

RETIREMENT EXPERIENCES

Similarities and Differences between Male Professional versus High
Performance Amateur Athletes' Retirement Experiences

By

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba

In partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Science

Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the similarities and differences of retirement experiences of professional versus high performance amateur athletes determined by participation statistics in Canada. Results were obtained through qualitative interviews with 5 retired professional hockey players, and 4 retired high performance amateur rugby players who retired from sport within the last 15 years. Interview questions were based on Wylleman and Lavallee's theoretical model of transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual, psychosocial, and academic/vocational levels. The research concluded that there are many similarities experienced by professional hockey and high performance amateur rugby athletes regarding their sport retirement. However, there are also some considerable differences experienced by these athletes. Additional research may lead to awareness of coping resources and supports available to athletes experiencing retirement from various sports to help improve preparation and the quality of retirement experiences.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to my advisory committee: Dr. Leisha Strachan, Dr. Adrienne Leslie-Toogood, and Dr. Sarah Teetzel. Special thanks to Dr. Leisha Strachan for all of her support, time, patience and understanding. Without her guidance I would have never been able to complete my graduate degree in sport psychology. Thank you for providing the opportunity to learn and grow during my graduate degree; you have truly helped me improve academically and individually. I will utilize the skills you have taught me throughout the rest of my life. I appreciate everything each of you have done for me. I would also like to thank the Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management for the financial support during my graduate studies.

I would like to thank my family, most importantly my parents, Alan and Judy, for their support, encouragement, and love throughout my life and education. Without the support of my parents, I would not have had the opportunity to pursue an education and I will always remember and appreciate everything they have done for me. Also, I would like to thank my brothers Jason and David, and my sister Kerry, and all of my friends- I don't know what I would do without you. Thank you for always being there for me, sharing good times, and providing an often needed escape from my studies.

Finally, I would like to thank the athletes who participated in my research study. Thank you for your honesty and openness discussing your personal experiences. Without your involvement, this study would not have been possible.

Before beginning this journey, completing a graduate degree seemed impossible. It is because of all of you that I was able to learn and grow to make it to this point in my life. Thank you very much.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Achieving international or professional status as an athlete requires many years of training and dedication. Research conducted by Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Romer (1993) suggests 10,000 hours of deliberate practice is required to reach high performance levels. However, many athletes who invest 10,000 hours of training do not reach an international or professional sport level. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (2011) states the odds of a high school athlete playing professional basketball is 0.03 percent, football 0.08 percent, baseball 0.44 percent, hockey 0.32 percent, and soccer 0.07 percent. As there are low odds of reaching a high performance sport status, hundreds of athletes retire from high performance sport each year, and many struggle with physical and psychological pain as a result of their athletic career (Center for the Study of Retired Athletes, 2011). Athletes who do compete at an international or professional level often have short-lived athletic careers which may end abruptly or unexpectedly. The average high performance athletic career lasts between 3 to 7 years (Coakley, 2001). Athletic careers are unique to each athlete, depending on their sport, position, or skill level. Career termination is common amongst most international or professional athletes and psychological preparation and interventions may help athletes through this transition process.

Retirement from high performance sport is a unique process which can consist of both positive and negative experiences (i.e., healthy retirement transitions compared to crises retirement transitions). High performance sport at professional or amateur levels may produce more difficult retirement experiences than recreational sport, due to an increased commitment toward sport training, which may result in a stronger development

of athletic identity (Blinde & Greendofer, 1985; Cecić Erpič, 1998; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Athletic identity refers to “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role” (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Sport may be considered part of an athlete’s personal identity and leaving high performance sport may result in an athlete feeling of a loss of self. Athletes experiencing loss of athletic identity may struggle to redefine themselves outside of sport (Webb, Nasco, Riley & Headrick, 1998).

In addition to athletic identity, sport popularity may also affect an athlete’s retirement experiences (Webb et al., 1998). Popular sports with a large public audience may alter an athlete’s perception of his/her athletic career and athletic retirement. Likewise, sports with a small public audience may also alter athletes’ perception of their athletic career and athletic retirement. Athletic career successes or struggles may impact athletes from sports with a large public audience differently than athletes from sports with a small public audience due to public reaction of their performances (Webb et al., 1998). Athletes who participate in sports with a large public audience may feel a stronger connection to community due to public support (Webb et al., 1998). Also, athletes who participate in team environments may struggle with losing the special relationships which may develop between athletes and coaches or teammates. Therefore, sport popularity may affect high performance athlete’s retirement experiences due to an increased development of athletic identity, a stronger connection between the athlete and the community, and a loss of public support or relationships developed between coaches or teammates.

The aim of the present study is to investigate the similarities and differences among retirement experiences of professional versus high performance amateur athletes . Increasing understanding of high performance male athlete retirement experiences may help athletes and professionals in planning for retirement because additional research may help develop theoretical models and intervention programs. In addition, information gathered during this study may help increase the number of social resources available to high performance athletes during career transitions. Finally, this research may help improve the quality of social resources (i.e., transition coping literature) offered to athletes in career transition.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Athletic Career Stages

Recognition of athletic career stages originated from the life stage literature. Life stages are unique events which occur throughout the course of an individual's life that affect experiences (Erickson, 1959). Life stages can be positive (i.e., acquiring a drivers licence, graduating from school, or getting married) or negative (i.e., getting fired from a job, getting divorced or experiencing the death of a loved one). Life stage theories were applied to athletic careers to help understand athlete sport careers. Similar to life careers, athletic careers are affected by a series of stages (Bloom, 1985). These stages can have a positive or negative effect on an athlete's sports career. An athletic career can be defined as athletic participation over many years in competitive sport (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007) and is a term used to describe a succession of stages and transitions which include an athlete's initiation into competitive sport, continued participation in organized competitive sport, and termination of an athletic career. The athlete's career is terminated by his/her voluntary or involuntary discontinuation of participation in organized competitive sport (Bloom, 1985; Wylleman, Theeboom, & Lavallee, 2004). Athletic careers consist of many stages and transitions which correspond to childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and older stages (Bloom).

Another way to consider an athletic career is as a developmental event contributing to life span development in and out of sport (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Bruner, Strachan, & Côté, 2011). This approach includes several parameters which characterise an athletic career (Hanin & Stambulova, 2004; Stambulova, 1994). The parameters which characterise an athletic career include: duration from start to finish, sport event specialization, achievements, perceived benefits, costs (i.e., time, energy,

health, money), career satisfaction, and career successes (Hanin & Stambulova, 2004; Stambulova). An athlete's perception of each of the parameters may affect his/her athletic career experience (Alfermann & Stambulova).

Athletic Career Transition Models

Schlossberg (1981) developed a transition model to provide a systemic framework to help understand how individuals experience transitions. The transition model consists of three major parts: (1) Approaching Transitions: Transition Identification and Transitioning, (2) Taking Stock of Coping Resources: the 4 S System, (3) Taking Charge: Strengthening Resources. Approaching Transitions identifies the nature of the transition and provides understanding of which perspective is best for dealing with a transition. The Transition Process identifies where individuals are in a transition (i.e. entering transition, mid-transition, or exiting a transition). Taking Stock of Coping Resources; The 4 S System provides a way to identify the potential resources someone possesses to cope with a transition. The 4 S's refer to the individual's situation, self, support, and strategies. Individuals experience similar transitions differently due to the uniqueness of these 4 S's. Taking charge: Strengthening Resources refers to the use of new strategies in managing transitions. Schlossberg's theoretical model was a framework to help understand how individuals experience transition, however it was not related to athletic transitions. The transition model developed by Schlossberg can be applied to a sport context (Bruner et al, 2011).

Throughout the course of an athletic career, athletes experience many unique athletic career transitions. Athletic career transitions are any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles (Schlossberg, 1981). For example, being selected to a national team may be considered an event transition which

requires the athlete to adjust appropriately (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Similarly, not being selected to the national team may be considered a non-event that also requires personal or social changes to occur for successful coping (Alfermann & Stambulova). These transitions may be anticipated or unanticipated and may affect each athlete differently. Similar to athletic career stages, athletes can experience positive or negative athletic transitions. Examples of athletic transitions include starting a new sport, making a national team, or retirement from high performance sport. Retirement from high performance sport is a common example of a career stage and transition. The transition requires a strong integration of related and unrelated sport contexts (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). This transition may be normative (i.e., predicted or planned) or non-normative (i.e., surprising or unplanned). Normative transitions are considered easier to cope with because of their predictability. In contrast, non-normative transitions may be more difficult to cope with because of their unpredictability. Recognition of athletic career transitions led to the development of theoretical models to help understand transitions faced by athletes throughout a sport career.

Theoretical models developed by Stambulova (1994) and Wylleman & Lavallee (2004) provide an understanding of developmental transitions faced by athletes throughout their sport career. Stambulova was one of the first researchers to develop a theoretical model that was sport specific. Stambulova developed two types of theoretical models known as the synthetic description model and the analytic description model. These models help researchers understand how influences such as the length of a sport career, and achievements reached throughout the sports career can affect athletes' sport career retirement. Stambulova's research led to the recognition that athletic transitions are

unique transitions compared to Schlossbergs non-sport specific transition model which resulted in other researchers investigating sport specific transitions. Wylleman & Lavallee produced a theoretical model to understand sport careers known as a developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual, psychosocial and academic/vocational levels. This model suggests sport career experiences are a result of multiple experiences which occur in sport settings as well as outside sport settings. These models will be used to help understand sport career retirement experiences.

Research conducted by Stambulova (1994) was one of the first attempts to develop theoretical models pertaining to high performance sport careers in Russia. Previous to the development of these theoretical models athletic career transitions in Russia were withheld from North American society, and biased to demonstrate the advantages of the socialist way of life. Based on applied work with athletes in the 1970s and 1980s, techniques to deliver psychological training for high performance athletes have improved (Stambulova). This required sport psychologists to link psychological theory with practice techniques. The change in Russia from a socialist to a more democratic society resulted in the growth of shared knowledge between Russian sport psychologists and other sport psychologists around the world (Stambulova). Russian sport psychology techniques also changed from biased research, emphasizing achievements and positive examples, to a general scientific approach, to research of athletic sport careers. Stambulova recognized two theoretical models of the sports career: synthetic description models and analytic description models. Synthetic models consider sport careers as a whole, through a series of objective characteristics (i.e., time, space,

information, energy). Analytic models consider sport careers as complex structural form, including certain chronological periods and crises. These models were developed through empirical research of 200 Russian athletes representing different sports types and levels of achievement. From this research seven predictable crises common among high performance sport careers emerged (1) the beginning of sports specialization, (2) the transition to special intensive training in the chosen sport, (3) the transition from mass popular sports to high-achievement sports, (4) the transition from junior sports to adult sports, (5) the transition from amateur sports to professional sports, (6) the transition from culmination to the end of the sport career, (7) the ending of the sport career. Her theoretical model explains general symptoms of crises, ways to resolve crises, the influence crises can have on athletes, the “costs” of not resolving crises, and ways to provide psychological assistance to athletes in crisis. Sport career retirement is recognized as having a high potential of resulting in crisis.

The synthetic description model divides athletic careers into four distinct characteristics: time, space, information, and energy. Using this model, there are four objective characteristics which affect sport careers: sport career length (time), generalization/specialization (space), level of achievement (information), and costs (energy) (Stambulova, 1994). The length of the sports career has an effect on an athlete’s retirement experiences because it encompasses the number of years the athlete is devoted to sport, the age at which sport participation began, and the end of the athletes’ career (Stambulova). Generalization and specialization is determined by the number of sports events the athlete participates in, and by the number of roles the athlete masters among each sport throughout his/her sport career. Typically, high performance athletes will

specialize in one sport throughout their sport career. However, some athletes are able to obtain mastery of multiple sports simultaneously. Athletes who participate in multiple sports throughout their career may reduce the chance of experiencing a crisis transition because their sport may have a lesser role in defining their personal identity. The level of achievement is considered to have two aspects: (1) results of sport performance (i.e., qualifications, titles, athletes ranks, records), and (2) achievement in the development of the athlete (i.e., sport life experience, personality characteristics, social status and social ties, material well-being). Finally, the cost of the sport career is related to the “price” the athlete paid for their sport career achievement. These include expenditures of time, energy, health, and money, as well as, losses in other spheres of life. Stambulova considers this a very important characteristic of athletes’ sport careers because it can have a large effect on the perception of their sport career experience. The author suggests an athlete may reach high levels of sport career success, but experience extreme health costs as a result. Upon career termination, this athlete may consider his/her sport career as a negative experience or a disappointment. Athlete perceptions of these four characteristics can directly affect their sport career satisfaction which can have a large impact on athletes sport career retirement experiences.

