with others, with new experiences, and with herself to determine what is best needed for her transition experience. For Katherine, the major catalyst to inspire change in her post-athletic career was discovering that she was not alone, that other retired athletes felt just like her,

It took me awhile to do this, but I started talking to other athletes. Even my teammates, who were like my family, we just didn't talk for awhile. So, I guess we were going through our own kind of thing. And once we all started talking again, we came to the realization we were all going through the same thing. And most importantly, we realized athletes who won gold medals or reached their personal best, were going through this as well.

Discovering that she was not alone in retirement sparked a change in her thinking. So, after coming back from competing in her last Paralympics, she was aware of what retirement involved and changed her thinking to adapt in the best way that she could,

Yeah so, I make sure now, for example, with those workouts...like if I am only doing 20 minutes...at least I'm doing something. I think that really helps with the depression, keeping up your physical activity. I also just started a new job that I love... And with this job I am trying everything I have into it, just trying to

keep my mind occupied. When I went back after retiring to teaching it was not really motivating for me. Now I have this job where I am setting those big goals and those little goals and that has taken over which has helped a lot.

This helped her pull out her inner strength in figuring out her new approach when she retired for the second time. Essentially, approaching retirement with an open mind allowed for positive change to occur compared with her first retirement. Katherine treated retirement as something familiar,

I think if I had known that sport dictated everything about your life...I guess some helpful information would be to be aware of these things going into it. I guess its almost like approaching your training but not as fun [laughs]. Yeah, you gotta train now to be in a whole new schedule and this training is going to be rough and its not going to be fun like your sport. It's kinda like you are training to come out of it. You can think of it like a cool down like you are warming up in your competition and then this is the cool down. Being patient and sticking with it.

Thus, being open to try new things and figure out what worked for her, even if it went against her conventional understanding, was pivotal in Katherine's "the voyager" narrative. When the path envisioned became darker than anticipated, it was through having a positive mental outlook that the next step could be made. This openness that was gained from learning about others' experience and from herself showed that Katherine's experiences was not static but dynamic in nature.

Summary: In conclusion, Katherine's story of retirement demonstrates that the experience of retirement can involve voyaging from the course imagined. However, being lost in the process does not mean that the athlete cannot find her way. In this narrative, three sub-themes emerged throughout. The first sub-theme of expectations revealed that pre-conceived notions about what is involved with retirement can, in actuality, be much harder once an athlete actually retires. It was the intangible aspects of the process that made Katherine's initial retirement a tough process to cope with. This was seen in her diminished motivation levels in her job, her physical activity, and ultimately her purpose in life. Adrift is the second sub-theme of the narrative of the voyager. In this sub-theme, Katherine realized that with the absence of sport in her life, it was tough to find a new purpose and a goal in life. Uneasy feelings about what to do with herself began to consume her thought processes and her life, which brought upon depression. Finally, the third sub-theme of this narrative saw that keeping an open mind to try new things made the adjustment a much more pleasurable one. This came from being open to telling her story and listening to stories from other people, along with being open to forgoing her old career and making the decision to find and try out something more meaningful. Therefore, approaching retirement through a voyager's lens shows that when times are rough and are not going as planned, the willingness to explore and to carve a new path gives retired life a purpose.

The page turner. The narrative of the page turner takes the approach of rationalizing retirement as a closing of the past, but recognizing that there is more to come. This third narrative recognizes that growth as a person is fundamental for an individual to transition from an athlete into whatever they wish to pursue. Definitively,

this narrative about retiring from elite para-sport is characterized as taking experiences from the athletes' past as learning opportunities to become better for the future. This narrative does approach retirement as the second chapter of a story, in asking "What is next...". This particular narrative comprised the remaining two participants of this research project, Lori and Ariana. The foundation for the narrative of the page turner consisted of three sub-themes: the cautiousness, adaptability, and growth. Each is explored below.

Cautiousness. The first theme of the page turner narrative focuses on the timing aspect of the transition. In contrast to the speedy transition of the competitor narrative, Lori and Ariana note that they were more cautious in their transition, as it was quite a long process. This was highlighted before the decision to formally leave was made. For Lori, circumstances forced her to stay in her sport longer than anticipated. Realizing this, she took some time to ensure that she was going to leave swimming on a positive note,

I saw a bunch of counsellors, a bunch of sport psychologists and kind of gathered a team of support. Like I went to a different coach 6 months before retiring because I wanted to make sure I was retiring in the healthiest way possible. I did some travelling in my last year to try and remember why I love swimming. That was the best thing I have ever done, was to remove myself a little bit from the day-to-day grind of it all and to have a bit of new stimulus, new training partners. Even in my last competition, my heart was not in it. It was just unfortunate how things ended. But I was keeping the bigger picture in mind, where as before that I feel like the negativity and the emotion of it all was too strong to see past it. I also got a job out where I was so I would have a bit of a purpose. I spent some

time reflecting and decompressing and figuring out what my next adventure would be and what my goals and my priorities were. Yeah, and that was really helpful to put things into perspective to see things a little more clearly.

On the contrary, deciding to retire was an unclear, non-linear process for Ariana. In her case, she was willing to continue sport, but her physical health was holding her back. Being in that non-decisive state of waiting for the ‘yes’ to continue, she took time to evaluate if it was really worth it,

So, in that point of time I still wanted to play. So, I was going to try out for the team and basically...it was my full intention of trying out but, well with everything that happened, the national team coach was afraid and kind of decided that it was time to stop. So, when it came down to deciding, I just said well screw you [laughs]. After that phone call, it was time to start thinking about, ‘Okay, what is next for me’. Everything kind of lined up where, ‘okay, you can’t play basketball right now, you got to treat these concussions and its going to take awhile’. I decided that I was done it’s not worth the risk. I wasn’t getting much support from the national team at that point, like the coaches were hesitant and the physios were hesitant and all that type of stuff. In retrospect, I fully understand...I kind of just faded into the sunset. I didn’t announce a retirement. I didn’t do anything. I wanted to fly under the radar.

In that time, Ariana came to the decision to spend the next few years after her athletic career in the academic world, in an effort to help open up more possibilities,

I went back to school. I made that decision right before I let the team know I wasn't ready as I wasn't symptom free yet. I think subconsciously I started planning my retirement in that sense, in that I knew well its time to go back to school its time to get a degree. And its time to think, ok what am I going to do, because at that point in time no one was hiring in my field.

Therefore, taking the time to evaluate how to exit from sport is a key characteristic of this narrative. Here, being cautious in planning how best to leave, while remaining positive about sport, was a slow and gradual process. In this period of preparation, a decision about what to do and how to leave was not made until significant thought and self-reflection was made.

Adaptability. The second sub-theme of the page turner, is the notion of maintaining flexibility with the transition process and adapting to it as best as possible. This involved evaluating circumstances prior to retiring and creating an action plan that best fits those demands. Additionally, both Lori and Ariana demonstrated dealing with hurdles once retirement was actually experienced. For Lori, retirement brought some adjusting with how long it took to get everything on track. This was especially noticed in the pace of life outside of sport, which is much slower than an elite athlete's life,

It is a bumpy road. It took me seven years to really sort things out afterwards but I did not want a conventional job. So, it was a lot of trial and error in terms of lifestyle, in terms of just being a healthy active person because I think there are a lot of different aspects to retirement. For one, like how do you workout? How do you workout out just for enjoyment? Or just to be healthy and active? A lot of us

don't know how to do that and that was a long process. Job wise I wanted to go out and make something of my own and that took awhile to figure out...The self esteem piece is huge. It would be like I would make progress and then fall back down again. So, it would be 2 steps forward 1 step back. So, I learned to be patient along that bumpy ride while figuring out my identity. I had a fellow athlete say it well...The frequency of life as an elite athlete is very different from the frequency of life for everybody else.

Additionally, during this time Lori noticed that as her autonomy increased with her schedule being freer, her ability to make choices was shockingly absent,

I could not believe how hard it was to make decisions for myself. Swimming is a very coach-dominated sport, so what the coach says, goes. I was so dependent on having this coaching support system. Everyday of my life for many years, I knew exactly what I should be doing and if I wasn't doing that then someone would correct me and tell me what I should be doing. So, I found it very surprising that even simple decisions, I was having a hard time. I really wanted that external validation where like you chat it out with somebody, because I was so used to having that coaching support system.

On top of discovering these new things about herself, a devastating family loss occurred. This solemn moment provided the motivation she needed to move on through with her retirement,

Two years after I retired [family member]_passed away. Which was pretty massive. It really put things into perspective. I wasn't a super healthy person

once I retired, and that was like a wake-up call to get my life together! When mortality is thrown in your face like that is pretty powerful thing to want to get your life in order.

