

**An exploration of the lived acculturation experiences of  
newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba**

by  
Craig Brown

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University of Manitoba  
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## **Abstract**

Immigration has grown exponentially in Canada and, according to Sport for Life (2018), it will be the primary source of net population growth by 2030. Therefore, understanding the acculturation (learning a second culture [Rudmin, 2009]) challenges faced by the Canadian newcomer population has become essential. A gap related to understanding Canadian newcomer varsity athlete acculturation exists. This study explored the lived acculturation experiences of this population in Manitoba to reduce this gap and answer the call for more qualitative research related to this phenomenon (Schinke & McGannon, 2014). Using a social constructionist approach, letters to their younger self (inspired by Creative Analytic Practice) were used to inform semi-structured interviews from which data related to the participants' acculturation experiences was collected. An interpretive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was conducted in order to answer the question: What are the acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba? The results revealed themes related to: a) the challenges athletes face settling in their host cultural context, b) the essential role of support systems to these athletes, and c) how context affects the athletes' acculturation positionality. Particular insight into the social and structural aspects of the host culture, the networks of support that exist and how they can be improved will be discussed. Further, the practicality with which the athletes viewed adjusting to their host cultural context emerged as key to how the athletes experienced and approached acculturation in their host cultural context.

**Key Words:** acculturation, newcomer, varsity athlete, social constructionism

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

The movement of persons across borders is not a new phenomenon in a global or Canadian context. It is a trend that has been researched from various perspectives and geographical contexts throughout the years. With the growth of persons moving to Canada on a temporary and permanent basis, it has become important to understand the factors impacting their adjustment to living in the Canadian context. Persons, particularly student-athletes moving to Canada, face a variety of challenges that make adjusting to their new context a positive or negative experience. Exploring these unique student-athlete experiences may give greater insight into what difficulties they face and how those difficulties may be addressed. This chapter will introduce the migration of persons from other cultural contexts to Canada with a specific focus on athletic and student-athlete migration. A brief examination of the main theoretical framework (acculturation) guiding the study is then followed by a look at the objectives and contributions of this work to understanding the lived acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba.

### **Migration and Human Movement**

Persons move across borders for various reasons, ranging from the pursuit of personal development (e.g., education, employment), pleasure (e.g., vacation), necessity (e.g., refuge from national conflict), and many others. They are categorized based on their intent to remain in their new cultural context on a permanent or temporary basis. Those who move across national borders on a temporary basis are known as migrants (Schinke, McGannon, Battocchio, & Wells, 2013) or sojourners (Schinke et al., 2013; Schinke, Blodgett, McGannon, & Ge, 2016a) while those who move with the intention to remain permanently in their new cultural context are categorized as immigrants (Schinke et al., 2013).

Ryba, Schinke, Stambulova, and Elbe (2018) take a slightly different position by

defining short- term or intermittent movement across borders as mobility. Koser and Salt (1997) emphasized a re-conceptualization of the concept of short-term migration, associating it with long-term intent to stay based on the ease with which such a transition can now take place. For the purpose of this project, the position taken by Schinke et al., (2013) will be adopted based on that definition being used consistently in recent cultural and sport psychology literature (e.g., Shinke et al., 2016a; Schinke & McGannon, 2014).

Immigration has grown exponentially in Canada in recent years and, according to Sport for Life (2018), it will be the primary source of net growth in the population by 2030. The 2016 Canadian Census indicates that approximately 23% of Canada's population is comprised of immigrants (a landed immigrant or permanent resident) and non-permanent residents (persons born outside Canada who hold a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants) (Statistics Canada, 2016). For the purpose of this project, both categories will be considered under the term newcomer. More recently, according to the 2018 second quarterly demographic report by Statistics Canada, of the total Canadian second quarter population growth of 168,687 persons, international immigration accounted for 138,978 persons, approximately 68%, which is the highest for that period since 1971 (Statistics Canada, 2018). During this period in Manitoba, according to Statistics Canada (2018), international immigration not only accounted for much of the growth in the population but also compensated for population loss as a result of interprovincial migration. This trend in population growth points to the potential increased involvement of non-Canadian born athletes in various areas of society. One such example is the nearly 18% immigrant athlete representation in the Canadian Summer Olympic team in 1992 and 15% average in total over the summer Olympic cycle ranging from 1992 to 2008 (Schinke, Yukelson, Bartolacci, Battocchio, & Johnstone, 2011). The highest immigrant athlete representation took place in 1992 with fluctuations between 12% and 16% occurring between 1996 to 2008. Schinke et al. (2011) indicated that this trend, as well as the growth in immigrant

athlete participation in professional and academic contexts, was evidence of the increased multicultural nature of Canadian sport contexts.

When people move across borders, there are many factors that come into consideration. These can vary from finances to education and employment opportunities. For the athlete, the motivation and factors remain the same. The movement of athletes across borders has grown in frequency and volume (Ryba et al., 2018; Schinke & McGannon, 2014) and this migration can be attributed to several factors including educational opportunities (Schinke et al., 2016a), increased ease of changing teams/employment opportunities (Ryba, Stambulova, & Ronkainen, 2016), and sport tourism (Ryba et al., 2018). This growth in migration and movement of international athletes will have an impact on the varsity sport context which is influenced by the presence of international students pursuing higher education (Schinke & McGannon, 2014). The movement across international borders, however, can present the newcomer with various challenges that range from familial responsibilities, sport-related expenses, language and communication, finances, employment, and immigrant status (Nadeau, O'Reilly, & Scott, 2016) to difficulty living out the role of newcomer (Blodgett et al., 2014). All these issues remain salient when considering the sport context.

### **Migration and Sport**

The sporting context has been shown to have a significant impact on the newcomer as well as newcomer athlete experience. Garrido, Olmos, García-Arjona, and Pardo (2012) highlight the social benefit that can be gained from the physical activity and sport context such as the development of self-esteem, autonomy, empathy, communication and coexistence, among others. Newcomers also receive these benefits as they become more familiar with aspects of the new culture. Ryba et al. (2018) also indicate that sport has the potential to bring individuals and different cultures together while building cohesion and relationships. While the sport and

physical activity context holds varying benefits for the newcomer, it is also recognized that involvement in this setting can be a detrimental and damaging experience for newcomers. Garrido et al. (2012) add a caveat for their stated benefits of the context listed previously by warning that if the design of the context and programs are not directed towards achieving these positive outcomes, the opposite will take place. Ryba et al. (2018) also caution that while the sporting context holds many benefits for the newcomer, it still has the power to divide cultures and promote segregation and racism.