The second theoretical model introduced by Stambulova (1994) is the analytic description model. This model is based on the analysis of the course of an athlete’s sport career which is expressed in predictable stages of development. A comparison of sport careers to predicted stages of development resulted in Stambulova recognizing seven possible crises of high performance sport careers. The possibility of crisis occur at predictable transitional phases which are: (1) the beginning of sports specialization, (2)

the transition to special intensive training in the chosen sport, (3) the transition from mass popular sports to high-achievement sports, (4) the transition from junior sports to adult sports, (5) the transition from amateur sports to professional sports, (6) the transition from culmination to the end of sport career, (7) the ending of the sport career. These seven possible crises are recognized as potential causes of premature retirement from sport. Inability to cope with these crises may result in sport career problems and difficulties which can lead to sport career retirement. These periods are times that athletes may need skilled psychological assistance to cope with the crisis transition.

Since the 1970s, sport psychologists have focused research on transitions into and out of organized sport. Researchers such as Bloom (1985), and Côté (1999) helped define specific predictable athletic career transitions. Bloom recognized three stages of talent development. These include (1) the initiation stage in which young athletes are introduced to sport; (2) the developmental stage in which athletes become more dedicated to their sport training; (3) mastery or perfection in which the athlete reaches high performance levels. Similar to Bloom, Côté recognizes four stages of an athletic career, (1) sampling, (2) specializing, (3) investment, and (4) mastery. This research focuses on the impact of sport career experiences on athletic career transitions.

Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) extended this research outside of sport career experiences and consider the impact of psychological, psychosocial, academic and vocational experiences on athletic career transitions. Previous to Wylleman and Lavallee's research, researchers investigated transitions experienced by athletes at an athletic level. Wylleman and Lavallee introduced the idea that athletes experience transitions not just at an athletic level but athletes also experience psychological,

psychosocial, and academic and vocational transitions throughout the course of their athletic career that may have an impact on their athletic performance. Research conducted by Wylleman and Lavallee recognizes retirement from high performance sport as a clearly identifiable moment. The authors suggest that athlete experiences which occur outside of the athletic career can directly affect the retirement experiences of high performance athletes. Therefore, Wylleman and Lavallee suggest a holistic approach should be used when studying athletic career transitions. The nature and types of transitions athletes' face throughout their athletic career are directly affected by the athletes psychological, social, academic, vocational, and financial aspects. There are two types of transitions: normative and non-normative. During normative transitions the athlete exits one stage and enters another, which makes the stage predictable and anticipated. Non-normative transitions are not predictable and are rarely ever planned. The transitions of athletes include career ending injuries, loss of personal coach, or deselection due to lack of skill. The unpredictable nature of non-normative transitions decreases the chance of the athlete experiencing a healthy transition. Wylleman and Lavallee's holistic approach to studying athletic career transitions resulted in a developmental model that takes a "beginning-to-end" perspective, and reflects the developmental, as well as the interactive nature of normative transitions at the athletic, psychological, social, academic/ vocational and athletic levels. The developmental model consists of four layers, (1) the top layer consists of the stages and transitions athletes face in their athletic development, (2) The second layer consists of the normative stages and transitions occurring at a psychological level (consisting of developmental stages of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood), (3) the third layer is representative of

the changes that occur in the athletes social development, (4) the final layer contains the specific stages and transitions at academic and vocational levels. Athletic sport careers are influenced not only by sport experiences, but also by non-sport experiences. Taking a holistic approach to understanding sport careers allows researchers to better understand experiences of high performance athletes who are transitioning from competitive sport to retirement.

Theoretical models developed by Stambulova (1994) and Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) provide understanding of high performance sport retirement experiences. Synthetic and analytic description models developed by Stambulova consider athletic career experiences such as length and achievements and explain how they may affect high performance sport retirement experiences. Stambulova also introduces seven potential crisis transitions that high performance athletes are vulnerable to experience. Theoretical models developed by Wylleman & Lavallee consider sport careers to have many influential contributors. These include sport career experiences, as well as non sport career experiences such as financial or vocational influences. Understanding how these theoretical models affect sport careers helps researchers better understand high performance athlete retirement experiences.

Research on High Performance Sport Retirement

Past research conducted surrounding high performance sport retirement focused on the negative aspects of retirement experiences, assuming retirement resulted in depression, or low self esteem (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). However, current research surrounding high performance sport retirement considers career termination as a unique open-ended process which may result in crisis, or more positively, as a chance for personal development (Alfermann & Stambulova). Many studies have shown that

voluntary withdraw from high performance sport is correlated with less difficult adaptation to post-sport life (Alfermann, 2000; Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004; Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001). Likewise, involuntary career termination has a higher likeliness of resulting in negative retirement experiences (i.e., depression, crisis transition, nonnormative career transition) (Alfermann, 2000; Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004; Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001). The quality of transition is also influenced by the gradualness of the athletic retirement (Cecić Erpič, 1998).

A study conducted by Webb, Nasco, Riley & Headrick (1998) consisting of 91 high school, college, or professional athletes explored relationships between athletic identity, psychological adjustment to retirement, and the reason for retirement. The authors suggest two components are expected to make retirement from high performance sport a different transition than retirement from other careers: athletic identity and the unique public versus private nature of athletic identity (Webb, Nasco, Riley & Headrick, 1998). Athletic identity refers to “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role” (Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993). Researchers have found individuals with strong athletic identities have a higher risk of experiencing difficulties from career withdraw (Lally, 2006; Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte, 2004; Lavallee, 2005). Athletic identity is typically recognized by the athlete early in life (Houle, Brewer & Kluck, 2010). For these athletes, the commitment to their sport results in a strong athletic identity. When retirement prevents the athlete from maintaining this identity, some athletes may struggle to redefine themselves (Lally, 2006). This is supported by research conducted by Lavallee & Robinson (2007) who found that any changes to athletic identity following career termination would be related to the overall success in coping

with career termination. Also, high level athletes may be more likely to experience traumatic experiences following career termination because athletic identity may be stronger among these athletes, and high level careers are often short in duration and end abruptly (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). High performance athletes, with strong athletic identities, are at a high risk of experiencing difficulties redefining themselves following career termination.

High performance athletic careers are often publically visible and displayed to a wider audience than other careers. In addition, athletic performance and the competitive nature of athletic careers rely on individual successes and failures as an appropriate evaluative method, which is often immediately available to public criticism (Webb, Nasco, Riley & Headrick, 1998). This creates a high degree of pressure on athletes to maintain high performance levels, which is rarely seen among other careers (Webb, et al., 1998). Variations in sport popularity may also impact retirement experiences. The uniqueness of sport public audiences may have an impact on a high performance athlete's retirement experiences. Athletes who have high sport popularity throughout the community may realize their athletic identity is connected to a larger community (ie., team, hometown, or country) (Webb, et al., 1998). Retirement from sports with a large public audience may also result in high performance athletes' feeling of loss of self. In contrast to sports with a large public audience, sports which have a small public audience may not have as large of an effect on athletes' ability to redefine themselves following retirement (Webb, et al, 1998). These athletes may not develop the strong community ties similar to athletes from sports with large public audiences (Webb, et al., 1998).

Therefore, redefining self identity may be easier for these athletes because they do not have the strong community ties.

Prior research has also considered the importance of other factors on athletic career termination which can be categorized by athletic and non-athletic factors. Athletic factors include the voluntariness and gradualness of career termination, personal subjective evaluation of sport achievements, planning for life after sports, and athletic identity (Cecić Erpič, Wylleman & Zupančič, 2004). Non athletic factors include chronological age, educational status and the occurrence of non-athletic transitions (Cecić Erpič, Wylleman & Zupančič). The current research will seek to understand the similarities and differences among athletic and non-athletic retirement experiences of athletes from professional and high performance amateur sport.

Rationale

Alfermann and Stambulova (2007) suggest some potential future directions surrounding athletic career transitions. They suggest areas where future research needs to be conducted to help inform career transitions models, and help generate understanding of athletic career transitions. The areas suggested by Alfermann and Stambulova are: terminology, methodology, and research and interventions. The transition models presented in this thesis require evaluation according to Alfermann and Stambulova. Research surrounding these models may lead to theoretical improvements and crisis intervention improvements. According to Alfermann and Stambulova additional research is also needed to investigate the differences of transitions among different types of sports, and different sport settings (i.e., professional vs. high performance amateur) to help distinguish differences/ similarities among high performance athlete retirement experiences. The similarities and differences among professional versus high

performance amateur athlete retirement experiences is the focus of the present study. Quality of career transitions are effected by four determinants, voluntary or involuntary withdraw, planning, athletic identity, and social resources (Alfermann & Stambulova). Understanding retirement experiences of high performance athletes may help athletes and professionals in planning for retirement because additional research may help develop theoretical models and intervention programs. This may be accomplished by increasing awareness that retirement from specific sport contexts may be different for athletes. The holistic approach to this research may also change theoretical models to understand athletic sport careers are affected by experiences in and out of sport. In addition, information gathered during this study may help increase the number of social resources available to high performance athletes during career transitions because theoretical models may use this research to begin structuring transitional coping resources from specific sport contexts. Increased knowledge of similarities and differences of specific sport retirement experiences may help professionals understand what athletes may experience during their sport retirement. Therefore resources may improve by becoming more specific and refined. Finally, this research may help improve the quality of social resources (i.e., transition coping literature) offered to athletes in career transition because increased research will help professionals who develop social resources to improve theoretical models and develop new and improved coping strategies. Currently several resources are available to athletes retiring from sport such as, athlete transition models, career planning models, interview skill training, resume preparation, managing change techniques, goal setting, media training, public speaking lessons, self-marketing strategies, study skills (Gould & Carson, 2008). Many of these resources were available

to athletes 15 years ago when participants in this study retired from sport however, improvements in research and sport retirement has increased the accessibility, number of resources available, and overall awareness of resources available to athletes in transition. Therefore, athletes retiring today may have quicker access to retirement transition literature to help prepare or cope with retiring from high performance sport.

Research Question

With the current need to research different sport settings, I am interested in answering the following question: What are the retirement experiences of male athletes who have retired from professional sport versus athletes who have retired from amateur sport? Answering this question can increase understanding of high performance athlete retirement experiences and help contribute to theoretical models regarding high performance athlete career transitions. Information gathered during this research study may also help inform career transition intervention models. Increasing understanding of high performance athlete retirement experiences may help athletes avoid crisis caused by career termination. Also, it may lead to more athletes experiencing healthy career transition retirement experiences.

Hypotheses

It is expected that male athletes who participate in professional sport may have different retirement experiences (i.e., accessibility to coping resources, increased difficulty to redefine personal identity, increased chance of experiencing crisis transition) compared to male athletes who participate in high performance amateur sport.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Participants

The sample of participants was composed of five former professional male hockey players, and four former national level male rugby players who have retired from sport within the last 15 years. The sample ranged in age from 32 to 55. All four of the retired rugby athletes voluntarily retired from their sport career, and four of the five hockey athletes voluntarily retired from their sport career. The fifth hockey athlete was training for hockey at the time of his retirement but was not offered a contract to continue playing. Research suggests athletes who voluntarily retire from sport will have a higher chance of experiencing a healthy retirement transition from sport compared to athletes who involuntarily retire (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).

Participants were male because men have higher sport participation rates than women (Statistic Canada, 2005). In 2005 36% of Canadian men participated in sport compared to 21% of Canadian women (Statistics Canada). Only men participated in this process because higher participation rates increased potential participants, and there were too many variables to compare similarities and differences among male and females with such a small participant group.

Instruments

Each athlete participated in a qualitative interview following phenomenological interview procedures with the primary researcher. A phenomenological interview perspective was chosen to describe what athletes experienced and how they experienced retirement from high performance sport (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological research describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a phenomenon (i.e., athletic retirement). The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual

experiences with a phenomenon to a description of a universal essence (Creswell). This description consists of “what” they experience and “how” they experienced it. This research followed a hermeneutical phenomenological perspective which is interpreting the “texts” of life through lived experiences of individuals (van Manen, 1990). In depth interviews were conducted using open-ended questions (See Appendix A). Demographic information was collected first, followed by information regarding the reasons why they no longer participate in sport. Questions sought to provide a holistic understanding (i.e., psychological, social, academic, personal, and vocational aspects) of each athlete’s retirement experiences based on theoretical models developed by Wyllemann & Lavallee (2004). To reduce interview bias each interviewee was asked the same questions with consistent wording and question order. Each interview was tape recorded along with written notes. Data analyses consisted of interview transcriptions, highlighting significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how athletes perceive athletic career retirement (Creswell). Data was analyzed through selective coding to formalise relationships of athlete’s experiences into the theoretical models (Creswell). Following transcribing of the interviews copies of the transcripts were sent to each participant to allow them to review the transcript and edit or omit any statements as necessary.