In realizing what to do next, Lori looked to find a way to push her through this period. This was accomplished by finding solace in friendship to buildup her self efficacy and get on with her life,

There was a lot of self doubt, but you have to move forward. I had a really good friend retire shortly after I did, and so we kind of went through the process together. I would say she was probably the most instrumental piece in me getting through this in a health way. We could bounce things off of each other and hold up the mirror for each other when we were being kind of unhealthy or irrational or just to offer support when it was needed. We had a jar and when we said self-depreciating comments about [ourselves], we would have to put money in the jar. Like every second thing that would come out of our mouths was like ‘I can’t do this’, ‘I don’t know what I am doing’, ‘I’m fat’, ‘I’m this or I’m that’ and we were just like no, we have to encourage each other. We both found community in each other and really helped each other through it.

Through a support system focused on building up each other, Lori was able to discover what she wanted to do in the next chapter of her life, “Now I have a very healthy relationship with sport [laughs]. I am a very active person and I own a coaching business” (Lori). Thus, for Lori, she recognized that her exit from sport would dictate either a negative or positive experience with not only her appreciation of swimming, but

with how retired life will treat her. This lead her into creating a network of support to adapting to the demands and figure out her life priorities.

Similar to Lori's experience, Ariana's exit from sport was less than ideal. Having left sport involuntarily through injury, her true expectations of retirement were halted as her initial adjustment period of retirement had a constant questioning of whether she could go back and compete,

For me it was always the constant, Okay can I go back? Can I go back now? Do you think ill be as good as I was before? So, I was struggling with those feelings, after my concussions. But one of the things my coaches have told me in the past and other employers have told me was that I don't do well in uncertainty. I don't do well when I don't know what is coming up next. So, that whole getting better period was tough I felt like I was on a see-saw basically. Like, am I going forward? am I going backwards? I also thought, like am I just focusing on school or am I still trying to keep in shape and do what I can so once I know I am getting better I will be ready to step in if I need to.

In the initial stages of retirement, Ariana questioned many things. In addition to questioning her ability, she also questioned who she was as a person,

Once you retire, what surprised me the most I don't have any hobbies [laughs]. I don't have any other passions than sport because that is all I have done for so long. It surprised me how much I had to find myself again. Like, who was I without or after sport. When you are in sport, you don't have time for other things, like big family gatherings, or friends in the party scene. It was very

seldom that you could be free for a family event. I'll never forget my nephew's baptism was happening, while I was flying to [a competition]! I missed it, I can't ever get that back.

However, adjusting her expectations about retiring came easier once the decision to retire was made clear. Once that occurred, Ariana was able to clear her mind to something else instead of having it clouded with the potential of returning if she got better,

It was a difficult process. At that point in time you are still dealing with disappointment, but once it was clear... that was it, it's done, it's time to move on. But before that it was more of the semi retired...not retired...hoping to come back and all that. So, there was always that uncertainty, but once it was clear, it was time to focus on something else. And once I set my mind onto something else, then it becomes...easier. So, I had those frustration moments, but I went through the process of accepting with you know those four or five stages of grief. Well, you get the same kind of thing with retirement and you go, 'Ok, I am done now. I am good'. I decided to give back and start coaching. I just kind of went from there.

In closing, Ariana found herself in a predicament of retiring or staying in sport. Though eventually deciding to retire because of her concussions, Ariana was free to move on from wheelchair basketball and adapt to the demands of her situation by going back to school and enjoying the social activities she missed out on.

Therefore, both participants of this narrative demonstrate how adapting one's frame of mind about retirement, is pivotal. In doing this a sense of direction with how to optimally take retirement was created based on their less than ideal circumstances. It is through a strong sense of courage, confidence, and faith in self that both participants were able to adapt accordingly to retirement and continue the story of their lives.

Growth. The final sub-theme of the narrative of the page turner is growth. It is the most unique element making this narrative distinct from the previous two, in that both participants stressed that moving on from sport brought them an opportunity to learn about their place in the world and what they could do. For Ariana, her opportunity to grow into her job and life after sport began with accepting that her time as an athlete came to a close in accepting the five stages of grief. Though it may seem that accepting her retirement allowed her to blossom into her working life, growing did not stop at that point. In fact, an additional aspect of growing is having a good understanding of when to say 'no' to things and look into investing in yourself. For Ariana, this involved finding balance in her life again,

There was no break when I retired. When I was on the national team, I was very adamant on, that I wanted sport to be sport and my career to be something else. Where as now my entire life was sport. My pastimes were sport related, my work was sport related. My husband and family were sport. Even my friends are all mostly in sport. I came to the realization that I was starting to need a little more balance in my life. It was never clear what role I had, people started mixing my roles. Like sometimes I would get emails at work about volunteer work, or about

coaching, and I was just like, ok this is work [laughs]. So, for now I stepped away from coaching to create some separation.

Thus, that aspect of growing and being versatile with retirement requires a dynamic input. For Ariana, becoming the person she envisioned after retirement involved understanding that it is okay to change the course she was on. In essence, personal growth requires understanding that each person has a unique experience. For Ariana, her journey after sport may not have been smooth, but she recognizes that those experiences have shaped her into the person she is today,

Being an athlete, really is a journey. I think everybody has their own thing they have to go through. I am a strong believer in the experiences and what you go through in life, with the obstacles and the good moments, and the successes and failures are what make you stronger. Like, I have always said, you learn a lot more from failure than you do anything else. And even with my successes, I have always been one of those athletes who don't really talk about my accomplishments very much. Not many people know about them or my career, and I'm okay with that. I like flying under the radar [laughs]...but I was always very grateful of the opportunities I was given. I think that is why I was always very adamant about giving back to your community, doing the public speaking engagements and sharing my opportunities with as many people as I could. You give back because they allowed you to have that.

Thus, the story of Ariana demonstrated that both prior to and in retirement, the opportunity to grow into the person one wants to become can happen at any point in life.

In failure or success, it is those experiences that allowed Ariana to learn and grow.

Growth for Ariana meant that an evolution of self in discovering what she wanted to do could occur at any time.

For Lori, growth was interpreted as a means of self-actualization. Specifically, she understood that her previous sport participation allowed her to springboard into new avenues in her life. For one, Lori came to realize that she was more than just a swimmer and those gold medals,

I am a much healthier and happier individual now that I am not competing [laughs]. Because you know we are just not taught that your worth is not attached to these accomplishments. So, that has been a great learning, and I am very happy to be able to separate myself from my accomplishments and still feel worthwhile. It is important to recognize winning and achieving are great, but it is not indicative of who you are, how valuable you are, and what you have to offer to this world.

Additionally, she learned to appreciate the value of her free time. Due to her training, Lori missed out on a lot of social activities. With her free time now she is able to do new things that she would not have been able to while competing,

Well, now there is time for other things which is amazing. The amount of activities or events or travelling that you put on hold when you are an athlete, I had to miss because I had practice on Saturday morning. So, to go away for a long weekend or stay up late and not have to worry about getting up early the next morning never happened. So, I tried a lot of different sports...and did some

travelling and some music fests, and yeah it was really neat to do some fun things that I think a lot of people take for granted.

Ultimately, growth for Lori was recognizing that life existed beyond the accolades received in sport; there is still so much that she has yet to conquer. This mainly comes from understanding that she should not separate those times in her life, but use them to help guide her into the things she wanted to do,

I think for a lot of people their worth is attached to their accomplishments or what they are doing and it certainly was for me. It is amazing how much more peaceful or at peace you can be with yourself and who you are when you recognize we are valuable humans no matter what we are doing. So, you know, whether it is winning gold medals or coaching a recreational swim team, I am worth the same amount. That was a huge realization that I do not have to be constantly striving in order to prove my worth. I have come to realize that while my swimming career was very meaningful to me, helping other people to live healthy active lives means even more! If we see retirement that way instead of an end in itself, it is actually a means to an end to become better global citizens. If we really take a hard look at what life has to offer us, then yeah it is the most beautiful training grounds or education that we can get to live the rest of our lives in an intentional and meaningful way.

In this example, life after retirement is not seen as an end, but a new beginning with the teachings of past experiences as the driving force aiding individuals in their journey.

Therefore, Lori demonstrates that growth is seen as an element that is not static. Growth

instead can happen at any time and is utilized to enhance one's sense of self in becoming a better person.

Summary: In conclusion, the stories of Lori and Ariana show that life after retirement was an opportunity to further better themselves rather than just wilt away. Three sub-themes emerged that were based on confidence levels and perceptions about retirement while enhancing one's sense of self. The first sub-theme of this narrative deals with the idea of cautiousness. Countering the narrative of the competitor, both stories of Lori and Ariana reveal that transitioning out of elite sport was a long and taxing process. In fact, a plan for retired life was not formulated until significant time and resources were devoted to it. The second sub-theme of this narrative dealt with adaptability. Adaptability for Lori and Ariana meant creating a plan for what to do in retirement based off of what their situation was like and what they can do to prepare. This meant managing how they would retire and how to counteract negative aspects with something more positive by shifting focus and having strong support. The final sub-theme of this narrative is growth. Growth in this narrative refers to the ability to develop from past experiences in becoming better versions of themselves. Growth for the two participants of this narrative meant that learning from the past allowed them to become stronger and that personal growth can occur at any point in the transition. Therefore, the narrative of the page turner recognizes that as one chapter in one's life closes, it does not mean the story is finished. It is about taking those experiences from one chapter to further oneself in whatever and wherever life may take the individual in the next chapters.