These contextual traits continue to varying degrees regardless of the size of the context. Nadeau et al. (2016) point to the benefits of sport involvement for newcomers and these include connecting newcomer children and their parents, learning about the new cultural context, fostering social inclusion, exposure to sport and physical activity, and aiding in the integration of the newcomer into the host culture. These become points of reference in encouraging newcomers to migrate to smaller cities and communities. Notwithstanding, the work by Nadeau et al. (2016) highlighted that even in these sport contexts, newcomers still face the dangers of exclusion, isolation, racism, and discrimination. Even in team-sport settings, which aid in newcomer integration by building relationships, newcomers are equally exposed to interactions, policies, and programs that foster a culture of inequality and discrimination that contribute to a negative experience with as well as attitude towards the new culture. The authors indicate that it can go as far as to the point of 'disidentification' where newcomers are pushed away from certain sports by the host culture when participation in a preferred sport or physical activity by the host culture is emphasized over contexts or sports familiar to the newcomer and their home culture. Foo (2015) also points out that the difference in the host culture sporting context as compared to that of the newcomer's home culture could make engagement in sport and physical activity problematic for

the newcomer. Ryba et al. (2018) state, “sport participation per se does not necessarily promote integration, but rather can be used as a context for bringing together individuals with different ethno-cultural backgrounds in a multicultural environment that can promote integration and multiculturalism” (p. 527). The inextricable link between cultural identity and expression and how persons experience and know sport becomes poignant when the immigrant encounters a particular sport in a new cultural context and finds, in some cases, that the way they know the sport has changed (Ryba et al., 2016).

### **Student-Athlete Migration**

The varsity sport context carries much of the same associations with athletic migration to a new cultural context. From a Canadian context, the athletic teams that represent associated universities and colleges are known as varsity sports teams (Canadian-universities.net, n.d.). Bartolacci (2010) highlights the growth in International Student-Athlete (ISA) recruitment and Foo (2015) concludes that the movement of this group of athletes possibly represents, “the most prevalent form of sport migration today” (p. 150). Foo’s study done in the United States demonstrates what the migrant student-athlete may encounter when they move to a different cultural context to not only practice sport, but to also attain higher education. Foo indicates that it is important for educational athletic contexts to understand why the student has come and develop an appreciation for the possible difficulties they have had to, and possibly still, face in making the decision to pursue sport and studies in a new cultural context. Foo argues that these athletic migrants face a greater level of stress than their counterparts, sometimes based on the expectations of coaches and peers, which aids in placing them at a disadvantage for achieving success in their student-athlete endeavours. This occurs while facing the same concerns affecting other student-athletes as they navigate a new cultural context.

Schinke and colleagues (Schinke et al., 2017; Schinke & McGannon, 2014) argue that this is an example of how acculturation is navigated by student-athletes in contexts, including those outside of sport, during a very sensitive and crucial time in their cultural interaction. This could either result in developing or damaging the newcomer (Schinke et al., 2017). For the ISA, this can occur as they face rejection and exclusion from host culture agents such as their coach, teachers, teammates and other students, while on scholarships that may be inadequate when it comes to meeting their financial needs (Foo, 2015). Perhaps the varsity sport context can benefit from the work of Trendafilova, Hardin, and Kim (2010) which highlighted the increased perception of satisfaction by NCAA division 1 ISAs when their new environment has more support systems and programs in place to help them navigate this new cultural sport and educational experience.

### **Support and the Sport Context**

As the newcomer athlete encounters their new sport context and overall host culture, they are met with varying levels of support and understanding. At this point where two cultures collide, the athlete goes through a process of negotiating norms and values and will have to decide on what actions or decisions will have to be made in order to survive in this host culture. As Foo (2015) indicates, the familial support received by the newcomer becomes important in maintaining positive well-being, and Schinke et al. (2017) point out that support in general becomes imperative as the newcomer negotiates cultural divides. Establishing connections that can help the athlete navigate this experience becomes essential and beneficial as the athlete will otherwise be left to go through it on their own (Schinke et al., 2017). Sport participation in a cohesive context becomes an important social integration tool for newcomers (Ryba et al., 2018)

and as such there is a great need for these sport contexts to become aware of the various issues facing these individuals. Sellers and Damas (as cited in Kontos & Breland-Noble, 2002) note that many of these newcomers are members of minority groups who have a greater representation in sport contexts than in the general population. But to what degree do sport migrants experience any reciprocity or effort from those belonging to the host cultural context to assist in navigating the experience of cross-cultural interaction in the sport context? Some may find that there is a lack of support or willingness to help, lack of cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness, and an overall unwelcome atmosphere, from host context members, that has the potential to push and keep athletes away from other sport cultures (Ryba et al., 2018; Schinke et al., 2017).

Host culture sport contexts, some Canadian contexts included, have been found to lack the understanding and resources necessary to help athletes experiencing acculturation (Schinke et al., 2017) and fail to provide sufficient support and guidance for these athletes (Schinke et al., 2016a). This has resulted in calls for sport contexts that are more adaptive and sensitized to the acculturation needs of newcomer athletes and for greater effort at having formal structures and practices in place that create welcoming, open and inclusive sport spaces (Blodgett et al., 2014; Garrido et al., 2012; Schinke et al., 2016a). Even community sport spaces have been challenged to take an acculturation approach to newcomers as opposed to the predominantly utilized assimilationist perspective (Nadeau et al., 2016). As such, there have been calls for more empathy and understanding of the circumstances of newcomers in sport contexts (Sport for Life, 2018), for more inclusive contexts and approaches, and for “a full appreciation of how best to support these athletes in their development and in acculturation” (Schinke et al., 2016a, p. 37). With this environment greatly impacting newcomer integration strategies as well as team attitudes towards newcomers, the coach becomes one of the key components in establishing this

supportive culture that allows newcomer athletes to encounter a different culture and experience acculturation positively (Ryba et al., 2018).