Procedure

After obtaining ethics approval from the University of Manitoba’s Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board, participants were recruited through the Winnipeg Jets Alumni Association, and the Manitoba Provincial Rugby Association. Each participant was contacted through email or phone and sent information detailing the general purpose of the study (see Appendix B). Participants interested in participating were asked to reply

by email to the primary researcher. Following participant recruitment and consent (see Appendix C), interviews were conducted and analyzed. Interviews were conducted in person with the primary researcher and were approximately 25-40 minutes in length. Prior to conducting interviews, the interview guide was pilot tested to ensure the questions were not leading and were properly worded.

Transcribed interviews were analyzed following Burnard's method of thematic content analysis (1991). The aim of this analysis was to produce a detailed and systemic recording of themes and issues that emerged among the interview transcriptions to create categories of common themes. The analysis consisted of 14 stages, which provided detailed description of content analysis during each stage. In stage one, notes were made during and following each interview regarding the main topics that emerged during the interview procedure. During stage two, transcripts were created and read with notes made regarding additional themes that emerged during the transcription and reading process. In stage three, transcripts were read again and headings were made to describe all aspects of the content. In stage four, the list of categories was reviewed and grouped together under higher-order headings. In stage five, headings were worked through and similar or repetitious headings were grouped together to produce a final list of headings. Stage six consisted of my thesis advisor reading through the meaning units to create a category system without seeing the researcher's list. The lists were then compared to the list created by the researcher to increase validity. This helped create more appropriate category headings and group the meaning units under the appropriate category headings. During stage seven, transcripts were re-read along with the new list of categories to determine the degree the list of categories covers all aspects of the interview. In stage

eight, each transcript was coded under headings and category lists and, in stage nine, coded sections of the interview were selected and collected together. Stage ten involved the placing of the selected sections under appropriate headings followed by stage eleven where quotes were double checked for the appropriateness of the category system. During stage twelve, a table was created to group all sections together for direct reference when writing up the findings. Finally, stages thirteen and fourteen involved the writing up process using the table of sections and the researcher deciding how to write up the data. When analyzing the data I attempted to remove all of my own preconceptions about the results of the interviews, to move back and forth through the responses of the participants and compare the responses to others experiences and bracket out my own experience from the data.

Chapter 4: Results

Similarities and differences among high performance rugby and hockey athlete retirement experiences can be found in Table 1.1 on the following page. In total, 162 meaning units were selected from the interview transcripts: 100 meaning units from the retired hockey player interviews and 62 meaning units from the retired rugby player interviews. Meaning units were any significant statements the participants said regarding their retirement experience. During the interviews some of the transcriptions were related to the athlete's retirement experience and some were not related to retirement from sport. Therefore, only information pertaining to athletes retirement from sport were selected as meaning units. Meaning units were selected from 4 themes: social, vocational, educational and personal. Of the 100 meaning units selected from the hockey interviews, 34 meaning units related to social influences, 12 meaning units related to vocational influences, 12 meaning units related to educational influences, and 42 meaning units related to personal influences on sport career retirement. Of the 62 meaning units selected from the rugby interviews, 35 meaning units related to social influences, 9 influences related to vocational influences, 3 meaning units related to educational influences, and 15 meaning units related to personal influences on sport career retirement.

Social Influences on Sport Retirement

Hockey and Rugby: Influence of Family on Sport Retirement

Categories related to the influence of family on sport retirement can be found in Figures 1a and 1b on the following pages. Both hockey (3 of 5 participants) and rugby (3 of 4 participants) athletes described family as having a large supportive role throughout their high performance sport career and their retirement. In particular, family was

Table 1.1: Similarities and differences experienced by high performance rugby and hockey athletes during retirement

Similarities	Differences
<p><i>Social Influences (Family)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential in sport involvement • Influential in sport development • Supportive during development • Supportive during retirement transition • Influential in making the decision to retire <p><i>Social Influences (Friends)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement in sport development <p><i>Social Influences (Teammates)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of relationships following retirement • Discontinuation of relationships following retirement • Recognized relationships as a special kind of bond <p><i>Social Influences (Coaches)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Similarities were identified from the meaning units selected 	<p><i>Social Influences (Family)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No differences were identified from the meaning units selected <p><i>Social Influences (Friends)</i></p> <p>Hockey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of friendships during sport career <p>Rugby</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support during sport career <p><i>Social Influences (Teammates)</i></p> <p>Rugby</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified teammates as having an influence on athletes' retirement transitions <p><i>Social Influences (Coaches)</i></p> <p>Rugby</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified coaches as having an influence on retirement transitions • Discussed coaches as having involvement in their sport development
<p><i>Educational Influences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro-active steps regarding education • Education from sport culture 	<p><i>Educational Influences</i></p> <p>Hockey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified an awareness of the importance of education • Identified no formal advantage of education <p>Rugby</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Described the extent education had on their retirement transition
<p><i>Vocational Influences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed career satisfaction • Both groups of athletes had examples of vocational preparation prior to retirement, as well as no vocational preparation prior to retirement 	<p><i>Vocational Influences</i></p> <p>Rugby</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify their sport as influencing the type of employment they sought prior to retirement.
<p><i>Personal Influences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued athletic identity following retirement • Identified retirement as a difficult transition to cope with • Identified feelings of separation from teammates following retirement • Identified a lack of preparation for retirement 	<p><i>Personal Influences</i></p> <p>Hockey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggled to redefine personal identity following retirement • Feelings of pride from recognition of being a high performance athlete • Identified a lack of social resources and support during retirement • Described feeling prepared to retire from sport • Described lessons learned from retirement <p>Rugby</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified non-athletic identity following retirement • Described the decision to retire was made independently

Figure 1a- Social Influences: Family Theme (Hockey)

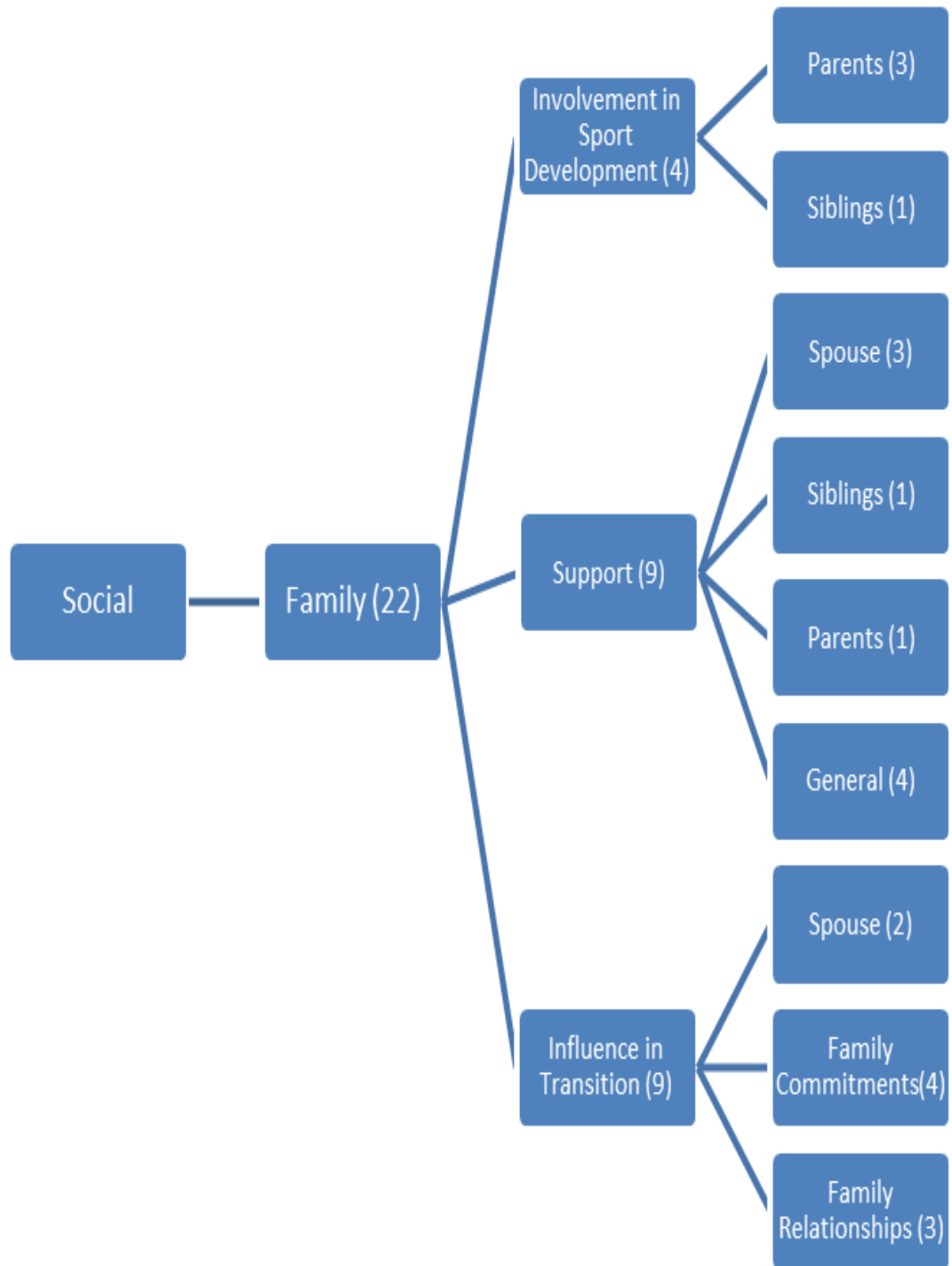
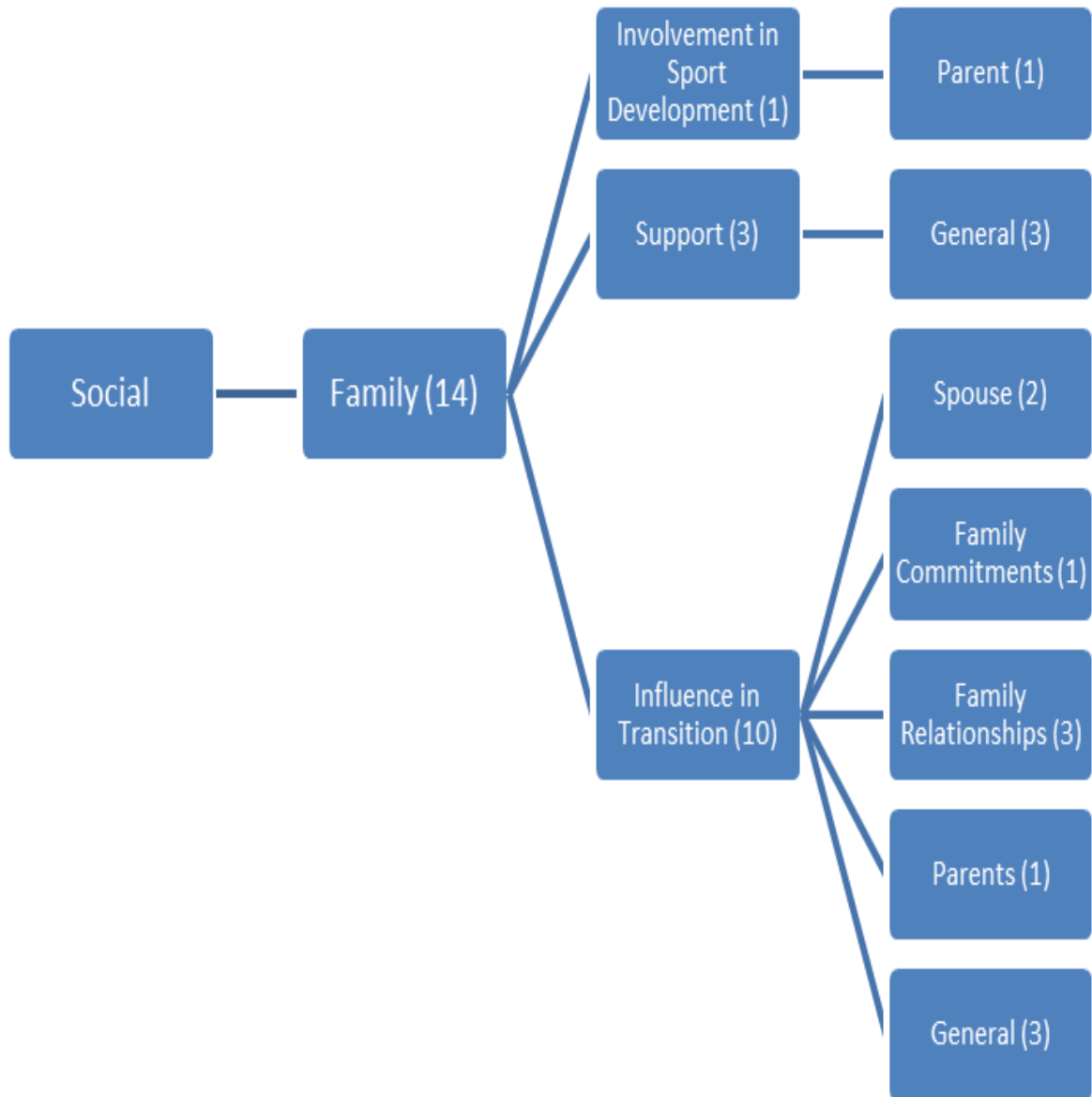