In conclusion, this chapter identifies three narrative paths that represent the various approaches for facing retirement that the participants of this study took. The narrative of the competitor approached retirement like a game, by appraising retired life as a challenge to complete. The narrative of the voyager approached retirement as a continuous journey and recognizes that mistakes can happen during this transition process. Lastly, the narrative of the page turner approached retirement as an opportunity to continue to grow as a person in discovering new avenues to pursue and learning from their past. In closing, the three narratives demonstrate three different avenues for approaching athletic retirement and how those approaches created a favourable transition experience out of sport. The findings of this study are explored further in relation to findings found within the academic literature in the chapter that follows.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to uncover the processes elite athletes with a physical disability experience when re-shaping or re-affirming their sense of self through the narratives crafted for retirement. At the same time, this study looked at how the narratives found related to the quality of retirement experience. From the discussion about retiring from elite para-based sport, the six participants revealed three narrative types about what occurs during retirement. Each narrative type reveals the approaches each participant undertook to adapt to retired life and how those approaches affected their lives after sport. In examining the three narratives, this chapter is structured in four parts. First, the three narratives are re-visited, highlighting the distinguishing factors that characterizes them respectively. Next, to understand the experience of retirement through these narratives, the relationships between the narratives and existing literature will be identified and discussed. In exploring the themes seen through the narratives, the amalgamated transition model shall be employed as it categorizes the stages of retirement. This section concludes with a summary of what major themes were identified from the literature and what was novel in this study. This chapter ends with an exploration of the limitations of this research and recommendations for future research.

The Narratives

The participants of this study unpacked their respective reasons for retirement, their approach taken, how they adapted, and their reflection of the whole overall experience. Although each participant had different entries into para-sport and different sporting careers, similar themes became apparent when analyzing their responses and

transforming them into a narrative type. Jack, Bruce, and Anthony (competitor narrative) identified approaching retirement similar to how they approached competition. This approach fostered and capitalized on the desire to continue to experience success well after the time of competing at the elite level of para-sport concluded.

Katherine (voyager narrative) revealed that her retirement was a journey consisting of many different moving parts. It involved planning, adapting when plans did not work, the willingness to try new things and to learn from others. The final narrative came from Lori and Ariana (the page turner narrative). Central to their narrative was an opportunity for self-reflection and personal growth. As well, the page turner narrative also demonstrated the importance of adapting to the situations prior to retiring and for life in retirement.

These three narratives characterize retirement as having a positive outcome. Though five of the six participants retired involuntarily (and had a less than smooth adjustment period) positive transitions were still made. The narratives of the six participants highlighted that approaches to retirement dictate the type of journey an individual will experience. Appraising retirement as another form of competition, an opportunity to find or re-discover one's self, or as an opportunity for personal growth can assist an athlete facing retirement. A further examination as to why the narratives of the competitor, the voyager, and the page turner emerged and demonstrated positive outcomes are discussed below.

The Amalgamated Transition Model

As discussed in the literature review, Stambulova et al.'s (2007) model of transition incorporates aspects of many different models to best represent the complexity of athletic retirement. This model explores the entire process of transitioning that factors in processes internally and externally by the athlete individually. Setting this model apart from others is that it recognizes actions before during and after the decision of retirement is made, providing a more complete conceptualization of the entire process. This model consists of five influencing factors, creating a path for transition. Pre-conditions for athletic retirement, perceived transition demands, internal and external factors affecting coping, coping strategies, and cultural context influence the retirement experience for athletes. This model provides empirical backing for explaining the narratives in that this model explores the factors leading to retire, the process, and the outcome. The model provides context for the progression through the transition of retirement and will be used to organize additional research that is seen as being useful. The five factors of the model are explored below. How those factors affected the overall quality of the retirement experience follows.

Pre-conditions for athletic retirement. The first factor seen in Stambulova et al.'s (2007) model explores the issues that an athlete faces when deciding on retirement. In this category the precursors for retirement appear, which can range from performance related issues to economic-related issues. In the narrative of the competitor, Anthony's story revealed that physical factors shaped his decision to retire. As noted in other research, physical factors such as sustaining an injury and getting older tend to shape a motivation to retire from sport (Ceci Erpic et al., 2004; Moesch et al. 2012; Wylleman et

al., 2004). Anthony offered similar rationales for deciding to retire. He severely hurt his hamstrings in competition, and recognized that as he was getting older; it was simply harder for him to keep up with the younger competitors.

Another participant of the narrative of the competitor, Jack, experienced a different pre-condition to retirement in that his motivation for retirement was seeking out a job. Economic factors such as getting vocational/academic training to find a job, or simply looking to get a job to maintain financial stability are more likely to motivate athletes to depart from sport (Gearing, 1999). Jack notes that he knew his athletic career was coming to a close, and he was eager to find employment. He had not only been out of work for a long time but wanted to “grow up” and get out into the professional world.

From the voyager narrative, Katherine’s pre-condition for retirement is more psycho-social in nature. Diminished motivations and family obligations are cited as strong reasons for retirement (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Katherine identified with that, given that the circumstances that led her to retire were to get back to being a mom and return back to the ‘real world’.

Lastly, from the narrative of the page turner, Ariana’s story reveals that she left sport due to physiological pre-conditions (i.e. injury) as she sustained too many concussions (Martin, 1999). Lori’s story highlights psychological preconditions as a major contributor to her retirement, which are noted as being a strong influencer to retire (Blinde & Stratta, 1992, Martin, 1999, Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Lori’s story reveals that she began to lose motivation to keep swimming as a result of emotional exhaustion from competing for so many years.

It should be noted that not all participants had formal plans for retirement. Further those in the same narrative type experienced different pre-cursors to retirement. Therefore, using these pre-cursors should not solely be used as the reason why the participants retired. A more accurate understanding of how these narratives appeared deals with the willingness to retire. The work of Wippert and Wippert (2008; 2010) notes that an athlete's choices to retire come from either voluntary or involuntary means. In this sense, the narratives of the competitor and the page turner saw participants leave sport via involuntary reasons. Both narratives identify that injury, de-selection/team folding, and loss of funding were the major catalysts for leaving sport, which is referred to as drop-out. The narrative of the voyager was the only participant who identified as being willing to retire.

It was also noted that push and pull factors affected the decision to retire for the participants in addition to retiring by voluntary and involuntary means. Push and pull factors demonstrate pre-conditions for retirement as they are antecedent to the decision to retire, as Mullet et al. (2000) suggests. Push factors are those factors coercing an athlete out of their sport while pull factors are factors that draw an athlete into something outside of sport (Mullet et al., 2000). Pull factors were identified for Katherine as she made the transition towards more time with her family life. Push factors were noticed for Lori's narrative. Her de-motivation to continue swimming pushed her out of her sport. Other push factors such as injury were identified in Ariana and Anthony's stories while Jack and Bruce were pushed out of their respective sports by program termination.

Contrary to push and pull factors, which move an athlete to leave sport, anti-push and anti-pull factors work to keep an athlete in sport. Fernandez et al. (2005) note that,

anti-push and anti-pull factors work to keep an athlete from retiring and prolong their career. Anti-push factors work on maintaining an attachment to something specific, such as staying for the fans. Anti-pull factors exist when evaluating the costs and gains to staying involved in one's sport, like staying in to keep up relationships. While Ariana's story did exhibit the desire to stay in her sport, her anti-push factor to remain in sport was outweighed by not receiving her clearance to return to play. It would not make sense for her to continue after sustaining a significant amount of concussions. As a result, anti-push and anti-pull factors were not observed from the stories of the six participants, as all participants had stronger push or pull factors to leave sport rather than stay longer. To conclude, the preconditions for retirement seen within the three narratives deal with the willingness and circumstances to retire. While pre-cursors can be noted on an individual basis for the participants, the narratives themselves emerge from the factors that forced the participants to retire voluntarily or involuntarily.

Perceived transition demands. After setting a course toward retirement, anticipations about retirement is the second demand of retirement (Stambulova et al., 2007). This is where questions of identity and expectations arise. Research suggests that ballet dancers (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000) and gymnasts (Lavalley & Robinson, 2007) who focused solely on their sport and did not consider plans for retirement had a difficult time adjusting. The large amounts of time those athletes dedicated to the sport diminished their opportunities to develop in other social realms. This caused a delay in social maturity in making new friends outside of their sport world and struggling to adjust with new found free time. Only one narrative out of the three can attest to parts of this claim about adjusting retirement expectations. A major theme of the voyager

narrative is derived from the idea of being adrift and feeling inadequate. In Katherine's case, feelings of being lost were apparent when she left sport and realized her plan for retirement left her feeling empty. As Katherine came to realize, there are many other domains of life that require fulfillment as sport was her whole fulfillment for eight years. It should be noted that differing from existing research on ballet dancers and gymnasts (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007), Katherine was significantly older than the participants of those studies. The effect of social growth for making friends does not appear to play out as a consequence as those authors suggest.