## **Acculturation**

Acculturation, which originated in anthropology and further developed in sociology (Sam & Berry, 2006), has many varied definitions but the consensus in research is that it can be a lengthy and stressful process, which Berry (1997, 2006b) terms acculturative stress, as the athlete encounters the new host culture. The athlete is forced to determine what aspects of the host and home culture must be accepted, adopted, rejected or adapted (tweaking so that it resembles both cultures but is seen as acceptable) in order to survive in their host culture. This can result in significant psychological stress on the individual (Berry, 1997, 2006b) and can affect how they function in society, including whether they stay involved in recreational or organized sport and physical activity. One of the foundational definitions of acculturation by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) highlights that acculturation takes place when individuals from two different cultures come into contact with each other and this continuous interaction over time changes the way of life of one or both individuals. Rudmin (2009) summarizes this by later defining acculturation as the learning of a second culture that takes place in an active and ongoing manner, a definition cited widely in recent acculturation research (Blodgett et al., 2014; Schinke et al., 2013, Schinke et al., 2017). Berry (2009) critiques Rudmin's definition of acculturation as uni-dimensional and assimilationist, ignoring the complexity of the concept and robbing it of the depth of its meaning. Weedon (2011) also describes acculturation as the 'deterritorialization' or breakdown of the newcomer's home cultural norms as they settle in the host culture and Nadeau et al. (2016) define it as

a dual-direction change process whereby a newcomer learns and adapts to the cultural traditions of a host culture that is different from the one in which they were raised and the dominant culture changes by the influence of the newcomer. (p. 112)

All these definitions point to the significant interaction between persons from different cultures that causes one or both to change the way they carry out their way of life, view culture and express culture. This can be a positive and beneficial experience or a negative one that Schinke et al. (2013) likened to self-shock or culture shock where the newcomer experiences a conflict between their cultural identity and accepted expressions of cultural identity by the host context, leading to a questioning of their concept of self. For this project, Rudmin's (2009) definition will be used to remain consistent with the recent literature in cultural sport psychology, while recognizing the complexity, fluidity and ongoing nature of acculturation. This is the position from which this project will examine the phenomenon of newcomer varsity athlete acculturation in Manitoba.

The aim of acculturation is the integration of the individual into the host culture in a way that will allow them to function optimally, but the individual can also choose to reject both the home and host culture (marginalization), completely adopt the host culture and reject their home culture (assimilation), or completely reject the host culture (separation) (Berry, 2006a). As newcomer athletes experience their new sport contexts, many wrestle with issues surrounding language, finances, acceptance, different sport practices, and discrimination, among others (Foo, 2015; Schinke et al., 2013; Zacheus, 2010). While going through this process, the related stress experienced impacts the athlete and others within their social context such as coaches and peers (Schinke et al., 2016a; Schinke et al., 2013). This means that the need to gain a greater

understanding of the newcomer athlete's acculturation experience is not only beneficial for the athlete but also for those in the social context of the athlete.

In Weedon's (2011) study of the acculturation experiences of migrant youth footballers in Premier league academies using the 'glocalization' framework, assimilation is referred to as transformation, separation is referred to as relativization, and the other two acculturation strategies are perceived from a different perspective. Weedon instead points to the newcomer choosing accommodation, where a more pragmatic view is taken with regards to accepting host culture norms and values in an effort to give them the space to maintain home cultural practices, and hybridization where a new blended culture is created. The strategy chosen will depend on many factors but the interaction between the members of different cultures plays a significant role in the acculturation process for newcomers. How this process is navigated could be influenced by the newcomer's cultural background (Foo, 2015), immigration status and reason for migrating (Ryba et al., 2018), as well as the cultural context to which the newcomer moves and many other factors. For athletes, the extent to which the sport context is supportive (Ryba et al., 2018) and whether or not the move has taken place for sporting or other reasons (Ryba et al., 2016) is of significant importance.

As indicated previously, how this experience is navigated is not solely dependent on the newcomer. An atmosphere that is welcoming to newcomers and willing to assist in the sharing of norms and values with an aim to assisting in the acculturation of the newcomer is likely to result in a positive experience, with the opposite also holding true (Zacheus, 2010). It is argued that many host contexts take on the assimilationist perspective where the newcomer is expected to adopt aspects of the host culture at the expense of their home culture, with failure to do so resulting in marginalization (Nadeau et al., 2016). Even if the newcomer makes the effort to

share cultural norms and values and attempts to engage those in the host/dominant cultural context, the members of the host context can still decide whether to be influenced by or reject aspects of the newcomer culture (Berry, 2006a ; Nadeau et al., 2016).

## **Objectives**

This master's thesis project will examine the lived acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba with a view to understanding their experiences in the sport and non-sport (university/college educational) context, which Schinke et al. (2017) indicate are both important areas of focus for understanding newcomer athlete acculturation. In seeking to gain a further understanding of newcomer varsity athlete acculturation in Manitoba, this project will aim to accomplish three things. Firstly, it will provide additional insight into the under-researched topic of the acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes in Canada. Secondly, it will add to the general literature on the acculturation experiences of athletes in a sport context, and thirdly, it will answer the call for more research on the acculturation experiences of pre-elite athletes in Canada (Schinke & McGannon, 2014).

## **Contribution**

This project aims to explore the lived acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity student-athletes in Manitoba using varied qualitative methodologies (i.e., an interpretive approach). This is recommended in the literature (Ryba et al., 2016; Schinke et al., 2016a; Schinke & McGannon, 2014; Schinke et al., 2013) because it is expected that these approaches will assist in providing further understanding of the acculturation experiences of newcomer athletes. Much of the recent work from a Canadian viewpoint on immigrant athlete acculturation has been informed by the social constructionist perspective which states that individuals make sense of their surroundings based on their interactions with those around them. Where acculturation is concerned, this means that athletes experience acculturation based on their

interactions with others in the social setting (Schinke et al, 2013). From this qualitative perspective, this project will aim to delve deeper into the richness of the newcomer varsity athlete's experiences and challenges, and unpack these experiences in order to increase the understanding of how they navigate acculturation (Schinke et al., 2016a). The results from this exploration will provide insight into the acculturation experience of newcomer varsity athletes. The role and importance of the varsity sport context in how newcomer varsity athletes experience acculturation will also be investigated. This specific contextual investigation has been largely missing from the literature pertaining to newcomer athlete acculturation in Canada.

From a paradigmatic standpoint, I have chosen to approach this project using social constructionism as a guide. Aside from attempting to continue in the path of previous acculturation research in the Canadian context, this paradigm shares tenets with the researcher's identified paradigmatic stance of an interpretivist/constructivist. This paradigmatic position subscribes to the understanding that what is considered truth or knowledge is contingent on the meaning that an individual ascribes to that experience. Going even further with social constructionism, the position taken is that these meanings are not simply formed by the individual but is influenced by that individual's interaction with the social world around them. This is the perspective taken for this project as I attempt to understand the lived acculturation experiences of the newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba.