Figure 1b- Social Influences: Family Theme (Rugby)



supportive of the athletes' extensive training schedules, travel requirements, and commitment to personal development throughout their sport career. Also, family provided support during the athlete's retirement transition: "I mean being in the comfort of you know, of family and, and living in a comfortable home and all that made the transition a lot smoother than it possibly, than it could have been" (Rugby Athlete 1; R100). However, one of the athletes interviewed felt his family could have been more supportive during his retirement:

I would have hoped for a little bit more support and assistance in um, sort of getting my feet wet in the real world. Assisting in things like, contacts and ah, um. So there were some things that I felt were ah, in some family instances that they could have been more helpful. (Hockey Athlete 1; H100)

Both groups (2 of 5 hockey athletes and 3 of 4 rugby athletes) describe family as influential in making the decision to retire from playing high performance sports. More specifically, both groups identified their parents, spouses, family relationships or family commitments as having input in their retirement decision. Most of the athletes describe discussing retirement with their family members but were given independence in making the final decision to retire:

They supported me, um basically. I mean, well my wife ah, had me looking at, um, physically the toll that ah, you know, I may be taking on my body at the time. Family was very supportive of, you know, my continuing to play though. Whether it was my, my wife or my kids, so I mean, you know, it was a, in the end it's your decision, but you know, in my case everybody had some input, but

at the end of the day it was my decision as to when to walk away. (Rugby Athlete 2; R200)

Both groups (3 of 5 hockey athletes and 1 of 4 rugby athletes) also described their family being influential in their involvement and development of their sport career at a young age. In particular family was influential in introducing the athletes to sports at a young age, providing equipment to play, driving them to practices or games. Many of the athletes describe sport as having a unifying effect on family relationships:

I think sports has had a, for my personal family a very unifying um, effect on our relationships. It's something all my brothers and my sisters, and I have 5, we all share. They all love hockey, they all love going to the games, now especially now that the Jets are back. Um, so we do have this very common bond and ah, that's always been there and I think probably will always be there. (Hockey Athlete 3; H300)

Hockey and Rugby: Influences of Friends on Sport Retirement

Categories related to the influence of friends on sport retirement can be found in Figures 2a and 2b on the following page. Both retired hockey and rugby athletes identified friends from outside of their sport community as having a very minimal role in their sport retirement. Both groups (1 of 5 hockey athletes and 1 of 4 rugby athletes), however, identify friends as one of the reasons they began participating in sport. One hockey athlete, in particular, describes the difficulty of maintaining strong friendships during his high performance sport career:

Um, you know once again personally I was you know moving from city to city quite a bit at the end of my career and you know that brings with it a lot of um, you know there's a lot of alone time I guess. Sometimes it's tough as far as

Figure 2a- Social Influences: Friends Theme (Hockey)

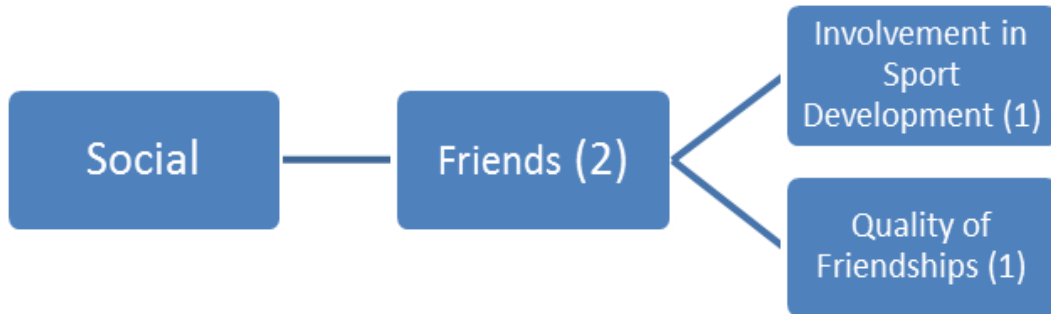
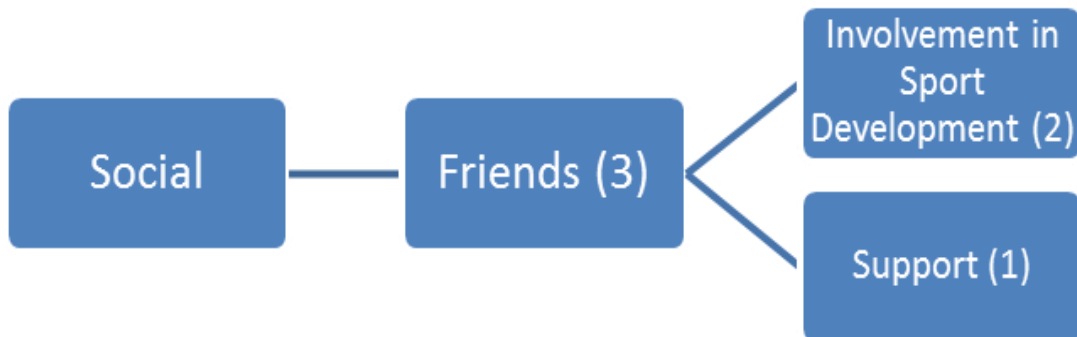


Figure 2b- Social Influences: Friends Theme (Rugby)



building relationships and strong, and long relationships. So that can be difficult but for the most part it has remained fine yeah. (Hockey Athlete 2; H200)

One rugby athlete recognizes his friends to have had an influence on his sport development following his retirement:

I just mentioned a couple of buddies of my [mentions friends name] who used to be the captain of Canada's National team, a good friend of mine. He was involved in coaching development, and [mentions another friends name] both these guys were with Rugby Canada, now were with International Rugby Board. Um, they had an awful lot to do with getting me involved in coaching development. (Rugby Athlete 3; R300)

Hockey and Rugby: Influence of Teammates on Sport Retirement

Categories related to the influence of teammates on sport retirement can be found in Figures 3a and 3b on the following page. Continued Relationships with teammates after retirement are recognized by both groups of athletes. Four of five retired hockey players and three of the four retired rugby players interviewed identified maintaining relationships with teammates:

Um, the hockey, the hockey friendships don't really lose a beat. I don't stay immediately connected to a lot of them, but in a lot of get togethers ah you know, you get back it's like a, it's like a mini reunion and you share old stories and ah, I mean it's like you never, you never left each other (Hockey Athlete 1; H100)

Both groups of athletes also identify relationships with teammates to discontinue following sport retirement. Two of the rugby athletes interviewed and one of the retired

Figure 3a- Social Influences: Teammate Theme (Hockey)

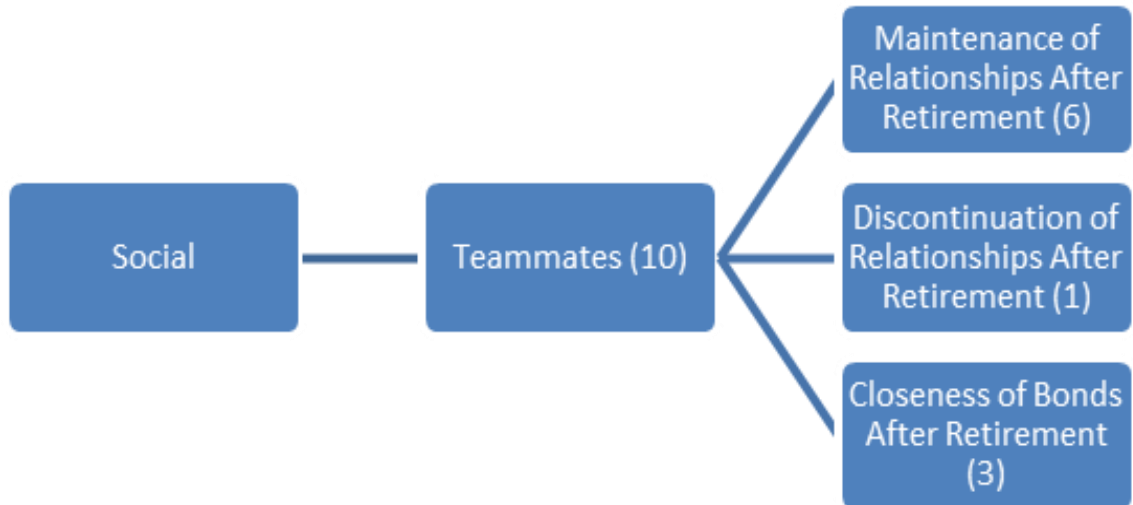
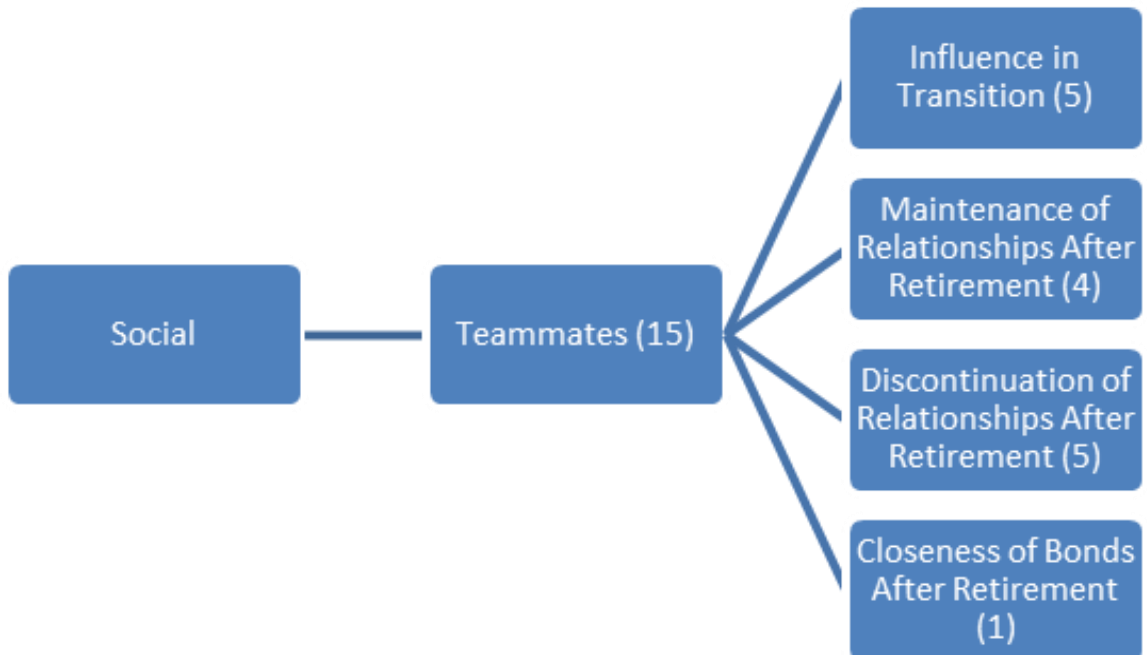


Figure 3b- Social Influences: Teammates Theme (Rugby)



hockey players interviewed recognized a change in relationships with teammates following sport retirement:

Well, its, I mean it makes it difficult as I said, um not seeing those people day in day out, um, or you know, three, four times a week that you been doing, and all the sudden you sever those relationships, it's not, you know, you make the effort especially probably more so in the first year to stay in contact but, you know, your life is changing your not ah, going out to the fields, you're seeing those people on a regular basis, um, so I mean you know, obviously all of those relationships change from some degree or another. (Rugby Athlete 2; R200)