Furthermore, Katherine's story reveals a conflict of moving from high level sport to just exercising. In fact, many of the other participants revealed similar conflicts of maintaining physical activity levels or competition after leaving sport. It is here that dedicating leisure time was a major concern for the participants of this study. Stebbins (2005) identifies that to lead a balanced life requires one of optimal leisure. Optimal leisure requires participation in things that allow a person to find fulfillment and better their lives. This is further broken down by the types of activities one can engage in, which consists of pursuing serious leisure complimented by a fair amount of casual leisure (Stebbins, 2000). Serious leisure, as outlined by Elkington and Stebbins (2014), are the activities and individual can perform for self expression and identity enhancement. Casual leisure defined by Elkington and Stebbins (2014) are hedonistic, short-lived, activities that are purely performed for pleasure. Generally, casual leisure activities work to develop one's creativity, relaxation, and social relationships (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014).

This balance between serious leisure and casual leisure is apparent for athletes dropping out of sport. The work of MacCosham, Patry, Beswick, and Gravelle, (2015) identified that when athletes dropped out of sport, the common reason was that their lifestyle had become too hectic. Thus, it is found that an overabundance of serious leisure does not allow an individual time to recover and remove themselves from the stress that casual leisure provides (MacCosham et al., 2015). Interestingly, the stories of Katherine, Lori, and Ariana noted that being an athlete meant having a schedule filled with training and competition. This led them to the realization that upon retirement, they did not have any other hobbies outside of their sport, and had lost out on social events throughout their sport career.

Similar to athletic identity (Brewer et al. 1993), if a person spends a lot of time in their serious leisure, they start to identify with it. In the work of MacCosham and Gravelle (2016), it was found that their participants' identity was focused on being hockey players as the majority of their time was dedicated to hockey. In this research it was found that over time, the participants began to associate hockey as a job rather than leisure which resulted in a negative opinion of hockey. Specifically, it was the demands of hockey (i.e. practices, long travel times, etc.) that made the participants feel this way rather than just hockey all together (MacCosham & Gravelle, 2016). Additionally, the work of MacCosham and Gravelle (2017) discovered that major junior hockey players over commit to their serious leisure, which leaves practically no time to enhance themselves in casual leisure.

This strong identification to serious leisure resulted in the former hockey players feeling both mentally and physically exhausted and a decrease in appreciation of hockey

(MacCosham & Gravelle, 2017). However, it was discovered in MacCosham et al. (2015) and MacCosham and Gravelle (2016; 2017) that once more casual leisure became available, not only was an appreciation for sport renewed, but the participants' sense of well-being was better maintained. This was accomplished in three avenues. The first avenue was engaging in recreational levels of hockey as the participants were able to control the demands of how much they wanted to play (MacCosham & Gravelle, 2017). Additionally, diminishing the quantity of hockey allowed for the opportunity to re-grow the attachment to hockey and create a multidimensional identity as the participants were now able to do more things at their leisure (MacCosham & Gravelle, 2016). This is similar to the stories of Jack, Bruce, and Anthony in that all three engaged in recreational level sport to fill the void of competition in their lives.

The second and third avenues of casual leisure deal with re-discovering one's self either by social contact or travelling. With social contact, the participants in MacCosham's et al. (2015) study noted that social support was pivotal in dealing with the demands of hockey. This is similar to the stories of Katherine, Lori, and Ariana discovered that social connection was a major factor in the outcome of their retirement experience. Travelling was a positive form of escaping from the hockey world and exploring more meaningful leisure experiences. This is similar to what Lori did. Lori, took some time to travel to experience some of the things she missed out on and discover what she wanted to do for the rest of her life. Thus, it is fair to say that finding new leisure pursuits was another transition demand the participants of this study experienced when they retired. Similar to literature above, retirement brought on a significant amount of casual leisure time which not only allowed the participants to

discover what they wished to pursue in work and in life but allowed for a deeper appreciation of their sport and sport identity, especially evident in the narratives of Katherine and Lori.

Though the idea of optimal leisure is apparent in the stories of the participants of this study, there is a major difference that must be addressed to the literature found above. For one, the participants of all three studies are able-bodied and never achieved the highest elite level of their sport. The participants in this study were all elite level Paralympians and this revealed a strong connection to their athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993), which is something that the literature on optimal leisure is lacking. Within the literature on athletic retirement, athletic identity is perhaps the most commonly referenced variable affecting the retirement experience for athletes. In fact, numerous studies have shown that when athletes have a strong connection to their athletic identity or are being seen as only an athlete, they tend to encounter a more difficult time with the transition (Ceci Erpic et al., 2004; Grove et al., 1997; McPherson, 1980; Ogilvie & Howe, 1982; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Some athletes even equate the retirement process as a form of dying if they strongly identify with their athletic identity and have it as their only identity (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). Goal achievement seems to have an effect on retirement if an athlete is strongly tied to their athletic identity. For example, if an athlete has a strong system of support and achieved their goals, those athletes tended to have a more favourable retirement experience (Baille & Danish, 1992; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). While much of the research on athletic identity and retirement has focused on athletes without disabilities, athletic identity also resonates strongly for athletes with disabilities. Martin (1996) noted that the development of athletic identity can be more

pronounced for these athletes as they generally have less social contact with others outside of sport and have a reduced opportunity for career mastery enhancement.

In all three narratives identified in this study, identity was a major component of the transition. The six participants were heavily invested in their athletic identity during their time as competitors. When all six faced retirement, their identity was put into question. In the narrative of the competitor, all three members noted that while they were aware of their careers ending, the competitive spirit they developed as an athlete would remain a part of them. This is evident in the themes of needing to compete and performing in new domains. Essentially, the participants of the competitor defied conventional thought about maintaining athletic identity and having a less than favourable experience. While Bruce was the only one that maintained his athletic pursuits, all three modified their ‘athletic identity’ into more of a ‘competitive identity’ in an effort to give purpose in their lives and conquer retirement.

In the narrative of the voyager, identity was not expressed as being important in the planning stage of retirement. However, as Katherine revealed, identity was a huge reason why her experience was poor upon retirement. Her story highlights a lack of awareness for how strongly her athletic identity related to her sense of self, and contributed to feeling lost during the experience. Retiring the second time, Katherine focused on working on new parts of her identity and managed her expectations of retirement and approached more cautiously. Therefore, the voyager narrative highlights how a strong bond to athletic identity can become problematic when athletes retire.

The narrative of the page turner demonstrates how identity can fluctuate throughout the process. Both Lori and Ariana note how adapting to retirement required taking necessary steps to set themselves up for what they wanted to do post athletic career. They came to realize that without the structure of sport, they had to re-discover what they liked and disliked in respect to both work and hobbies. Both participants noted that through this time of identity discovery and re-construction, it was the breakdown of their athletic identity that seemed to help them. Both Lori and Ariana accomplished this by cautiously considering what they wanted to do. Both decided to continue to work in sport and give back to their community in that capacity. This is key in that their conceptualization of what an athlete represents goes beyond reaching peak performance. The time spent as an athlete opened up many possibilities to discover meaning beyond competition (Ronakinen & Ryba, 2017). Likewise, developing a ‘coach identity’ or a work identity within the sport context follows the recommendations of the other scholars (Allison & Meyer, 1998; Martin, 1996) where maintaining a working relationship in sport can help smooth the transition process. Therefore, not only did identity have an impact on the course of retirement but it was a powerful force over the participants when starting a new path. Thus, re-discovering one’s sense of self was a perceived demand of the process for the six participants, even if it was not identified once the participants retired.

Internal and external factors related to coping. Following the presumptions and early considerations about retirement, the factors surrounding coping for an athlete is the next factor in Stambulova et al.’s (2007) model. Internal to the athlete, one of the biggest indicators of success for retirement is the idea of preparedness. As discussed

previously, a preparedness to retire, which includes formulating an idea of when to retire and what to do in retirement, can lead to an adequate adjustment to life without sport (Roberts et al., 2015). At the same time, however, preparedness to retire considers factors external to the athlete. A host of unfortunate outcomes can occur if the athlete is unprepared to retire especially if the athlete is forced into retirement (Ceci Erpic et al., 2004; Grove et al., 1997). This can include identity crisis (Allison & Meyer, 1988); loss of self-worth (Svoboda & Vanek, 1992); decrease of self-esteem (Alferman & Gross, 1997; Ballie & Danish, 1992); decline of self-satisfaction (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Greenford & Blinde, 1985); and emotional problems (Wylleman et al., 1993). From the three narratives, preparing for retirement was an underlying factor surrounding the success of retirement for the six participants.