## **Chapter 2 – Review of Literature**

In this section, I will build on the concept of acculturation after examining sport in Canada, the university sport context in Canada, and the role newcomer athletes have played in that context through the years. Afterwards, looking at how acculturation research has progressed in the field of cultural sport psychology, recent research in the Canadian context will be considered. This look at acculturation research in the Canadian context will be followed by an examination of some of the theoretical models related to acculturation and a look at the critiques and gaps related to research on acculturation. The chapter will end with a look at the implications for this research.

### **Sport in Canada**

Sport and physical activity play a significant role in Canadian society. The Government of Canada, the largest investor in the amateur sport system, funds the implementation of programs aimed at improving the prevalence and quality of sport and physical activity in Canada (Government of Canada, n.d.). Sport Canada (founded in 1971) manages this funding and the implementation of programs, and helps with elite athlete development through financial support, building sport ethics, and by helping organizations improve sport performance levels. Sport Canada also collaborates with the Coaching Association of Canada to improve coaching standards, promote the coaching profession, and to provide the requisite training needed for coaches (Government of Canada, n.d.). Canada's sport system, which Sport Canada delivers, has a three-tiered structure. The first tier consists of the National Multisport Service Organizations, which are responsible for the creation and delivery of specific services to the national sport community. Some examples of these organizations are Own the Podium, ParticipACTION, and U Sports (Government of Canada, n.d.). The second tier consists of the National Sport Organizations and these are the governing bodies for particular sports such as basketball and ice

hockey (Government of Canada, n.d.). The final tier is made up of the Canadian Sport Centres and Institutes (seven centres across Canada) and they focus on elite sport development (Government of Canada, n.d.).

The Canadian Sport Policy (2012 - 2022) was created to be a guiding framework for the governments, institutions and organizations in the sport system. It has five broad objectives: 1) the introduction of sport to Canadians to develop the related skills, 2) the encouragement of recreational sport participation, 3) the improvement of competitive sport performance, 4) international sport competitiveness, and 5) the use of sport to build the society, economy and share Canadian values (Government of Canada, n.d.). The sport policy is a product of collaborative discussions between varied levels of sport management (community-based, provincial/territorial and national) in Canada with the aim of replacing the original sport policy established in 2002 and to create a vision for Canadian sport going forward (Sport Information Resource Centre, n.d.). This vision is to have

a dynamic and leading-edge sport environment that enables all Canadians to experience and enjoy involvement in sport to the extent of their abilities and interests and, for increasing numbers, to perform consistently and successfully at the highest competitive levels. (Sport Information Resource Centre, n.d., "CSP Renewal Overview", para. 4)

In order to achieve this vision, policies and programs, such as the Canadian Sport for Life, became essential frameworks for approaching sport management and delivery in Canada.

**Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L).** The Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) initiative was created to help achieve this aim with a focus on athlete training and coordination (Government of Canada, n.d.). The CS4L model focuses on Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) where kids and adults are encouraged to engage in, train for and participate in physical activity using

the approaches relevant for their phase of development. This initiative is led by Sport Canada and the eight stages are awareness and first involvement, active start (from 0-6 years of age), FUNdamentals, learn to train (up to age 12), train to train, train to compete, train to win (after puberty), and active for life (throughout the lifespan) (Sport for Life, n.d.). University sport may be seen as assisting in fulfilling the functions of the train to train, train to compete, and train to win phases with a focus on elite training, sport specialization, elite competition, and maximizing physical, mental, and emotional athlete development (Sport for Life, n.d.).

**University sport in Canada.** University sport in Canada is governed by U-Sports with 56 universities registered as members (U-Sports, n.d.). It started in 1906 as the Canadian Interuniversity Athletics Union (CIAU) with universities from Ontario and Quebec amid increased growth in university sport up to 1919 (U-Sports, n.d.). A boom in university sport followed that influenced facility expansion and the creation of professional coaching and management positions up to 1944 (U-Sports, n.d.). With varied associations across Canada being formed and disbanding for a multiplicity of reasons (such as conflicting interests) until 1961, the various associations across Canada and the Government of Canada recognized that various changes were necessary to move university sport and sport in Canada forward (U-Sports, n.d.). This resulted in the Canadian Government allocating funding for university sport, managed by Sport Canada, with the ultimate aim of helping the federal government identify elite talent and develop international competitors (U-Sports, n.d.). A shift to a focus on high performance sport occurred by the 1970's (U-Sports, n.d.) and this shift is evident in the CS4L's stages of train to train, train to compete, and train to win.

The final major amalgamation of provincial/regional university sport associations took place in 1997 when the Ontario Women's Interuniversity Athletic Union (OWIAA) merged with

the Ontario University Athletics (OUA). The CIAU was changed to Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) in 2001 because it was believed to represent a stronger Canadian brand, and also because of the growing association between the term athletics and track and field. The final name change (U Sports) took place in 2016, with 56 universities, approximately 12,000 athletes, and 7,700 games and events each year being managed by the governing body (U-Sports, n.d.). The members are divided into four conferences; the Atlantic University Sport (AUS) conference, the Canada West Universities Athletic Association (CanWest), the Ontario University Athletics (OUA) conference, and the Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec (RSEQ). As the associations became more organized, the focus of university sport shifted to elite athletic performance, and the Canadian Government increased their intake of immigrants, the presence of international student-athletes became more prominent.

**International student-athletes (ISAs) in Canada.** The Canadian Bureau for International Education (n.d.) noted that in 2017, there were 495,525 international students in Canada with Ontario, British Columbia, and Québec accounting for 84% of that number. This represented a 119% increase since 2010 and a notable increase from the 353,000 recorded by Statistics Canada (2017) in 2015. Of the more than 11,000 student-athletes competing in U-Sports between 2012 and 2014, 5.1% were ISAs with a majority of the representation coming from basketball and soccer (Danylchuk & Grbac, 2016). There is a gap related to updated university student-athlete information and statistics in Canada, especially those related international or newcomer student-athletes. In contrast, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which is the governing body for university sport in the United States of America (U.S.A.), has reported having more than 20,000 ISAs out of a total of more than 460,000 university athletes (NCAA, n.d.). Of particular note on the NCAA's website, is the

acknowledgement of the factors impacting ISA well-being, transition, and the benefit they bring to the university sport context. This highlights Grbac's (2014) point of a dearth in available statistics related to international student-athletes in Canada.