Both groups of athletes (3 of 5 hockey and 1 of 4 rugby athletes) interviewed recognized relationships with teammates as a special kind of bond that will always remain with them following sport retirement:

I am able to see guys on many teams and the thing about hockey, once you've battled together and played the game together, whether it's years, months, whatever, once you see those same people again that relationship picks up right where it left off. (Hockey Athlete 5; H500)

Rugby: Influence of Teammates on Sport Retirement

Two of the four retired rugby athletes also identified teammates to have influence on their retirement transition. More specifically, teammates were recognized as attempting to convince rugby athletes to continue playing and delay their sport retirement:

You know, I knew physically that I was done and the people that I played with kind of knew that physically I was done, but they were still encouraging me to still play. Um, but they knew that wasn't in my best interest but they still wanted

me to play. Ah, so it was really having to have that separation from those coaches and players. (Rugby Athlete 4; R400)

Rugby: Influence of Coaches on Sport Retirement

Categories related to the influence of coaches on sport retirement can be found in Figure 4 on the following page. Two of the four high performance rugby players discussed coaches as having an influence on their retirement from sport. Rugby athletes identified coaches as trying to convince players to play longer than they are capable due to a lack of high performance players in Canada:

Yeah, definitely improvement should have been there and needs to be there. I mean, I still see it today um, you know going through what I went through 10 years ago. Um, I see people going through that same pressure today. People are telling them that they are still capable when really they're not but it becomes a number issue. It's almost as if some people want to use others for their successes. (Rugby Athlete 4; R400)

Educational Influences on Sport Retirement

Hockey and Rugby: Impact of Education on Sport Retirement

Categories related to the influence of education on sport retirement can be found in Figures 5a and 5b on the following pages. Both groups of athletes (2 of 5 hockey and 1 of 4 rugby athletes) identify taking a pro-active approach regarding education. Many of the athletes recognized the importance of education following retirement:

I made up my mind that, that I was going to continue to work hard and apply myself you know, first of all at university. I went and got my commerce degree

Figure 4- Social Influences: Coach Theme (Rugby)

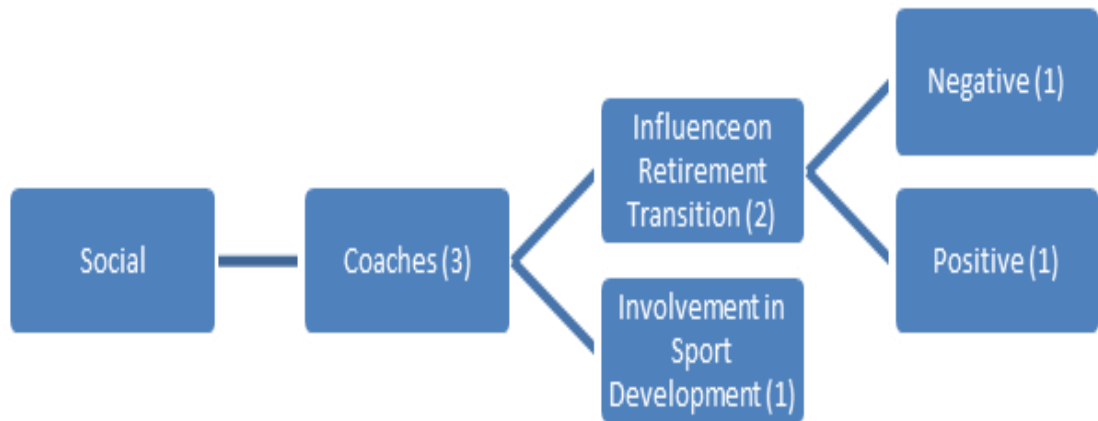


Figure 5a- Educational Influences on Sport Retirement (Hockey)

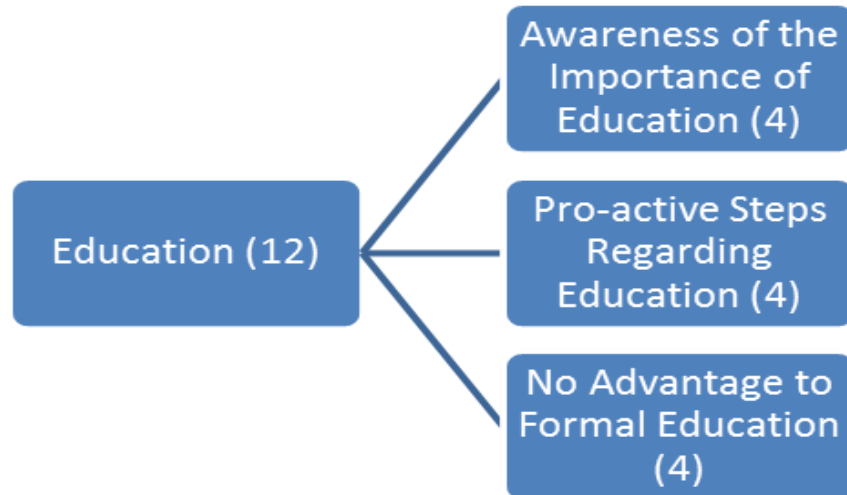
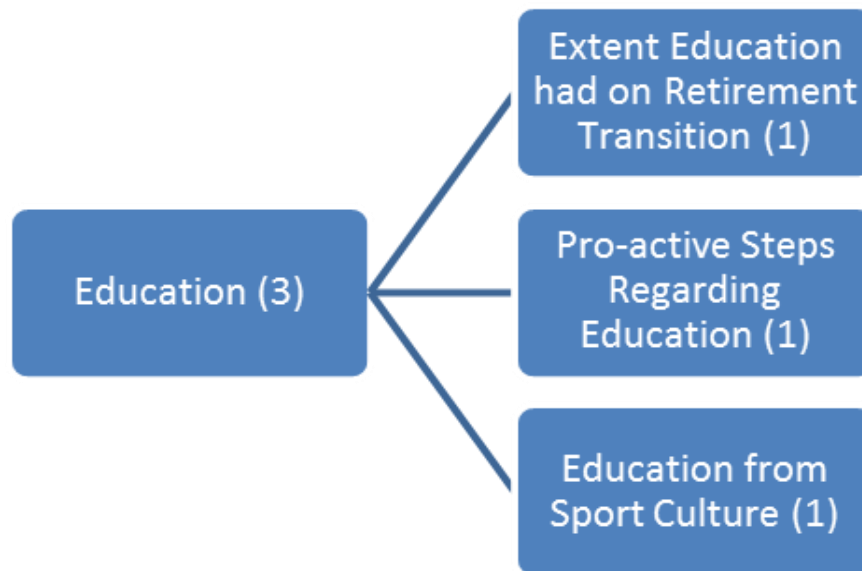


Figure 5b- Educational Influence on Sport Retirement (Rugby)



and then I start you know, looking for work opportunities after that. (Hockey Athlete 4; H400)

Both groups (1 of 5 hockey and 1 of 4 rugby athletes) also identified education gained through their sport culture or life experiences on their sport retirement. Most of the athletes identify education gained through life experiences to have the largest impact on their sport retirement: “I had the masters studies but also another educational opportunity and that was the rugby culture” (Rugby Athlete 3; R300). Another example states:

Um, my education, I don't think it really played much of a role. Um, again I have used this analogy before I think there is all types of different education. You know, obviously there is academic, um, and you know everybody studies for specific careers. Well my career was hockey, the sport of hockey, I played it, I had some of the top coaches throughout my 15 year professional career. Um, and in that time I don't think there is anywhere better to learn my craft than the way I did for that many years. (Hockey Athlete 5; H500)

Hockey: Impact of Education on Sport Retirement

Four of the five retired hockey athletes also identified academic education to have no formal advantage during their sport retirement:

Well, I thought at the time the biggest thing was getting an education. Was continuing my studies and, and ah, at least getting a post secondary education. I thought was the most important, I mean. After the fact its not, it's not crucial. (Hockey Athlete 1; H100)

Three of the five retired hockey athletes also identified having an awareness of the importance of education at the time of their sport retirement.

I think I realized that um, in order to have a successful work career for the rest of my life I needed a you know, I needed some assets. You know, and I realized that going to university was one of those. So, ah, I guess in one sense not having that at the time of retiring made me realize that I needed to get that. So, so that was a key point for sure. (Hockey Athlete 4; H400)

Vocational Influences on Sport Retirement

Hockey and Rugby: Career Planning

Categories related to the vocational influences on sport retirement can be found in Figures 6a and 6b on the following page. Both groups of retired athletes discuss the extent to which they prepared for a vocational career following their sport career retirement. There was little consistency among one group over the other regarding career planning at the time of their sport retirement. Athletes from both hockey and rugby (2 of 5 hockey and 2 of 4 rugby athletes) prepared for careers following their sport retirement and they identify that preparation made the transition easier:

You know it wasn't like I retired into nothing. So that has made it a lot easier. I retired into the game still, I am still very much active part it's just a different role. Um, so it has been a real seamless transition. (Hockey Athlete 5; H500)

Both groups also had athletes (1 of 5 hockey and 2 of 4 rugby athletes) who did not prepare for a vocational career following their sport retirement. These athletes describe the transition as difficult and many struggle to find a career which provides personal satisfaction:

I didn't really know what the heck, what I wanted to get into after, and so yeah there was about a year and a half after I was done, ah (...) well sorry no more

Figure 6a- Vocational Influences on Sport Retirement (Hockey)

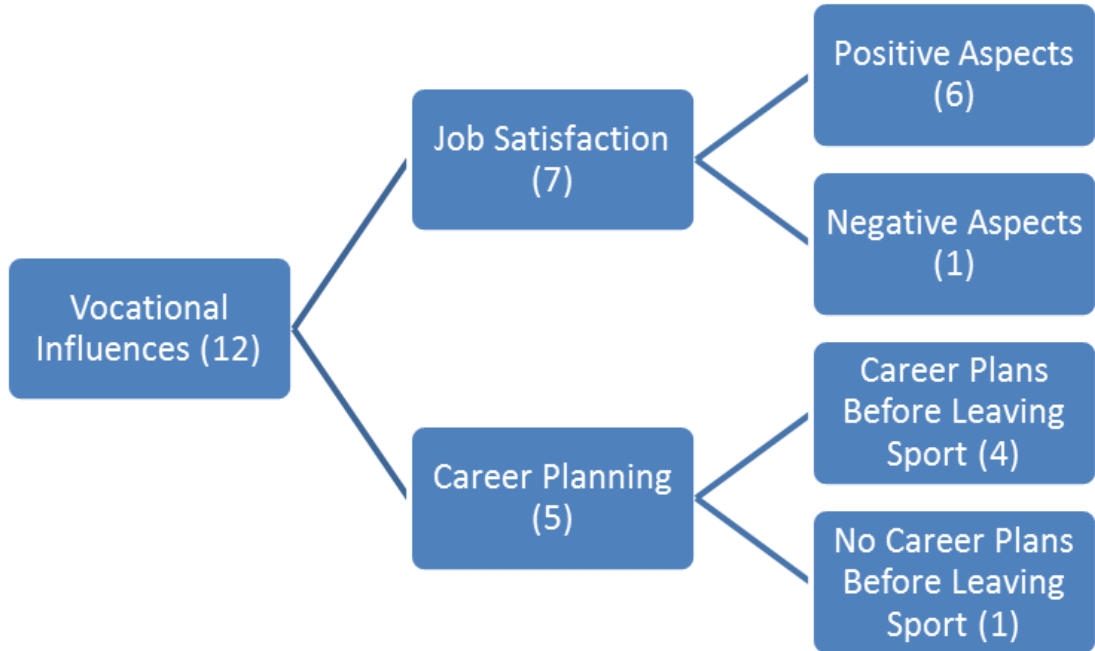


Figure 6b- Vocational Influences on Sport Retirement (Rugby)



than that about two years, until I finally found a career as a fire fighter. (Rugby Athlete 1; R100)

Both groups (2 of 5 hockey and 2 of 4 rugby athletes) identify their sport career as having an influence on the type of employment they were seeking following their sport retirement. More specifically, athletes identified their sport careers as opening doors to new opportunities or preparing them to have the abilities to succeed at a new career:

Um, because part of what I was doing with my, my career was similar to the kind of things that I gravitated into, coaching development and stuff like that. So, I think they were related, in one just sort of mirrored the other one so nicely, you know, that it made it a common, made sense type of, of move to go an be involved in, I don't coach a lot of provincial teams but I work with all the coaches. (Rugby Athlete 3; R300)

Both groups of athletes (4 of 5 hockey and 1 of 4 rugby athletes) also discussed career satisfaction following sport retirement. Only one retired rugby athlete spoke regarding his career satisfaction compared to four of the five retired hockey players. All four of the retired hockey athletes and the single rugby athlete identified positive satisfaction with their sport career employment. However, some of the athletes transitioned quickly into a fulfilling career, while others struggled to find a career that was personally satisfying:

I'm gonna kind of delve into the, the golf course management business. A friend of mine is already in the business and needs kind of a partner so um, so you know for the first time in a while, you know I am looking forward to doing

something that I know I can be good at and enjoy um, so yeah that's exciting for me. (Hockey Athlete 2; H200)

Personal Influences on Sport Retirement

Hockey and Rugby: Personal Identity

Categories related to the personal influences on sport retirement can be found in Figures 7a and 7b on the following pages. Both groups of athletes (4 of 5 hockey and 2 of 4 rugby athletes) identified themselves as athletes during their sport career, which continued following their sport retirement: "I've come to by definition calling myself a professional athlete and if someone wanted to be more specific, well what kind of athlete I would say professional hockey player, that's my job, that's my profession" (Hockey Athlete 1; H100).