From the participants comprising the narrative of the competitor, it was found that even though the three participants left sport involuntarily, each had some formulation of a plan for retirement. In fact, Jack, Bruce, and Anthony cite that athletes should identify some sort of activity or pursuit to do in order to fill the void of time left by competing. Further, Lori and Ariana (page turner) demonstrated that planning for retirement can occur the moment an athlete retires and can lead to a positive transition. However, both Lori and Ariana were cautious of starting a new endeavour without considerable planning and contemplation. In fact, Lori took over seven years to discover what she wanted to do. Given that preparing for retirement has been found to produce a favourable outcome, the narrative of the voyager offers a contradiction, as it shows that an athlete can prepare but experience a negative outcome. Katherine was under the presumption that retirement for athletes was mainly about finding a job and given that

she had one, she thought retirement would be simple. Unfortunately, this lack of preparation seemed to contribute to her poor adjustment to the transition. Not identifying that her athletic identity contributed to so much of her sense of self led to an identity crisis when returning back to her family and vocational responsibilities. Thus, the narrative of the voyager demonstrates that preparation for retirement should consider all dimensions of an athlete's life and not just to prepare for finding employment.

Wippert and Wippert (2008) found that if an athlete was informed in person as to why they were terminated from the sport, they tend to have a more favourable outcome of retirement than athletes who were not informed. However, Jack and Bruce's stories contradict this finding. Neither were informed in person in regards to the termination of their sport and/or their funding. Instead of having less than favourable outcome as Wippert and Wippert (2008) suggested, both participants took their forced retirement as an opportunity to begin a new endeavour and did not feel any major regrets. This could be explained by the fact that they were removed from their sport for a longer period of time as opposed to the participants of Wippert and Wippert's (2008) study. Here it can be argued that the time and distance removed from sport impacts the overall mood seen in the narratives, to where things that may have been impactful on the onset of retirement may not seem as meaningful after time has passed. As a result, characteristics that are internal to the six participants speak more to the success of their approaches when facing retirement in contrast to some external factors.

In examining other factors that were internal to the successes seen in retirement from the participants of the study, personality was a major contributor. This was especially apparent in how all the participants entered retirement for different reasons,

but developed healthy ways to deal with the transition. This could in part be due to how retirement was appraised. It has been noted that, retirement can be thought of as a shaking of identity for a short period of time (Stier, 2007) and the participants of the competitor narrative did demonstrate an eagerness to transition into something else in a short period of time. However, all narratives demonstrated a unique attitude in facing retirement. To further examine why this occurred, an understanding of personality/attitude with retirement was reviewed.

Of the many theories and models about personality, the Five-Factor model (Digman, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1997) presented a clear and concise understanding of the different dimensions of personality. The five factors or dimensions of personality consist of: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. Extraversion is the degree of seeking out social stimulation. Agreeableness focuses on the degree of compassion and cooperation an individual displays. Conscientiousness, focuses on the ability to be organized and dependable. Neuroticism, looks at the degree to which an individual tends to be stressed or worried. Finally, openness to experience focuses on the degree of curiosity an individual possesses.

With reference to the Five-Factor model (Digman, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1997), it is noted that Jack, Bruce, and Anthony demonstrated a high level of conscientiousness as all three focused on achieving tasks right away and accomplished those goals through establishing routines. Contrary to the competitor narrative the other participants planned retirement and diminished athletic identity differently. It should be noted that diminished athletic identity refers to the processes retirees undergo to strengthen their identity in other areas (Lally, 2007). Katherine (voyager), in a sense,

denied her true self when retiring the first time. Upon her second retirement, Katherine approached it as an opportunity to re-discover what she wanted to do to diminish her elite athletic identity. Under the big five personality traits, the narrative of the voyager demonstrates a high level of openness as Katherine focused on challenging new tasks with an open mindset by reaching out to others and voicing her displeasures and feelings.

The narrative of the page turner showcased a more empathetic approach to retirement when planning and diminishing their athletic identity. Lori and Ariana both recognized that retirement is not an end to who they were. Rather, they used what they learned from being an athlete in an effort to help others in sport and utilized their helping nature to guide themselves through their transitions. Under the big five personality traits, the narrative of the page turner demonstrates a high level of agreeableness as both Lori and Ariana reveal a high level of altruism. This is noted as Lori and Ariana demonstrated a high degree of compassion and cooperation in that both have a great deal of concern for others. This is evident as both Lori and Ariana are firm believers in giving back to the community and are in roles of advocacy for sport, which in turn helped them in their transitions.

In conclusion, the three narratives of this research report spotlight the effect internal and external factors have on an athletes' ability to cope. This is especially noted in the importance of planning for retirement. Externally, the factors surrounding why an athlete prepares to retire deals with if they retire voluntarily or involuntarily. Nearly all participants retired involuntarily, yet this factor did not impact the ability to formulate a plan to retire, as all were aware of the importance of filling a void sport would leave

behind. Internally, the ability to form the plan and chart out a unique approach differed amongst the personalities of the participants. Thus, external and internal factors related to coping deals with the foresight of creating a plan no matter the circumstances and making the plan unique to the individual respectfully.

Coping strategies. The actual strategies athletes use to cope is the fourth concept of Stambulova et al.'s (2007) model. Within the literature on the subject of athletic retirement, there are two types of coping strategies – emotion-focused/defensive and active/problem-focused. As noted by Grove et al. (1997), athletes who engaged in a defensive style of coping, either by remaining in denial or disengaging from society, set themselves up for serious consequences psychologically. While some participants demonstrated an emotional style of coping at the onset, such as Katherine seeking help with others and Ariana and Lori validating their feelings with their support systems, this coping style did not persist through out the entirety of the retirement process. Rather, when making big strides on deciding what to do and facing major barriers during the transition period, all the participants engaged in an active/problem focused style of coping.

The active/problem-focused style of coping sees individuals tackling the challenges of a situation by evaluating the pros and cons of the dilemma, seeking information, and taking charge of the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The work of Stephan et al. (2003b) discovered that if an athlete, within a period of five to eight months, engaged in an adaptive style of coping, such as setting achievable goals, they appeared to have a higher value for well being after the one-year mark. This is especially evident within the narrative of the competitor as all Jack, Bruce, and Anthony set goals

immediately after deciding to retire. The narrative of the page turner revealed a slower approach in that both Lori and Ariana took more than the five to eight-month period suggested by Stephan et al. (2003b). Regardless, both Lori and Ariana engaged in an active style of coping as both took control of their situation to figure out what they wanted to do. This was in the form of going back to school or performing behaviour change activities to dispel negative attitudes about retirement. The narrative of the voyager shows a blending of the emotion and active styles of coping. Katherine sought out other athletes to vent her displeasures of her retirement experience (defensive/emotion focused). At the same time, Katherine used her group to vent and to re-align her focus. She sought a more meaningful job and other satisfaction in her life (active/problem focused).

Additional literature about coping style and retirement discusses how the style of coping is predicated on the circumstances that lead an athlete to retire. Alfermann (2000) discovered that forced retirees often use defensive styles of coping, while voluntary retirees tend to use more active styles of coping. This research report finds the contrary in that the narratives of the competitor and the page turner, who retired involuntarily, used active styles of coping. The narrative of the voyager, who retired voluntarily, demonstrated both emotion and active styles of coping during both retirement phases respectively. Supplementary to this, Pallares et al. (2011) notes that athletes who engage in dual careers prior to retiring have a better adjustment with their athletic retirement. Only one participant mentioned something similar. Lori found that being mentored while working in the banking industry as an athlete helped expose her to different avenues for the working world. Although it cannot explicitly be stated that mentorship

prior to her departure from sport set up her entire course of transition, it can be suggested that engaging in this dual career could have had some influence over her choices of how to retire.

Lastly, the work on coping styles specifically for athletes with a disability is relevant (Martin, 1999; Wheeler et al., 1996). Retirement involves physical, psychological or social loss. Therefore, it is suggested that to combat these feelings of loss, education and counselling services should be made available. Likewise, Wheeler et al. (1996) suggests that para-athletes should channel their energies into new passions. All participants took the necessary actions to replace the void of not competing with something new. To conclude, the narratives demonstrate the effectiveness of adaptive styles of coping with retirement. While all three narratives demonstrate coping at different points during the transition, all three narratives had participants taking control of their situation to figure out what to do as opposed to removing oneself from the world.

Cultural context. Working in tandem to the four concepts of the transition process, Stambulova et al.'s (2007) model considers how cultural influencers affect retirement. It appears that a host of cultural entities work alongside the more personal aspects of the transition process. Of the six cultural concepts suggested by Stambulova et al. (2007), four of those concepts were identified in this study: the elite sports climate, mass media attention, job possibilities, and availability of retirement services. The concept of living standards was not a strong influence in this study as all six participants are from Canada and are within reasonable economic means. Likewise, cultural traditions did not seem to have an influence as the participants stories did not reveal any

pressures to retire based off of societal norms or requirements that are uniquely Canadian.

An athlete's elite sports climate has an effect on the ability of an athlete to cope with retirement. The type of sport appears to carve different paths for retirement (Young et al., 2006). In fact, it would appear that sports that are individual rather than team-based saw former athletes have better outcomes in retirement. The rationale for this is that individual sports require athletes to build up independency in their coping skills and resiliency over the duration of their career. Likewise, athletes of individual sports have noted that the environment as a player can be hectic and leaving sport can, in some cases, feel like a relief as they are escaping that environment. This was the case even when forced to retire. The work of this study uncovered that the ability to cope did not rely on the type of sport (team vs. individual). It appears that the approach taken to cope and personality of the participant was more influential given that each participant varied in their experiences with team-based or individual sport.