**The origins of university sport recruitment.** The advent of globalization and internationalization (highlighted by universities wanting to attract top talent and build ratings) has been identified as the driving forces behind ISA recruitment by Canadian universities (Grbac, 2014). The Canadian Government's immigration policy has also contributed to the growth in newcomer participation and attendance in Canadian university contexts with its intentional efforts at increasing immigration. The NCAA's approach has been more aggressive in relation to ISA recruitment, which is driven by the intent of coaches to achieve success and by international students looking to gain academic and athletic exposure and success (Grbac, 2014). This recruitment drive started in the 1950s in the NCAA (Popp, Hums, & Greenwell, 2009) with ISAs often representing the elite athletes from their countries of origin (Popp et al., 2009). From this perspective, they are seen as a means by which universities can improve athletic performance in the competitive American environment while the athletes consider it an opportunity to further their professional athletic careers or at least gain higher education (Grbac, 2014). This experience can be positive or negative, but Danylchuk and Grbac (2016) found that of the 16 ISAs they interviewed from the four regional associations in Canada, most reported having positive experiences in Canada.

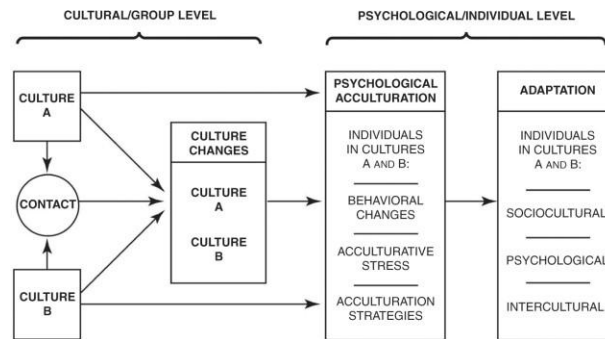
### **Acculturation**

The definition of acculturation has changed over time but it can be viewed as the process of learning a second culture (Rudmin, 2009) when migrants from one culture come into significant first hand contact with members of the host culture to which they have moved. There

is a distinct change that occurs in the behavioural, attitudinal, and psychological process of the individual based on this interaction and it can be likened to culture shock (Schinke et al., 2013) or a rupturing of the individual's psyche and concept of self (Ryba et al., 2016). It is differentiated from enculturation by the fact that enculturation is likened unto socialization, where an individual learns the necessary skills to survive within their own culture through observation which isn't always deliberate (Sam, 2006). While there may be similarities in the fact that a culture is being learned, acculturation is specific to the process of learning another culture in a different cultural context. Berry (1997; 2006a; 2006b) has been responsible for much of what we know today in cultural psychology about acculturation.

Moving to a new cultural context is not always voluntary, such as in the case of refugees who are forced from their home country, but the impact of the change in cultural identity and behaviour occurs nonetheless. Just by being in the context and learning new practices, acculturation occurs whether acknowledged or not. Figure 2.1 details Berry's framework for acculturation. Acculturation was previously positioned as linear, meaning it had a start and an end which came after following a particular path. This linear view of acculturation has been challenged by critical psychology scholars who consider that it does not happen over a set period of time (Schinke et al., 2016a), is a social process (Schinke & McGannon, 2014), is non-linear (Chirkov, 2009), and continuous (Sam, 2006). In other words, it is a very complex phenomenon, which can occur each time the migrant encounters something or someone new in their host cultural context.

Figure 2.1. Acculturation Framework



*Figure 2.1.* Berry's framework for conceptualizing and studying acculturation. From "The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology," by D. L. Sam and J. W. Berry, 2006, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Copyright 2006 by Sam and Berry. Reprinted with permission.

These encounters with the new host culture, especially in the early stages, can result in significant stress on the newcomer, termed acculturative stress (Berry, 1997, 2006b), and impact the acculturation experience of the individual. The individual can choose to adopt the host culture and reject their home culture (assimilation), reject the host culture in favour of their home culture (separation), reject both the host and home cultures (marginalization) or adapt in a way that leads to acceptance of the host cultural norms and values while being able to maintain home cultural identity (integration) (Berry, 2006a). These acculturative strategies are chosen based on the context and level of stress encountered by the newcomer and, according to Berry (2006a) is grounded in the notion of whether one seeks to preserve home cultural identity or places a premium on contact with the host culture. This premise also guides the strategies chosen by the larger society who will decide to choose multiculturalism (integration), a melting pot (assimilation), segregation (separation), or exclusion (marginalization). This gives insight into

the concept that an acculturating context includes two cultural perspectives that can choose to approach the other with whichever strategy is deemed fitting at the time of the interaction (see Figure 2.2).

According to Segmented Assimilation Theory, the acculturating newcomer has three possible paths they can choose. These are acculturation and integration, which in this case is akin to assimilation, they can move in the opposite direction towards a life of poverty and assimilation with the underclass instead of the dominant culture, or selective acculturation where they attempt a deliberate preservation of their home culture even if economic progress occurs (Garrido et al., 2012). This theory is guided by the notion that social status plays a part in determining to what extent the newcomer acculturates in their new host context. Regardless, of the strategy or path chosen by the newcomer, the consensus in research is that, especially in the early stages for migrant athletes, “issues of cultural dislocation, including homesickness and loneliness, language, isolation and related problems of adjustment” (Weedon, 2011, p. 205) can characterize acculturation. Other factors that have an implication for how acculturation is experienced include the differences between the cultural contexts, level of social support available to the newcomer, perspective and approach of the newcomer, phase of acculturation, and origin (Berry, 2006a ; Garrido et al., 2012; Weedon, 2011).