Hockey: Personal Identity

All of the retired high performance hockey players still described themselves as an athlete following their sport retirement. Most of the athletes embraced the identity of an athlete and described a feeling a pride of being a high performance hockey player. One athlete discussed the difficulty redefining himself: "Yeah, I guess it has been difficult leaving it behind. It's not that I want to fully leave that identity behind but, but in another way I want to gain some personal satisfaction from doing something else now" (Hockey Athlete 2; H200).

Rugby: Personal Identity

Rugby athletes identify a change in personal identity from their sport career to retirement from sport. Three of the four rugby athletes still consider themselves athletes however, all described they are a different type of athlete. The majority of athletes identified themselves with descriptive words such as hardworking, charismatic, or

Figure 7a- Personal Influences on Sport Retirement (Hockey)

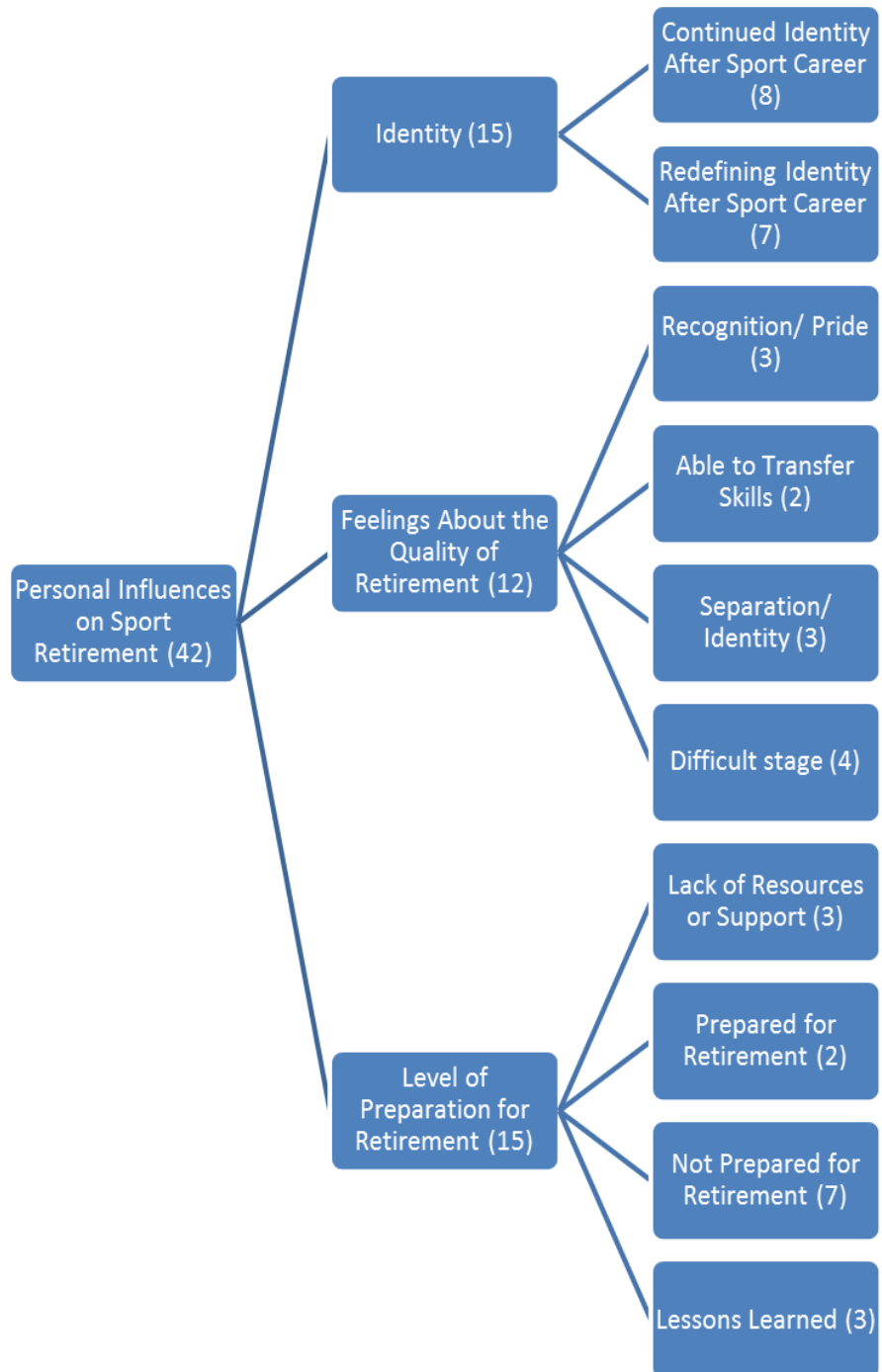
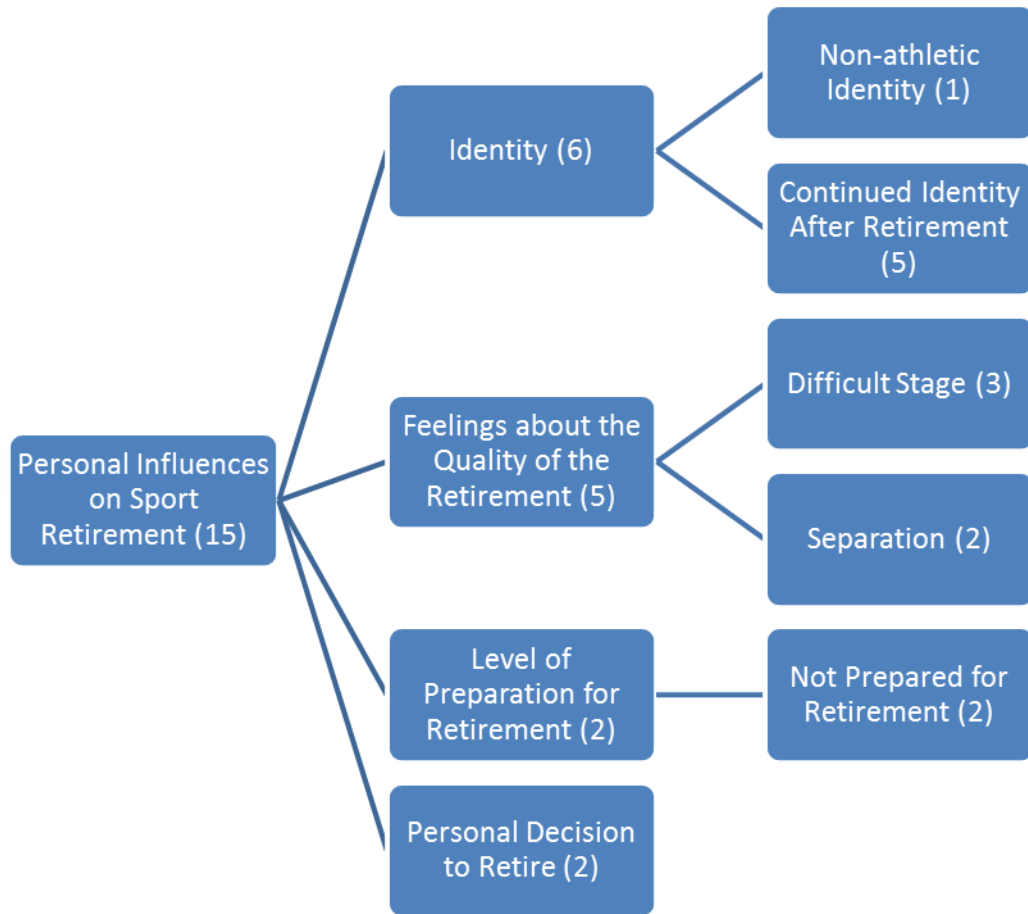


Figure 7b- Personal Influences on Sport Retirement (Rugby)



identify themselves with their new career: “I am a professional fire fighter slash paramedic with the City of Winnipeg, ah, a dad and a husband” (Rugby Athlete 1. R100).

Hockey and Rugby: Feelings about the Quality of Retirement

Both groups of athletes (3 of 5 hockey and 2 of 4 rugby athletes) describe their sport retirement as a difficult stage of their lives:

My first year I stopped playing rugby I ended up playing almost 100 games of golf that next summer and ah, it was tough. So, I tried to find something else to replace it but it didn't work that well. (Rugby Athlete 4; R400)

Three of five retired hockey players and two of four rugby players also described feelings of separation with teammates and from playing the game following their sport career retirement:

For me it was a little bit of a shock. I knew that it was going to be tough um, people ask me to this day if I miss playing and my answer is quite honestly every day, I mean I miss playing every day. (Hockey Athlete 2; H200)

Hockey: Feelings about the Quality of Retirement

One of the retired hockey athletes also described feeling proud about receiving recognition for being professional hockey players:

One thing I found that was kind of, being a professional athlete that has always been a, a real sort of um, pat on the back is you always get that bit of recognition of, oh you're a you know, you're a professional hockey player, you played in the NHL so, so there was ah, um, always even though it's fading, that little bit of celebrity status and that, that was always very special. (Hockey Athlete 1; H100)

Three retired hockey players also identified feeling capable to transfer skills learned throughout their hockey career following their sport retirement:

On the positive side um, I you know, I worked really hard at being an athlete and being a hockey player. Ah, and being a good professional player. So what I ended up doing was you know, using those positive attributes to apply them to something new and different in my post playing career. (Hockey Athlete 4; H400)

Hockey and Rugby: Level of Preparation for Retirement

Four of the five retired hockey athletes and two of the four retired rugby athletes describe a lack of preparation for their retirement transition:

Life after hockey was not a real big topic I guess um, you know admittedly as a player myself and as a young kid you know you sometimes are a little bit naïve and maybe shy away from talking about a post career. When you're you know in the middle of your career. Its, I can can't speak for anybody else but for me you know, you're riding such a high I guess when you're at that level and sometimes you can be pretty naïve your post career kinda situation. (Hockey Athlete 2; H200)

Hockey: Level of Preparation for Retirement

Three of the five hockey athletes described a lack of social resources or support leading up to, and following their sport career retirement. Many athletes did not seek support or resources or were unaware that support or resources may be available to help them through their retirement transition:

I remember it being a very solitary thing I mean there, ah, I wasn't aware nor did I go looking really for any resources you know, either workshops or psychological assistance, measures or anything of that nature. So, basically I just sort of figured it out on my own and ah, and there were ups and downs because

of the, because of the strong tie to that previous lifestyle, or not lifestyle but ah, you know work style and environment. (Hockey Athlete 4; H400)

Two of the five hockey athletes interviewed described feeling prepared for sport retirement. Their feelings of preparation are credited to having a long fulfilling career and being ready to start a new chapter of their lives, or having an opportunity to transition into a new career which they always had interest in pursuing:

I have played the game, it has been part of my life for you know, since I moved away from home at 15 for junior hockey so for 20 plus years hockey has been my life so, I don't think there is any better preparation I could have asked for to jumping into analyzing a sport in which has been my life not just part of it, it has been my life. (Hockey Athlete 5; H500)

After experiencing retirement from high performance sport two of the hockey athletes describe lessons learned, or advice they would provide high performance hockey players who are going through sport retirement:

I think it is very important to be able to bounce some ideas off whoever it is your agent, your parents, your coaches, um yeah because it can be a shock to the system when you stop playing and it's better to slowly but surely prepare yourself you know year after year instead of in the final year of your career saying ok what am I going to do next. (Hockey Athlete 2; H200)

Rugby: Personal Decision to Retire

Two of the four retired rugby athletes describe their decision to retire from sport was made independently: "I mean I think my parents, um, you know family, gave me that independence to kind of figure things out on my own, like I think my dad obviously was kinda dropping hints here and there" (Rugby Athlete 1; R100).