Within the elite sports climate, the literature surrounding athletic retirement and narrative sees the effect of breaking a performance narrative. A performance narrative is similar to that of athletic identity in that this type of narrative sees an athlete devote total focus to sport, so much so that the athlete and the sport become indistinguishable (Douglas & Carless, 2006). Similar to the notions on how the strength of athletic identity has in respect to shaping retirement, Douglas and Carless (2006) identified that when a female athlete abandons a performance narrative that initially was her whole identity, it can lead to a 'self-narrative wreckage'. In fact, adhering to one identity through all domains of life can lead to serious problems if the person is forced to not

identify as such (Frank, 1998). In an effort to combat this, former golfers sought out a more relational type of narrative to force themselves out of being regarded as only a golfer. While the effect of athletic identity is a major underlying theme seen in the narratives, only Katherine's story demonstrated the abandonment of the performance narrative. Specifically, Katherine looked to find support through others to help pull her out of the negative feelings she felt from being retired. What differentiated Katherine's story from the performance narrative was that she revealed that she was unaware that performance was such a huge part of her life. Based on the discussions with the participants in Douglass and Carless' (2006) work, the golfers appeared to be fully aware that they were always an athlete. Perhaps this notion differs for Katherine given that she got into sport much later in life and experienced much more in her life prior to getting into sport. Thus, the elite sports climate did not appear to have a large effect on how the participants of this study transitioned into retirement. While it could be argued that the climate of elite para-sport forced them out of their sport (i.e., injuries and terminations), their ability to transition seems to be minimally affected.

The second cultural effect of retirement deals with media involvement in an athlete's life. The research has shown that if an athlete has been in the spotlight of the media because of their sport, abandoning the public athletic identity is harder to overcome when an athlete retires as society has a harder time separating the person from the media image (Webb et al. 1998). Para-athletes can also have a tough time distinguishing themselves as someone outside of para-sport. Mass media attention about para-sport tends to gravitate toward composing stories under the 'supercrip' narrative (Tynedal & Wolbring, 2013). The term of 'supercrip' used by the media attributes

superhuman qualities for athletes with a disability and how these athletes overcame their disability to lead a normal life (Tynedal & Wolbring, 2013). Using the term of 'supercrip' for athletes with a disability presents an inaccurate interpretation for society at large (Berger, 2008; Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Hutchinson & Kleiber, 2000). This term can present a false sense of inadequacy for individuals who do not make it to the elite level of para-sport and may influence those without a physical disability in attributing those aspects of the 'supercrip' as the norm for all individuals with a disability.

The participants in this study appear to not have been influenced by the 'supercrip' concept. Interesting to this project was the fact that the manner in which the participants spoke seemed to not focus on having a disability, but rather as being an athlete or just as a person. This could explain why the narrative of the competitor relied on its sport background in managing the transition process. As well, both narratives of the voyager and page turner emphasized how their individual qualities as a person were crucial in the re-configuration of their lives or personal growth. Simply put, it would show that the study participants may have been former athletes with a disability, but they appeared to truly regard themselves as a former athlete first before any identity associated with disability.

The third cultural effect of the transition process deals with the actual and potential market for jobs. Perhaps one of the biggest factors to consider in athletic retirement is what to do next. Job possibilities can concern an athlete if they lack the necessary competencies for the job and/or if an athlete does not have any idea of types of job they wish to have. For example, Stambulova et al. (2007) identified that German athletes who planned ahead of the retirement about their next career demonstrated a

positive mechanism of coping and an overall positive attitude towards retirement. For the participants of this study, a heavy focus on what to do next was present. In respect to jobs, all three narratives demonstrated a concern about what type of career participants wished to enter and that creating a plan was pivotal. The only difference among the narratives was related to the timing of securing a job. As mentioned previously, Jack, Bruce, and Anthony engaged in pre-retirement planning and moved quickly to attain employment. The voyager pre-planned before retiring as well and had a job lined up, only to realize that it was the wrong job because it lacked fulfillment. Lastly, Lori and Ariana, had also took some time to plan before retiring or when notified of their dismissal from sport. Unique for both Lori and Ariana, was that each participant took some time before choosing a job after sport. This was seen in either prioritizing school first or by gaining experience through mentorship and travelling.

An interesting point must be stated about the participants of this study in that nearly all the participants secured employment after leaving sport. This presents quite an anomaly in respect to census data for Canadians. Turcotte (2014) identified that the employment rate for adult aged persons with a disability is at 49 percent as opposed to 79 percent for those without a disability. Additionally, it was found that 12 percent of Canadians with a disability, and 33 percent of those with a severe disability were refused employment as a result of their condition (Turcotte, 2014). For those with a disability, outside of monetary gains, work can be a significant source of validity, developing social contacts, and most importantly participating and contributing to society (Anthony & Blanch, 1987). It appears for those in Canada, more than half of the population of persons with a disability do not reap the rewards that employment provides. Para-

athletes are no different in that attaining employment is a big concern given the structural and social barriers surrounding their situation, despite sport being a tool to leverage employment prospects (Misener & Darcy, 2014). In the case of the participants of this research, it seemed that deciding on a career path was more of a barrier than attaining employment as the literature would suggest.

A variety of reasons could explain why the participants of this research did not seem to have a hard time finding employment. For one, the work of Itoh, Hums, Arai and Ogasawara (2018) identifies that social identity is a major factor for former Paralympians to find work within para-sport after retiring. Social identity, as Laverie and Arnett (2000) describe it, relates to how individuals affiliate with people and with things to reveal many versions of self. For those with a strong social identity to the Paralympic movement, Itoh et al. (2018) discovered that a strong sense of responsibility to the Paralympics to give back or contribute to it. This is similar to the stories of Jack, Anthony, Lori and Ariana in that they created career paths around sport to further the sport delivery system by training, consulting, and publishing. Secondly, Itoh et al. (2018) identified that the knowledge gained from having a disability and the coping skills they gained from encountering barriers can be advantageous for seeking jobs. This is especially seen in the tenacity and resiliency to pursue jobs. Although the participants of Itoh et al.'s (2018) study all became coaches, the participants of this study demonstrated similar characteristics of resiliency. This is especially evident in using their adaptive/problem focused coping strategies to identify what actions are required to have a successful transition. Additionally, all participants of this study demonstrated a high degree of perseverance to not only discover a career path, but to chase after it and

capture their desired employment. Thus, while many people with a disability experience barriers in the job market, the participants of this study demonstrated that resiliency and perseverance developed through their time as an athlete allowed them to find success in attaining employment.

The last cultural context influencing the participants in this study was the interplay of resources aimed at helping athletes transition. Countries or regions that lack support services can see athletes having more unfavourable feelings towards retirement (Kuettel et al., 2017). The stories of the participants revealed that while the services were available in Canada, all relied on their own personal support structures when they retired. However, some argued that the resources/support services should cater to other areas. For instance, Katherine felt that more resources should be made available in regards to mental health given her experience of suffering depression through her retirement. Additionally, she suggested makes the point of making these resources available not only for those who retired, but also for those still competing to help with understanding that serious psychological problems can occur with retirement.

To conclude, this study identified that the elite sports climate, mass media attention, job possibilities and availability of services were recognized as underlying tones for the narratives. While the elite sports climate and availability of services could have had some minor effect on the experience of retirement for a select few participants, the job market and separating from narratives presented in the media were presented in the participants' stories. Specifically, finding a career and performing the necessary actions to get a career as well as performing work to be regarded as a person first rather than a 'supercrip' were apparent factors seen within the themes of the narratives.

Perceived quality and long-term consequences of the transition. The last factor of Stambulova et al.'s (2007) model sees the four concepts of control for athletic retirement (e.g. pre-conditions for athletic retirement, perceived transition demands, internal factors relates to coping and coping strategies) coupled with the effect of cultural influencers create the outcome of the experience. Within the literature on athletic retirement, it appears that an experience can be regarded as positive or negative based on some core findings. It would seem that the strength of athletic identity at the time of retiring, planning for retirement, the circumstances/reasons for retiring and social resources along with coping emotionally or adaptively determine the quality of the outcome (Marin-Urquiza, Ferreira, & Van Biesen 2018). Within this study, the participants across the three narratives demonstrated a favourable outcome of retirement and a positive quality of transition.

It is noted that the stories from each participant appear to touch on some of the major topics identified within the literature. All three narratives demonstrated the importance of planning ahead for retirement, having an adaptive/problem focused coping style, and diminishing one sole identity and converting it into multiple senses of self. Participants across all three narratives accomplished this by identifying a void to fill for retirement. The competitor tackled this by quickly finding a job or new sport. The voyager learned from mistakes, heard from others what to do for a second retirement and identified what she needed to be removed from her plan. The page turner took the most time to figure out the best strategy for setting up a path where they could continue to be challenged and experience personal development.