Figure 2.2. Acculturation Strategies

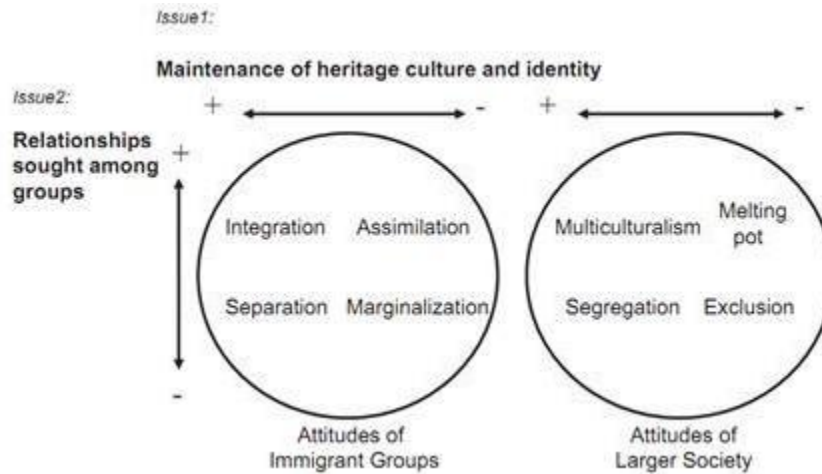


Figure 2.2. Berry's two-dimensional model of acculturation for pluralistic societies. From "The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology," by D. L. Sam and J. W. Berry, 2006, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Copyright 2006 by Sam and Berry Reprinted with permission.

**Sport acculturation of newcomer athletes.** Newcomer athlete acculturation has been examined from a variety of international contexts including Finland (Zacheus, 2010), the United States of America (Foo, 2015; Sato, Hodge, & Burge-Hall, 2011), and Spain (Garrido et al., 2012), among others. Though much has been unearthed about acculturation as time has gone on, much more is still being learned about how it impacts different populations and cultures. Athletes who move across borders have to navigate the same transitional issues mentioned previously but the sporting context brings a few other factors into consideration. The work of Kontos and Breland-Noble (2002) has contributed significantly to understandings of newcomer athlete acculturation and the authors have been seen as forerunners in researching the topic in the field of sport psychology. Some of their findings highlight the importance of understanding the

athlete's home cultural context, the importance of culture and context in the athlete's interpretation and response to experiences, and that generation of immigration matters in understanding the immigrant's acculturation experiences. This review focused on the need for sport psychology consultants to be aware of particular issues when dealing with athletes of colour and it was borne out of a need for a greater understanding and awareness of multicultural issues in sport psychology. The prevalence of minorities involved in sport, the lack of formal multicultural training for sports psychologists, and the lack of a multicultural focus in sports psychology literature (Kontos and Breland-Noble, 2002) were the motivations behind the author's investigation of the topic.

There are multiplicities of factors that affect acculturation but some researchers have been accused of ignoring the impact of culture during this process (Chirkov, 2009). Shifting to a focus on culture highlighted the possibility that an athlete's country of origin influences how they experience acculturation and it should be considered in research examining their experiences of acculturation, a position echoed by Garrido et al. (2012). The role of the host cultural context also comes into focus as the greater the disparity in the cultures, the more acculturative stress experienced by the immigrant athlete (Garrido et al., 2012). Kontos and Breland-Noble (2002) have also furthered the consideration for the role the receiving context plays by indicating the need for host sport contexts and sport psychologists to increase cultural sensitivity and awareness when working with athletes from a different sport cultural context. This becomes even more essential as the authors note the institutionally embedded and reinforced stereotypes related to race and ethnic behaviours in the U.S.A.

Foo (2015) explored the sport migration experiences of eight Trinidad and Tobago male soccer players who moved to the U.S.A. Using a phenomenological approach, the author aimed

to understand sport migration in relation to international student-athlete recruitment, as well as the stressors these athletes experience during this process. The author raises support for the need to understand where the immigrant athlete has come from, why they have come to the new context, and the stress that is placed on them by elements within the new context itself (e.g., coaches, teammates, teachers, and finances). While Foo's study focused on ISAs in the United States, this interpretivist work brought focus to the importance of particular demographic factors such as background, level of support, and motivation for pursuing migration on newcomer athlete acculturation. Weedon's (2011) work done in the United Kingdom utilizing the 'Glocalization' framework (using a local and global perspective to explain how individuals act within a cultural context) also highlights the importance of the host sport context on newcomer athlete acculturation. While considering the physical, psychological and cultural challenges of youth in English Premier League academies, Weedon noted that the school sport system plays an important role in the acculturation of its athletes in many ways. These include the sometimes forced athlete acculturation at the expense of other areas that could prove beneficial to the athlete, the addition of performance-related stress based on the fact that the context is responsible for critical areas such as housing the athlete, and also the response received from others in the sport system to their performances. Weedon's work also highlights the fluid nature of acculturation strategies based on the phase of acculturation one is in (reflective of previous perspectives of acculturation as a linear process), the key role language plays in acculturation, the importance of perspective and approach of the acculturating individual, and the crucial role of those within the receiving sport system in the acculturation process. This contextual importance is also noted by Garrido et al. (2012) in their study done in Spain as they highlighted the fact that place of residence impacts newcomer athlete acculturation and that when compared to young newcomers outside the educational context, those in an educational context acculturate at a higher rate. With these things in mind, Weedon's (2011) question proves salient, "Is there a

need for an acculturating strategy for players who migrate within nation-states and, if so, are they received in different ways by host cultures?" (p. 214).

**The shift in research.** Recent research has positioned acculturation as fluid, recognizing that it is not a linear process that ends but is experienced based on the context and each new experience as athletes navigate their host cultural context (Schinke et al., 2013). Newcomer athletes make sense of their reality based on their social situation as they come into contact with others around them and, as such, how and when they experience and understand acculturation is framed by this interaction. This point of view is informed by the social constructionist perspective which emphasizes the notion that an individual's perception of reality and how they experience the world is informed by their interactions with the people and world around them (Schinke et al., 2013). This work by Schinke and colleagues examining the acculturation experiences of amateur and elite newcomer athletes in Canada from the perspective of the athlete and the coaches that work with them has been instrumental in positioning the acculturation experience as shared (two-way) or shouldered (one-way) by the athlete. As noted by Ryba et al. (2018), Schinke's work is significant in relating newcomer acculturation as adaptive or maladaptive based on whether it is shared or shouldered, becoming a benchmark for newcomer athlete acculturation research in a Canadian context. Schinke and colleagues highlight the importance of the approach or level of reciprocity of the acculturation context in determining to what degree acculturation is experienced positively or negatively. The host sport context becomes a significant source of cultural learning for the newcomer athlete but the athlete is sometimes met with the expectation to assimilate and with lack of reciprocity which results in

shouldered acculturation, increased acculturative stress, and increased negative perception towards the host culture (Schinke & McGannon, 2014; Schinke et al., 2013). The added perspective from the coaches working with the newcomer athletes was also beneficial in highlighting the concept of acculturation as a two-way process in that the athlete and those in the acculturating context are both impacted by how the athlete experiences acculturation. Similar to Berry's model (Figure 2.2) reflecting the responses of the newcomer and the host culture to cross-cultural contact, the coaches willing to assist in or understand the perspective of the newcomer athlete contributed to a more positive newcomer acculturation experience. Schinke et al. (2013) also found that the athletes would lean towards a preference of the host context especially when there is a sense that efforts to assisting a shared acculturation experience were present. This essential work in studying acculturation in a Canadian context ended with recommendations for further research incorporating the perspectives of others in the acculturating context, which would provide a more holistic perspective, and also suggestions for a formal preparation module to be created that would assist coaches and athletes in dealing with any challenges related to acculturation. This would be necessary going forward, along with the creation of formal networks for immigrant athlete support, in helping the athlete and those in the acculturating context.