Chapter 5: Discussion

Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes throughout their sport career provided a framework to better understand retirement experiences of high performance athletes. Wylleman and Lavallee recognize transitions occurring during an athletic career are affected by athletic, individual, psychosocial, vocational and academic influences. The purpose of the current study was to examine how each of these influences affects high performance male athletes' perception of career termination and identify similarities and differences between high profile sport and low profile sport retirement. The results of this study suggested retirement from high performance sport is affected by athletic, individual, psychosocial, vocational and academic influences. The results of this study highlighted multiple examples of how these influences affect athletes' retirement transitions following discontinuation of their sport career. The discussion will focus on the similarities and differences experienced by professional versus high performance amateur athletes during their retirement transitions.

Social Influence on Sport Retirement

From the interviews it is clear that family has a large role in both highly popular and lesser popular athletes' retirement transition. Family support is important during an athlete's sport career development (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Both groups of athletes in this study identified family as being influential in their sport development early on in their sport career. Family was also recognized by both groups of athletes to influence decisions made throughout their sport career. Throughout an athlete's sport career, parental expectations influence many decisions such as, which activities to participate in, the intensity and effort expended, and the athlete's actual performance level (Eccles &

Harrold, 1991). As athletes progress to adolescents and transition to high performance sport, parental roles change from an involved role to a more supportive role (Bloom, 1985; Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Kirk, Carlson, O'Connor, Burke, Davis, & Glover, 1997). Both groups of athletes interviewed during this study recognize family as having a large supportive role during their sport career retirement. Family is also identified as having a large supportive role regarding decisions during athletes' sport careers (Côté, 1999), which is extended beyond athletic careers into retirement. Parents, spouses, family relationships, or family commitments were all identified by both groups of athletes interviewed, to have influenced athletes' decision to retire from high performance sport. Although all of the athletes who participated in this study recognized family as being influential throughout their sport development, it is important to recognize that family relationships and bonds can vary from family to family. All of the athletes described their family as having an influential role throughout their sport career however this study relied on their own perceptions of the role their family had during their sport career. Therefore, each athletes' family may still have had very different levels of involvement among the athletes who participated in this study but the athletes recognized their family as having a role during their sport career and sport career retirement. Both groups of athletes described family as having a large role throughout their sport career, with commonalities regarding their sport development, family support, and having an influential role during their retirement transition. There were no differences among the retired hockey athletes or the retired rugby athletes regarding family influences on their sport career. Perhaps there were no unique meaning units selected regarding the athletes family members because each athlete recognized their family as having involvement

toward their sport career. The involvement levels, and styles may have been unique from family to family but each athlete described their family as having similar characteristics throughout their sport career and sport career retirement.

A considerable amount of research suggests that sport can result in the development of strong friendships (Weiss & Smith, 2002; Weiss & Smith, 1999; Weiss, Smith & Theeboom, 1996). Friends are recognized by both groups of athletes to have had significant role in the decision to become involved in sport (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009; Carr & Fitzpatrick, 2011). However, friends outside of a sport context were recognized by all of the athletes interviewed to have had a minimal role in their sport retirement. While conducting the interviews some of the athletes spoke about the difference among relationships they experienced between their friends from a sport context compared to friends outside of a sport context. Friends outside a sport context may have had little input in athletes retirement transitions because the athletes may like to keep these relationships separate from their sport careers and they may not have been comfortable involving them or seeking advice from these friends. Although little was said regarding the role friends had during sport retirement for both groups of athletes, one of the hockey athletes described the difficulty of maintaining strong friendships throughout his sport career due to constantly moving from city to city during his professional career. The quality of social relationships can affect athletes' performance levels, resistance to dropping out, enjoyment, and ability to cope with and recover from injury (Rees, 2007). Moving from city to city during an athlete's playing career was only identified by hockey athletes. This may be because hockey, as a high profile sport, has more participants

which results in higher competition for playing positions compared to low profile sport, and constantly moving makes it difficult to develop strong friendships.

Sport creates a social context where relationships with teammates may be positive or negative (Smith, 2007). This study determined relationships developed with teammates throughout a sport career continue following sport career retirement. Both groups of athletes describe these relationships as a special kind of bond that is developed through years of participating in sport together. This is supported by research conducted by Weiss & Smith (1999) who determined that sport has potential to build strong, lasting relationships. However, both groups of athletes who participated in this study also reported that relationships with teammates discontinued following retirement from sport. Relocation following retirement, or separation from teammates was indicated as the reason relationships with teammates discontinued. However, discontinued relationships are specific to sport careers. Relationships with teammates may have been recognized to discontinue because it may be difficult to maintain strong friendships with all of one's teammates due to each athlete going their separate ways following retirement. Retired hockey players interviewed during this study did not seek support, or advice from teammates previous to their sport career retirement. This is different than retired rugby players, who describe teammates as trying to convince athletes to continue participating in high performance sport due to a lack of high performance players in Canada. This may also be a product of the reason athletes retire from competitive sport. Higher participation rates increase the possibility of being deselected from the team, compared to low participation rates which increase the possibility of a voluntary retirement from sport.

During athletic development coaches can be influential in providing leadership, extrinsic motivation, and support (Jõesaar, Hein, & Hagger, 2012). However, the retired hockey players interviewed during this study did not identify coaches as having significant input in their sport career termination. This coincides with research conducted by Sinclair & Orlick (1993) and Taylor & Olgilvie (2001) which emphasizes support during career termination comes more from family and friends outside of sport and less from coaches or the sport system. Only athletes representing low profile sport described coaches as having an influence in their sport retirement. Coaches of retired rugby athletes were recognized as trying to convince athletes to participate in the sport longer than they had intended. Some of the retired rugby athletes identified the lack of high performance players in Canada to be the reason coaches attempt to convince players to continue playing. None of the retired hockey athletes recognize coaches to have had any input in their sport career retirement which may be due to the high number of hockey players in Canada. The increased development of high performance players in Canada increases the likelihood that coaches can replace high performance hockey players when the players choose to retire or no long have the ability to play at a high level

Educational Influences on Sport Retirement

Due to the overwhelming odds of participating in high performance sport many athletes seek educational training in preparation for employment (Leonard, 1996). Academic training is identified as a major reason athletes terminate their high performance sport careers (Bussmann & Alfermann, 1994; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Koukouris, 1991; Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 1996; Wylleman, De Knop, Menkehorst, Theeboom, & Annerel, 1993). Similar to previous research, both groups of athletes who participated in this study describe taking a proactive approach to academic

training in preparation for their sport career termination. This may be because many athletes develop athletic skills while playing for high school, or post-secondary athletic institutions. In addition to academic training, both groups of athletes also discussed education developed through sport culture to have affected their sport career retirement. Education developed through sport culture is similar to gaining experience at a more traditional job. As athletes gain experience they develop an education from their sport culture which may have an impact on their sport retirement or their new vocational career following sport retirement. Many athletes utilize skills developed (i.e., hardwork, dedication, perseverance) through sport culture during their sport career retirement and this is consistent with previous research (Conzelmann, Gabler, & Nagel, 2001).

Only hockey athletes identified an awareness of the importance of education to their post-sport career success. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (2011) states the odds of playing professional hockey is 0.32 percent. Many of the hockey athletes interviewed stated they developed an awareness of the importance of education from their parents who would remind them that playing professional sports is not guaranteed, and can end abruptly. Although high performance rugby is not guaranteed and can end abruptly as well, high spectator rates of hockey results in professional careers for hockey players, compared to amateur sport careers for rugby athletes. Perhaps rugby athletes may not have stated an awareness of the importance of education because playing rugby professionally in Canada did not seem like an option, which resulted in utilizing their educational training during their playing career.

Vocational Influences on Sport Retirement

Little consistency exists among retired hockey and retired rugby athletes interviewed during this study regarding preparation for a vocational career. Both groups

of athletes had examples of athletes who prepared for vocational careers, and athletes who did not prepare for vocational careers prior to their sport retirement. This is more related to individual personality characteristics. However, when speaking with some of the athletes during the interviews one athlete mentioned when he was playing at such a high performance level he had to believe in himself and believe that he had the abilities to maintain those performance levels. Therefore the variation among preparation for retirement may be because high performance athletes are constantly pushing to maintain high performance levels and it is difficult to maintain the intense training schedule and prepare to retire at the same time. Research has determined athletes who prepare for life after sport adapt faster and have higher vocational satisfaction levels compared to athletes who do not prepare (Alfermann et al., 2004; Perna, Ahlgren, & Zaichkowsky, 1999; Torregrosa, Boixadós, Valiente, & Cruz, 2004; Wheeler, Malone, VanValack, Nelson, & Steadward, 1996). The athletes who did prepare for a vocational career following their sport retirement describe immediate high levels of vocational satisfaction following their sport retirement. Transitioning into a new occupation was more difficult and took up to two years for the athletes who did not prepare for a vocational career before their sport retirement. Both groups of athletes interviewed during this study identified their sport career as having an influence on the type of employment they were seeking following their sport career retirement. This is supported by research conducted by Conzelmann et al. (2001) and Nagel (2002) who found the majority of athletes utilized sport career experiences and made an occupational choice which mirrored their education and sport training.

Personal Influences on Sport Retirement

Both groups of athletes identified themselves as athletes during their sport careers. However, only the retired hockey players continued their athletic identity following their sport retirement. Higher sport popularity can increase development of athletic identity (Webb et al., 1998). Athletic identity at the time of retirement is highly correlated with adjustment, and changes to athletic identity following retirement may have a direct effect on athletes coping ability and retirement experience (Lavallee, Gordon, & Grove, 1997). The retired hockey players interviewed during this study still define themselves as hockey players. This may be because their personal identity was reinforced by spectators throughout their career, but also following their sport career retirement. One of the retired hockey athletes described the difficulty redefining his identity after retirement due to spectators constantly recognizing him as a professional hockey player. High performance players with high athletic identities at the time of retirement have a more difficult time redefining their personal identity (Lavallee et al., 1997).

High performance rugby athletes did not continue their athletic identity following their sport retirement. Following sport retirement the rugby athletes described themselves with descriptive terms (i.e., hardworking, charismatic) or by their new employment (i.e., firefighter, or school teacher). Sport popularity has a direct correlation with an athlete's ability to redefine their personal identity following sport retirement (Webb et al., 1998). Due to the low spectator rates of rugby in Canada these athletes are able to personally redefine themselves following retirement without their athletic identity being reinforced by spectators. Therefore, if these athletes want to redefine themselves following sport retirement they can do so without the constant reminder of how others perceive them.

Both groups of athletes describe the transition from high performance sport to retirement as being a difficult transition to cope with. Research has shown involuntary sport retirement due to deselection, or injury results in a more difficult retirement transition than voluntary sport retirement (Alfermann et al., 2004). However, all of the athletes from both groups except one hockey athlete voluntarily retired from high performance sport. A common theme among both groups of athletes was the difficulty coping with retirement from high performance sport. Many of the athletes interviewed describe doing little preparation or seeking any support or resources during their retirement transition. Planning, support, and resources can all assist athletes during retirement regardless of whether retirement was voluntary or involuntary (Alfermann et al., 2007). Athletes may have had a difficult transition from sport to retirement because they had dedicated so much time, effort and commitment to their sport training to achieve high performance levels. Although many of these athletes have the ability to continue playing recreationally they described the quality of play and competition level to be a different experience than high performance sport.

Both groups of athletes also described feelings of separation from teammates following sport retirement. Many high performance athletes experience a sense of emotional loss associated with separation from teammates following their sport career retirement (Astle, 1986; Murphy, 1995; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Separation from teammates was a common theme experienced by both retired hockey players and retired rugby players. Some of the athletes interviewed explained they still maintained contact with teammates following their sport retirement; however, the relationships changed following their sport retirement. Perhaps this is result of no longer being a part of the

team cohesion. Cohesion refers to “a dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998, p. 213). Sport retirement may reinforce a feeling of separation from teammates.