All participants across the three narratives used an adaptive coping strategy by either modifying behaviours (page turner), seeking support and admitting to failure (voyager), or setting target goals immediately after retiring (competitor). In other words, all three narratives included participants who were problem-solving oriented and actively took strides to ensure a healthy transition or actions to correct the discomfort felt. The ability to lessen their identification as an athlete helped the participants of this study. Although some still strongly identified as an athlete after retiring, it was the ability to deconstruct that identity and reformulate into multiple senses of self that aided their transition. This point was also discussed in the work of Marin-Urquiza et al. (2018) who saw that retired Paralympic athletes had lower scores of athletic identities, but similar scores of self-esteem to Paralympians who still compete. Thus, it appears that a strong belief in one's self creates the possibility of developing new identities (Marin-Urquiza et al. 2018). In this study, diminishing athletic identity was accomplished by recognizing a change in life priority as a consequence of retiring. Therefore, energies were channeled into new areas of focus (voyager and page turner), or by recognizing retirement as regaining a sense of normalcy (competitor). Thus, the six participants' stories demonstrated the power of preparing to fill a void that elite sport leaves behind in life, having a problem-oriented coping strategy and recognizing a change in priorities for identity can output a favourable transition.

Less of the conventional negative factors contributing to negative retirement outcomes were seen in the three narratives. Traditionally, the literature has shown that a willingness to retire demonstrates a positive outcome while a forced retirement can lead to a less favourable experience (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2012; Roberts et al., 2015).

The narratives uncovered in this study show that a forced retirement can see a favourable outcome and a willing retirement can see a less favourable outcome. The narratives demonstrated that not only the approach taken by each participant was forward thinking in goal setting and actions, but the personality of the participants appeared to not let the circumstances of their retirement deter them from having a good retirement experience. The narratives demonstrated a degree of conscientiousness (competitor), openness (voyager), and agreeableness (page turner). Thus, similar to the findings of Roberts et al. (2015), this study demonstrates that attitude towards preparing for retirement can be more of a factor indicative of quality of experience as opposed to the circumstances that lead an individual to retire.

Outside of the literature on athletic retirement, a host of other factors may be at play for what was observed in the three narratives. For one, all participants of this study have careers, families, and strong support systems. It can be gathered that the successes each participant had in other realms after retirement could contribute to the overall satisfaction in their stories. Perhaps, if another athlete was lacking in some of the success highlighted by each participant, the narratives could have been altered. In addition, all participants had fairly long careers as Paralympians in their respective sports, with the average being eleven and a half years. It could be stated that a fairly long career length of this average may contribute to the ability of all participants to separate their athletic identity. All participants came to the natural evolution of their career and knew that their time spent as a Paralympian was ready to come to a close, even when they were forced to retire. Ariana's story does run counter to this as she wished to continue playing as she was waiting for her prognosis yet came to the decision to retire

once the diagnosis was made. In closing, it can be stated that other factors in addition to the themes seen in the literature may be at play when it came to the formation of these narratives. Still, these narratives demonstrate the importance of how an athlete with a disability can approach for retirement and see positive outcomes.

Limitations

Though great effort and care were taken in the design and procedure of this study, there are some limitations that must be addressed. One limitation is that while six subjects agreed to participate, several others were contacted and declined. Therefore, the narratives identified in this study may not be representative of all former elite athletes with a physical disability as the potential for other retirement experience and stories may exist. Perhaps, those who declined participation had less positive outcomes or who were still struggling with their transition. Additionally, all participants that qualified to be a part of this study were identified through colleagues and my own social network. Thus, the reach to gather all former elite athletes with a physical disability in Canada was small in scope. Therefore, the narratives may not be exemplarily of every former elite athlete with a physical disability.

A second limitation seen within this study is the exclusion factor of being retired for over one year. The participants of this project ranged from being retired from two to forty-two years. Those who had been removed from their para-sport for a significant amount of time may have experienced some limits on recalling past events or feelings. This may have an effect on the strength of the narratives. This could be seen more so on the perspective the participants had about retirement. With significant time and space

away from their sport, emotions associated with the experience of retiring can become dulled. Given that things appeared to work out for the participants of this study in how they described their ordeal, having been retired for awhile may have lessened the intensity of the negative emotions associated with the transition. Likewise, as all interviews were conducted over the telephone the opportunity to recognize facial cues and body language was absent. This lack of non-verbal cues could have some limits on which points and themes could have been more taxing of the experience based off of reactions to questioning. Therefore, there may be a factor of diminished emotion behind the narratives as individuals who have been retired for long periods of time may have forgotten the intensity of feeling towards the transition process.

A final limitation of this study deals with the characteristics of the participants. For one, all participants spoke English. This could have been an exclusionary factor as those who had French as their primary language may have felt less comfortable in discussing retirement fluently. This factor limits the potential to hear other types of stories about elite athletic retirement for athletes with a disability. As well, all the participants were former Paralympians. Athletes who are considered elite but have represented their sport at different elite levels may have different thought processes and experiences with retirement. In fact, the work of Ronkainen and Ryba (2017) stressed that amateur athletes do not fit the conventional career models used within sport psychology for athletic retirement. Thus, in order to establish a more complete understanding of elite retirement, Ronkainen and Ryba (2017), suggest, “If athletic career research hopes to live up to its claimed inclusivity of all levels of participants, the theory building should also develop more nuanced frameworks that reflect career

trajectories outside of professional sports” (p.19). Therefore, the limitations of this study come down to the small reach of gathering participants and the qualities of the participants affecting the three narratives discovered.

Implications for future research

This study explored the effect retirement had on former elite athletes with a physical disability. The most significant suggestion for future research would be to expand the number of participants to collect more stories to compare or contrast with the narratives identified in this study. In broadening the numbers of participants, it would be interesting to see if the three narratives are characteristic of different forms of disability and different sport. For one, it is recommended to explore a consistent sample of para-athletes. This can be looked at from a common sport or a specified disability shared by all participants. By incorporating one type of sport or one form of disability in research design can reveal how narratives vary under the same contexts as opposed to having multiple individuals from different sport backgrounds and differing forms of disability.

A second recommendation is to explore different points of the transition process. This could be accomplished by exploring the transition period between one year and two years post retirement. This could be accomplished in collaboration with athlete services like Game Plan, as they remain in close connection with athletes prior to and during their departure from sport and have dedicated resources to multiple realms of the transition process (Canadian Sport Institute, 2018). By exploring this period of time, a better sense of how retirement is experienced after the initial stabilization period could be understood. Additionally, narratives and mood could be better captured to reveal the

raw emotions felt during the transition process before a significant amount of time has passed where emotions get dulled.

The third recommendation for future research would be to conduct a longitudinal study of the same nature to see the stability of an individual's narrative as one progresses through the transition. This study was cross-sectional in nature as the interviews provided a snap shot of the athletes lived experience with retirement. As Stephan et al. (2003b) discovered, athletes' sense of self fluctuates from the five-month period of retiring to stabilizing after the one-year mark. Therefore, discovering what narratives emerge at points along the retirement process can provide a more in-depth appreciation of how identity fluctuates and can provide others a realistic sense of how narrative may or may not flow in real time.

Conclusion

This study sought to uncover the narratives former elite athletes with a physical disability craft about the experience of retiring in re-affirming their sense of self. Six former Canadian Paralympians discussed a significant transition in their lives. Each participant opened up, discussing their entry into para-sport, the highs and lows of their career, the factors that culminated into their retirement, their experience of retirement, and their reflections of retirement all together. The first research question simply asked what narratives exist in respect to retiring from elite para-sport. Three narrative paths emerged from the six participants of this study. Each narrative detailed the approach the participants respectively took when retiring. The narrative of the competitor revealed the process needed to treat retirement as a game. Essentially, the competitive mindset the

participants of this narrative possess was translated for retiring by being eager to transition, being self aware of what retirement involves, and performing well in new domains of life. The narrative of the voyager demonstrated that even though an individual may be lost on their retirement journey, they can create a new path for their life. In this narrative, this retirement journey saw not setting expectations, being adrift on the journey, and having an open-mind to try new things demonstrates the ability to adapt to tough situations. Lastly, the narrative of the page turner recognized that although the phase of one component in life may come to a close, the story does not end. In this narrative, it was ok to take time before deciding on a path to explore, be willing to adapt to retired life, and ultimately take retired life as an opportunity to continually learn and grow. These narratives are attributed as positive retirement experiences in that all participants were able to accomplish goals set out for themselves and do not have any regrets with how their retirement process went. In regards to re-affirming a sense of self in retired life, each narrative demonstrated through their approach to retirement that in order to develop a new identity, it can be built up through their past identity. The competitor narrative accomplished this by pursuing endeavours that were sport related when retired. The narrative of the voyager re-affirmed their sense-of-self by recognizing that they had a major athletic identity and worked around it to move forward. Lastly, the narrative of the page turner established a new sense of self by breaking down their sport identity into something that could help impact others in a positive way.