Schinke and McGannon (2014) and Blodgett et al. (2014) built on this concept of acculturation as a shouldered or shared process using a cultural sport psychology perspective informed by critical theory. Critical theorists have argued that previous perceptions of acculturation have been too simple and linear in their conceptions while also failing to thoroughly represent the immigrant's experiences, and positioning acculturation as an outcome. They choose instead to view acculturation as a social, fluid, and continuous process (Schinke et

al., 2013). The role and responsibility of those within the acculturating context and their relation to the positive acculturation of newcomers in the host culture has also been called into focus. Blodgett et al.'s (2014) work on the acculturation challenges faced by Indigenous athletes who are recruited to Euro-Canadian contexts builds on the perspective of acculturation being a social and ongoing process and highlighted the need for the promotion of more inclusive sport contexts. They also discuss the struggles faced in trying to acculturate (including culture shock, marginalization, and psychological harm) in Canadian sport environments, as well as the need for more research promoting cultural diversity in sport psychology. The acculturation accounts of Indigenous athletes moving to Euro-Canadian sport contexts to pursue sport shared similar themes (e.g., feelings of loneliness, disconnect from family, and racism) to those of newcomer athletes in similar research and provide consideration for the role of the sporting context in the integration of newcomer athletes. The authors also contribute to the cultural sport psychology field by continuing the drive for more inductive and interpretive acculturation research, furthering the perspective that acculturation is a process and not an outcome, and highlighting athlete's return to home response when faced with difficult acculturating contexts. Blodgett et al.'s (2014) work also hints at the formation of a new culture or in-between culture by the athlete in response to navigating multiple cultural realities instead of choosing one of the four acculturative strategies proposed by Berry and colleagues. This is similar to the concepts of Hybridization (Weedon, 2011) and Interculturalization (Sam, 2006) mentioned in the literature where the acculturating individual is able to merge aspects of various cultures in a way that creates a hybrid culture that becomes the normative culture thereafter.

With a dearth of perspectives in cultural sport psychology literature examining acculturation as a shared and fluid process, Schinke and McGannon (2014) posited that

newcomer athlete acculturation be examined as shouldered by the athlete or shared with others. They proposed three forms of acculturation: athlete's responsibility (similar to shouldered acculturation where the athlete is expected to assimilate or be marginalized), limited reciprocity (where the athlete is still expected to assimilate but with limited help from the host context), and immersed reciprocity (similar to two-way shared acculturation). This continues the perspective from cultural psychology of acculturation being a shared, fluid, and continuous social process. As researchers continued with a critical focus in examining immigrant athlete acculturation in Canadian contexts, Schinke et al. (2016a) highlighted the difficulties athletes encounter when interacting with the sport system. Noting that acculturation is dealt with in a situation specific manner, the authors found that support is more likely to come from familial agents rather than the receiving culture. While this can be seen as a natural occurrence, it points to the challenges athletes face in new cultural sport contexts where the authors raise the question of whether or not the sporting context is the best one for successful acculturation. This comes in light of the athletes stated challenges related to initiations into Canadian sport programs, adjusting to new sport programs and training approaches, dealing with cultural differences in Canadian athletes' mindsets, and searching for balance between cultures.

As Schinke and colleagues continued their work examining athlete acculturation in a Canadian context using interpretivist approaches in cultural sport psychology, more focus was being placed on capturing the fullness of the challenges and experiences of newcomer athletes in their host/receiving context. With social constructionism's focus on the social exchanges within the acculturation process serving as a theoretical guide, Schinke et al. (2017) highlighted the shifting perspectives of athletes towards receiving contexts. While cohesively strong contexts in sport which are not task-oriented can assist with newcomer athlete integration, the authors found

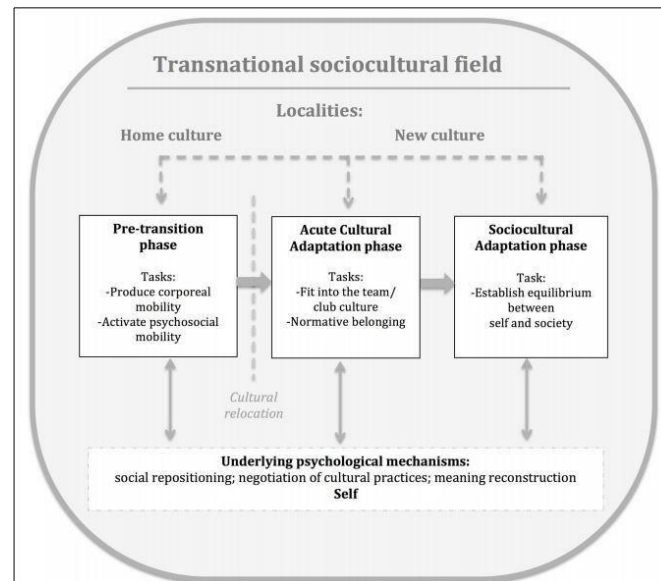
that athletes' mindsets can change from optimism to disappointment with the various hardships faced in the host context. This causes a comparison with the positive, familiar home cultural context and therefore a turning away from the host cultural context. This comparison is a normal part of the experience, whether positive or negative, as the athlete tries to make sense of relationships and interactions. This area is where Schinke et al. (2017) place emphasis as athletes fluidly move from positive to negative experiences and back again based on these interactions, with a better understanding of this positioning becoming increasingly important for sports psychologists and those within acculturating contexts.