Only the retired hockey athletes interviewed spoke of having feelings of pride about receiving recognition for being a professional athlete. This probably relates to the number of spectators who watch hockey in Canada, compared to the number of spectators who watch rugby. Higher spectator rates and media coverage increases the possibility of someone recognizing hockey athletes and appreciating their accomplishments. Moreover, only retired hockey players described feeling capable to transfer skills learned throughout their sport career following their sport career retirement. Extensive literature suggests sport creates an environment for the development of life skills (Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008; Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004)). Life skills can be defined as “those internal personal assets, characteristics and skills such as goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work ethic that can be facilitated or developed in sport and are transferred for use in non-sport settings” (Gould & Carson, 2008, p.60). Research conducted by Gould & Carson suggests life skills can be developed in multiple sport settings; however, only retired hockey athletes described feeling capable to transfer skills learnt throughout their sport career to their life following their sport retirement. Many of the hockey athletes described hockey as being “their life”. Perhaps they describe transferring skills from hockey because hockey played a large role in developing who they are.

Level of preparation for retirement from sport varied individually and had little consistency among the retired hockey athletes or the retired rugby athletes interviewed in this study. A common theme that emerged during the interviews from both groups of athletes was a lack of preparation and coping resources prior to retirement or during the retirement transition. Preparing for sport retirement or life after sport can decrease the possibility of a crisis transition and increases the possibility of a successful transition from sport (Alfermann et al., 2004). Although both groups of athletes identified a lack of preparation or coping resources, none of the athletes interviewed thought that a lack of preparation affected their sport retirement. Perhaps this is because it is difficult to predict how these resources would have impacted their sport retirement without utilizing them prior to or following their sport retirement.

Social support existed for both groups of athletes throughout their sport development and sport career. However, interestingly, both groups of athletes spoke about retirement from sport being an individual decision and process. Little research exists regarding social roles (i.e., family, friends, teammates) during sport retirement. Perhaps this is an area for future investigation.

Limitations of the Research

Some potential limitations may exist of this research. First, the results are specific to male high performance athletes in Canada. Therefore, results may be different if replicated in other countries and with high performance female athletes. Second, more work is needed to delineate between professional and high performance amateur sports as each is a unique context. Third, the hockey athletes interviewed during this study were professional athletes compared to high performance amateur rugby athletes. This is because playing professional rugby in Canada is not an option, as there are no

professional rugby leagues available in Canada. Professional hockey players did not have a vocational career compared to the rugby players, which may have limited the results of the vocational aspect of this study. Finally, the athletes interviewed during this study ranged from 4 months removed from sport up to 15 years removed from sport. Therefore, the retrospective aspect of this study may be a limitation due to perceptions changing throughout individual lives. Moreover, athletes may forget or have difficulty remembering importance aspects of their sport career. In the current study, however, each of the athletes spoke about their retirement transition as if it had just happened. Although athletes were asked to think retrospectively about their sport career, their memories and responses seemed to be still genuine and clear in their minds.

Future Directions

Additional researchers may wish to investigate social influences regarding the decision to retire. Many athletes made comments regarding the importance of family, friend, or teammates throughout their career but described retirement as being a solitary period. Future research could seek to investigate why social relationships play a large role during athletic development but have little input in making the decision to retire, or the retirement transition. Also, research needs to be conducted with high performance female athletes to better understand retirement experiences of high performance athletes. The number of high performance female athletes is increasing in Canada and female athletes may have different retirement experiences than male athletes (Ifedi, 2008). This research focused on retirement experiences of athletes from team sports. Additional research could be conducted to look at retirement experiences of athletes of individual sports. Team sport may have different social aspects compared to individual sports, such as, the role of family, friends, teammates and coaches which may be different for individuals compared

to athletes who participate in team sports. Finally, this study determined that personal influences (i.e., reasons behind retirement, feelings about the quality of retirement, preparation for retirement) have a large role during athletic retirement. Future studies need to be conducted to better understand these personal influences on sport retirement. This research added to Wylleman and Lavallees (2007) theoretical model by investigating retirement transitions of specific sport contexts. It also extended the model to recognize discontinuation from high performance sport is a unique experience that can have negative or positive effects on athletes' life satisfaction. This research also found that sport retirement has many personal influences that affect an athlete's ability to cope with his/her retirement transition. Findings of this research supported Webb et. al., (1998) study that recognized that sport popularity can increase the development of athletic identity making it more difficult to redefine ones personal identity following sport retirement, due to reinforcement of one's athletic identity by media or spectators. Wylleman and Lavallees, and Webb et. al., research lead to the investigation of retirement from sport from specific sport contexts.

Conclusion

Understanding retirement experiences of high performance athletes illustrates potential positive and negative experiences that may occur. This research used Wylleman & Lavallees (2004) theoretical model of sport career transitions to better understand retirement experiences of high performance professional and amateur athletes. Current theoretical models of sport career transitions need to be extended beyond discontinuation and recognize that retirement from sport is a transition that needs to be explored. Although retirement from professional sport compared to high performance amateur sport may be quite similar, it seems sport popularity is one variable that may have an impact on

high performance athletes' retirement experiences. While understanding the experiences of a small group of high performance athletes hardly scratches the surface, this research provides a base which additional research can expand upon. More research in this area can lead to improvement of theoretical models and coping and preparation resources by providing an understanding of retirement from different sport environments. Current theoretical models group all high performance sport together and consider athletes retirement experiences to be similar regardless of the sport the athlete retired from. This research concluded that retirement from unique sport contexts creates unique retirement experiences. Therefore, this research improves theoretical models by recognizing retirement experiences from unique sport settings may be quite different. Future research in this area could increase successful retirement experiences of high performance athletes. In addition, this research concluded that sport retirement is an individual and personal experience. Many of the participants in this study describe retirement as an individual and personal experience. This was an interesting finding because social relationships had a significant influence in the athlete's involvement in sport and sport development. Future research needs to investigate why athletes utilize social relationships throughout their sport careers for support but when it comes to retirement, it appears to become an individual experience.

The quality of retirement experience and ability to cope with the retirement transition varies among many high performance athletes. For some athletes retirement can be a very positive experience while others may have a difficult transition. Social , academic, vocational , and personal influences are recognized as areas which have the largest impact on an athlete's retirement transition. Increase preparation and planning can

improve the likeliness of an athlete experiencing a positive retirement experience. However, each athlete experiences retirement from high performance sport differently and what may lead to successful retirement transitions for one athlete may not have the same results for another. Increasing research and understanding of retirement from high performance sport allows researchers and professional to better understand retirement experiences of a larger group of athletes which will help lead to the improvement and availability of retirement transition literature to help athletes prepare or cope with retirement from high performance sport.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

With regard to demographics:

- How old are you?
- How long have you been retired?
- What sport did you play?
- At what age did you identify yourself as an athlete? When did you start thinking of yourself as an athlete? How old were you?
- How many hours did you dedicate to your sport each week? (may need to get to think of the things they did associated with their sport to get this more accurate)
- At what age did you specialize in your chosen sport? When did you focus on only one sport? How old were you?

With regard to athletic development:

- What role did your family?
 - Friends?
 - Teammates or coaches have during your athletic retirement?
- Throughout your athletic career did significant people in your life help you predict or prepare career for changes throughout your sport career? Probe- Who? In what way? Probe- Academic transitions, Athletic transitions, Personal transitions?
- To what extent did you identify yourself as an athlete?
- How did the extent to which you identified yourself as an athlete affect your career termination?

With regard to psychological development:

- Thinking back to when you first retired how did you define yourself?
- How would you describe your transition from sport?
- Did sport or your athletic identity affect the quality of your athletic career termination?
- Do you feel you were psychologically prepared for career termination? Probe- What was the reason behind your career termination?
- During your career did you consciously perform mental training techniques? What techniques did you use? Did you psychologically prepare for career termination? If so, how?
- Did your coach, parents, or friends influence your psychological development?

With regard to social development:

- Thinking back to when you first retired what was the quality of relationships with family, friends, teammates or coaches in your life?
- Did these relationships influence your career termination? Probe- In what way?
- Do you feel these relationships helped you predict, plan or prepare for career termination? Probe- What did they do well? How could they have improved?
- Did you experience any influence on your athletic career retirement from separation with spectators? Coaches? Teammates?

With regard to academic/ vocational development:

- What is your educational background?
- Thinking back to when you first retired to what degree would you say your education has impacted your career termination? Has it changed?
- Did you have career plans prior to athletic career termination?

With regard to spectatorship:

- How would you describe the extent spectators played in your athletic career?
- Did spectators influence your athletic performance or decisions throughout your career?
- To what extent was it important for you to perform well for spectators?
- How would you describe your sport career and the role spectators played?

Is there anything that you would like to add about your retirement experience?

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Script

Fall 2011

Dear Potential Participant,

I am from the Health, Leisure and Human Performance Research Institute at the University of Manitoba. I am conducting a research study entitled **Similarities and Differences between Male Professional versus High Performance Amateur Athletes' Retirement Experiences**. I am requesting your voluntary participation in this study, which I hope will lead to better understanding of experiences of retirement from sports with a large public audience versus sports with a small public audience. Research has been conducted regarding career transitioning from sport to retirement. However, further research is required to describe the unique retirement experiences from different sport contexts. There are many influences which may affect athlete's retirement experiences, such as injury, or age. Examining the difference between retirement experiences of sport will provide a stronger understanding of career transitioning. A qualitative approach will be used to collect data through interviews of approximately 1 hour in length. Findings will inform career transition models to be used at all levels of sport, provincially, nationally, or professionally. The goal of this research is to better understand retirement experiences of high performance athletes, to structure support systems to increase the likelihood of healthy career transitions.

The research will be guided by the following question:
What are the retirement experiences of athletes who have retired from a sport with a large public audience versus athletes who have retired from a sport with a small public audience?

Data will be collected in the form of interviews conducted in Fall 2011. If you decide to participate in this study please read through and sign the attached consent form.

In closing, allow me to reiterate that you are under no obligation to agree to participate in this research. However, if you choose to do so, you will be free to raise questions or concerns with me at any time throughout the study and you may withdraw without penalty at any time if you choose.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Faculty of Graduate Studies
Health, Leisure and Human Performance Research Institute
307 Max Bell Centre
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 2N2

APPENDIX C

*Consent Form***Research Project Title: Similarities and Differences between Male Professional versus High Performance Amateur Athletes' Retirement Experiences**

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I am from the Health, Leisure and Human Performance Research Institute at the University of Manitoba. I am conducting a research study entitled **Similarities and Differences between Male Professional versus High Performance Amateur Athletes' Retirement Experiences**. I am requesting your voluntary participation in this study, which I hope will lead to better understanding of experiences of retirement from sports with a large public audience versus sports with a small public audience. Research has been conducted regarding career transitioning from sport to retirement. However, further research is required to describe the unique retirement experiences from different sport contexts. There are many influences which may affect an athlete's retirement experiences, such as injury, or age. Examining the difference between retirement experiences of sport will provide a stronger understanding of career transitioning. A qualitative approach will be used to collect data through interviews of approximately 1 hour in length. Findings will inform career transition models to be used at all levels of sport, provincially, nationally, or professionally. The goal of this research is to better understand retirement experiences of elite athletes, to structure support systems to increase the likelihood of health career transitions.

The research will be guided by the following question:

What are the retirement experiences of athletes who have retired from a sport with a large public audience versus athletes who have retired from a sport with a small public audience?

I, _____, agree to take part in a research study on The Impact of Sport Popularity on male Athlete's Perception of Career Termination.

I understand that my participation over the fall 2011 term will involve a 1 x 60 minute recorded interview about my experiences and perceptions of career termination.

I understand that to help protect my anonymity, I will be asked to read and revise the interview transcript. This process will allow me the opportunity to edit out any

information that I feel is too sensitive or that I feel would serve to identify me. I understand that my specific answers and comments will be kept confidential. I understand that my name will not be identified in any report or presentation that may arise from the study. I understand that only the principal investigator will have access to the information collected during the study. I understand the findings of this study may result in publication. I understand direct quotes from data may be used, and that there is no anticipated benefit for participation. I understand that the data for this project will be destroyed within 5 years of the completion of the research.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, orally or in writing, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participants Signature _____ Date _____

Researchers Signature _____ Date _____

I prefer to receive my interview transcript via email: address _____

I prefer to receive my interview transcript in hard copy: address _____

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact the principal investigator at:

Faculty of Graduate Studies
 Health, Leisure and Human Performance Research Institute
 307 Max Bell Centre
 University of Manitoba
 Winnipeg, Manitoba
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