The second research question asked how these narratives impacted the overall quality of the retirement experience. First and foremost, these narratives demonstrated a positive outcome of retirement in that they are representations of how to approach

retirement. Analyzing the narratives further, the approaches the participants discussed represented a storied embodiment of the major concepts seen within the literature. All three narratives demonstrated an importance of planning, divulging identity, and having an adaptive coping strategy. This was exemplified in the stories of the participants for finding something meaningful to fill the gap that their sport left behind, changing priorities with respect to how the participants wished to see themselves, and using a coping strategy which focuses on tackling challenges and identifying problems. As well, these narratives demonstrated that the characteristics of an individual are more indicative of outcome as opposed to circumstances surrounding the decision to retire. Specifically, these narratives demonstrated varying degrees of personality akin to the themes of each narrative. It appears that the ability to be conscientious, open, and agreeable play into the attitudes for retirement and the willingness to inspire purpose in retired life.

This research contributes to athletic retirement literature for former elite athletes with a disability in that minimal literature exists on the subject at the time of this writing. Pivotal work surrounding the effect retirement has on athletes with a disability range in age from thirteen (Martin, 2005) to twenty-two (Martin 1996; Wheeler et al., 1996) years ago. This study furthers the recommendations of those studies by exemplifying the importance of channeling energies into new endeavours. Yet, this research also furthers the literature on the subject on recognizing how one approaches retirement. Though the six participants of this study revealed their success for retirement, there is still work to be done in discovering more stories around the world about this process. Efforts must be made to provide more opportunities to tell and listen to stories about retirement for elite

athletes with a disability, so it can become possible to develop a more complete depiction of what that transition process is really like.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

Hello,

I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Austin Mincone, and I am a Masters student within the Faculty of Kinesiology at the University of New Brunswick working under the supervision of Dr. Charlene Shannon-McCallum and Mr. Greg Duquette. I am conducting a study on how identity is restructured in wake of a significant transition. Specifically, I am interested in how elite athletes with a physical disability experience retirement and the narrative they craft surrounding it. I am seeking study participants who have competed in the elite rankings of para-based sport, either representing a team nationally or internationally, and who have been retired for a at least 1 year.

Participation in this study will involve a 90-minute interview at maximum. There is an option to have the interview face-to-face or over video conferencing software. You will be asked to explain your experience of the transition process of retiring out of elite sport that includes discussing what the process has involved and what was felt during that experience. This study has been reviewed and received ethics approval through the Research Ethics Board at the University of New Brunswick (on file as REB 2017-166). Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at austin.mincone@unb.ca or by phone at (506) 458-0688 (home) or 1-416-570-7048 (cell). I will then provide you with further information about the study and arrange a time for meeting

Kindest Regards,

Austin Mincone

austin.mincone@unb.ca

(506) 458-0688

(416) 570-7048

Appendix B

Information Letter for Potential Participants

Dear Potential Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study on the process of transitioning into retirement from elite para-based sport. This study is part of my graduate work in the Faculty of Kinesiology at the University of New Brunswick under the supervision of Dr. Charlene Shannon-McCallum and Mr. Greg Duquette. You have been identified through Parasport NB as a potential candidate who fits the criteria for this study, and I would like to provide you more information about the research to help you decide if you would like to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

For an elite athlete, transitioning out of sport and into retired life can be a complex process. The research on athletic retirement has shown that a host of controllable (e.g., preparation to retire) and uncontrollable (e.g., injury) factors work to shape the experience of the process. These factors create a unique experience for each and all types of elite athletes when transitioning to retirement and re-formulating their identity. However, the research has tended to focus heavily on the experiences of able-bodied elite athletes, with limited focus on elite athletes with a physical disability. Therefore, it is the purpose of this project to understand how former elite athletes with a physical disability adapt to life beyond sport when re-structuring their lives. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick (UNB) and is on file as REB 2017-166.

METHODS

There are three criteria for participation in this research that require the participant be: 1) a former elite athlete with a physical disability, who has 2) represented a team nationally or internationally, and 3) has been retired from his/her para-based sport for a minimum of 1 year. If you meet these criteria and are willing to share your experience with me, you will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview is expected to last approximately 90 minutes. The interview can take place either face-to-face in a location of your preference or over video conferencing software. You will be asked for your permission to have your interview recorded and for the recording to be transcribed. The audio recording and subsequent transcript assist me in analyzing the information. However, if you do not wish to have your interview recorded, I will take notes during the interview.

In the interview you will be asked to describe your experience of retiring from elite para-based sport. You will be asked to elaborate on your athletic career prior to deciding to retire, the events leading up to the deciding factor(s) to retire, and your experiences after the decision to retire was made.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that can be identified with you will remain completely confidential. Once I have transcribed the audio recording, I will attach a pseudonym to the data. Further, you will not be identified by name in any report or publication resulting from this study. Once the interviews have been transcribed, audio recordings will be destroyed. All hard copy materials (e.g., consent forms, paper copy of transcripts) will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the principal investigator's desk at the university and electronic material (e.g., transcribed interviews) will be kept on a secure, password-protected computer that only I will have access to. Data will be kept for five years and then destroyed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without consequence.

COMPENSATION/REIMBURSEMENT

There will be no financial compensation for your participation in this study. You are not likely to incur any expenses, with the exception of transportation expenses. To minimize these expenses, research participants will be able to select an interview location that is convenient to them.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR SOCIETY

By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to use your experience of retirement to enlighten others about what the process involves. This research can help organizations adapt policy and structure to better cater to the needs of those athletes who represented their sport, province or country. It is also hoped that you will personally benefit from recalling and telling your story of retirement as an athlete in elite para sport.

REPORT OF THE FINDINGS

Once the study is complete and the data have been analyzed, you will receive a copy of the findings in a report that can either be sent to you by mail to an address you provide on the consent form or emailed to you at an email address you provide.

QUESTIONS

Should you have any questions regarding this project, feel free to address the Principal Investigator. If you wish to speak to someone not associated with the project, please feel free to contact Dr. Usha Kuruganti, Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Kinesiology, at 506-447-3101.

Thank you for your time and consideration for this study.

Kindest regards,

Austin Mincone
University of New Brunswick

Appendix C Participant Consent Form

I understand that the main goal of this research is to explore the various experiences of retiring as an elite athlete with a physical disability from para-based sport through the narrative attached to the experience of the transition. The research is being conducted by Austin Mincone at the University of New Brunswick.

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB-2017-166.

I understand that this study will take approximately 90 minutes during which time I will participate in a face-to-face interview in person or over video conferencing software.

I agree to have the interview digitally recorded.

I understand that I will have the option to receive my transcripts from the study and a report of the study's findings after data collection has been completed.

I understand my participation in this study is voluntary. At any point during the study I am under no obligation to answer any particular question, and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation or consequence.

I understand that the information provided during the interview will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not appear in any report or publication resulting from this study. Any information that might identify me (e.g., the organization with which I am affiliated) will be removed when the text transcripts are created and will not be included in any report or publication. Major themes identified from all the interviews will be reported and direct quotes from my interview transcript may be used in order to best illustrate these themes. Quotes from my transcript will only be described by an assigned pseudonym, and not by my name.

Once the interviews have been transcribed, digital recordings will be destroyed. All hard copy materials and memory sticks will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and only the principal investigator will have access to these materials. I understand my name will not be attached to any hard copy materials.

I understand that the data will be published in a scholarly journal and that the data will be available to the public.

I am willing to participate as a volunteer in the above-mentioned study. I have read, understood, and agree to the above conditions.

Please print your own name:

Your signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact Information:

Austin Mincone phone: 506-458-0688 email: austin.mincone@unb.ca

Appendix D Interview Guide

1. Can you tell me how you got started in sport?
 - 1a. Follow up with chronology and interesting/specific points about their disability, to establish “flow order”
2. What kept you going in your pursuit of elite sport?
 - 2a. Same as 1a
3. Tell me about your athletic career? (Point about coaching relationship)
 - 3b. Same as 1a
4. What did being an athlete mean to you?
 - 4a. Same as 1a
5. Can you tell me about what circumstances lead you to retire?
 - 5a. Same as 1a
6. Did you prepare to retire?
 - 6a. Same as 1a
7. Can you describe your experience of retirement?
 - 7a. Same as 1a
8. How would you characterize your feelings when you retired?
 - 8a. Same as 1a
9. What role does sport (or the sport they played) have in your life now?
 - 9a. Same as 1a
10. How do you think about your days as an elite athlete?
 - 10a. Same as 1a

11. What have you discovered as you've transitioned out of being an active "elite athlete"?
12. What surprised you about retirement?
 - 13a. Same as 1a
13. What helped you move forward? Or what do you believe is holding you back?
14. Looking back, would you change anything about the experience of retiring?
 - 14a. Same as 1a
15. What would you recommend to other athletes for their expectations/how to deal when it comes time to retire?

Appendix E
Feedback Form (member check)

If you would / would not like to receive a copy of your specified results of this study please check the boxes that apply:

- I **do not** wish to receive specified feedback about my responses from the study

- I **do** wish to receive specified feedback about my responses from the study

If you have checked that you wish to receive specified feedback, please fill out the information below:

Please print your own name:

Your signature: _____

Date: _____

CIRRICULUM VITAE

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