With much of the research in newcomer athlete acculturation growing through the work of cultural sport psychology, the literature continues to build on the concept of acculturation as a fluid and socially constructed process. Ryba et al. (2018) indicate that it is open-ended, ongoing, and difficult to predict and regulate. Ryba and colleagues have also taken perspectives on athletic cultural transition in new directions in recent studies. Ryba et al. (2016) note that in many cases, these athletes' movement across borders is intentional and can also be impacted by a myriad of factors in their new cultural context. While noting previously mentioned concerns related to finances, language proficiency, and threat of de-selection (among others) on newcomer athlete acculturation, Ryba and colleagues note that the well-being of family members and how they go through acculturation also impacts how the athlete experiences acculturation. Their daily social interactions with others in the new host culture leads to a questioning of self and identity that must be navigated and balanced with athletic performance likely to be impacted if this balance is not established (Ryba et al., 2018). Like Foo (2015), Ryba and colleagues point to the need for organizations and those working with these athletes to be made aware of the depth of how this

process impacts the athlete, especially since all aspects of the athlete's life impact their transition.

**Acculturation and transition models.** Berry's model of acculturation (Figure 2.1) has been used primarily as the benchmark for illustrating the concept. Informed by the work of Schinke et al. (2013), Ryba et al. (2016) proposed the Cultural Transition Model (CTM) as a useful framework for examining acculturation based on position in society, the ability to balance cultural practices in the host context, and the meanings created based on these interactions (Figure 2.3). Basically, how one prepares for transitioning to a new culture, how you negotiate learning and practicing the differences in culture in your new context, and how well you integrate within the host context have implications for your acculturation and optimal psychological functioning in the host culture. Ryba et al.'s (2016) work was focused on the transition experiences of immigrant athletes and positions the CTM as a non-linear model for examining acculturation and not as a replacement for acculturation as a concept. The CTM brings light to and bears implication for understanding how an athlete navigates the process of transitioning to a new culture and how psychosocial support and pre-transition counseling impact this.

Figure 2.3. Cultural Transition Model



*Figure 2.3. Cultural Transition Model. From “The Work of Cultural Transition: An Emerging Model,” by T. V. Ryba, N. Stambulova, and N. J. Ronkainen, 2016, Frontiers in Psychology 7 (427), p. 1-11. Copyright 2016 by Ryba, Stambulova and Ronkainen. Reprinted with permission.*

While the CTM is not linear, once the athlete achieves a ‘meaningful relationship’ with society, they would be deemed to have reached the symbolic end of their transition even though they can cycle between the second and third phase based on the context and experience. With the aim of helping the athlete reach a level of psychological functioning that will allow them to acculturate properly, the CTM is broken down into three phases. The first phase is the Pre-Transition phase which is characterized by the preparation for moving to and examination of various characteristics of the host cultural context. Issues of relationships, language of coaches and teammates, and the expectations for life in the host cultural context are dealt with by the athlete. From the standpoint of the model, these are essential for psychologically preparing the athlete for moving to a new cultural context. Once the athlete has moved to the new cultural

context, they enter the second phase known as Acute Cultural Adaptation. This second phase is characterized by adjustment as issues of loneliness and a possible reclassification of identity take place. For athletes, the sport context plays a significant role in their adjustment. While a culturally sensitive coach or one who shares the athlete's background makes this phase easier to experience, if the sport context isn't supportive it can make the adjustment much more difficult and delay the athlete's transition to the third phase. Successful navigation of the second phase sees the formation of a new concept of self as the athlete builds a deeper attachment to the host context that also assists in their navigation of the third phase, Sociocultural Adaptation. This third phase is characterized by the athlete's need to feel contented and this becomes difficult for athletes who still have significant familial attachments in their home country. This means that once the athlete still has significant pull factors towards their home country, such as a spouse still living there, it is difficult for the athlete to make stronger attachments to the host country. Once the transition is successfully navigated, the athlete would have achieved the "psychological repairing of the cultural rupture of daily life that results in a more expansive and fluid psychological self-system." (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 10). The work of Ryba and colleagues with the CTM has highlighted the need for psychosocial support for transitioning athletes (Ryba et al., 2016), the importance of pre-transition counseling and preparation for the athlete, and the need for a greater examination of the acculturating context for newcomer athletes (Ryba et al, 2018).

The 'Glocalization' framework used by Weedon (2011) also has some benefit for the general study of acculturation. It examines how people behave in specific cultural contexts based on how global and local perspectives influence those behaviours. Weedon indicated that the framework is useful for assessing the sporting context and the atmosphere therein after the integration of newcomer athletes. This would be a useful model for a second phase/follow up to

this proposed research project to be undertaken. Garrido et al. (2012) created the Physical Activity and Sport Acculturation Index (PASAI) which is built on what the authors considered the main characteristics in a physical activity and sport context where the social integration of newcomers has taken place: mixed relationships, cultural references, engagement, and transnationality. While also seen as a useful instrument in furthering understandings related to newcomer athlete acculturation, this index is one that will be more suited to post-positivist and mixed methods approaches to examining acculturation through the use of surveys and statistical analysis. This interpretive project will focus more on the lived acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes looking to gain a better understanding of the experiences and meanings attached to them by the athletes in the varsity context.

**Critiques and gaps.** While the literature on acculturation has grown in the social sciences, especially in cultural sport psychology, many aspects of it have been challenged. Chirkov (2009) highlighted that the acculturation research of the time was dominated by positivistic and quantitative approaches which were insufficient in providing an adequate examination and explanation of acculturation as a phenomenon. This is a point of view that has been shared by Schinke and colleagues who have also joined with Chirkov in the call for more varied epistemological and methodological approaches to the study of acculturation in psychology. Berry (2009) disagreed with this turn in focus indicating that a move to the use of social constructionist concepts and methods would represent a regressive step in understanding acculturation and be insufficient for policy-making purposes. Notwithstanding, this social constructionist viewpoint has dominated explorations into immigrant athlete acculturation in Canada over the last half of a decade and it will also serve as the guiding paradigmatic framework for this project.

Chirkov (2009) also highlighted that the acculturation literature of the time lacked any focus on culture and its impact on acculturation, critiquing Berry in particular for taking a universalist perspective of acculturation (experienced the same way by all with no consideration for how individual differences impact the process). Berry refuted this claim by stating that this difference in individual acculturation experience is noted in his work while also pointing to his model of acculturation that places culture at the forefront of how the process is experienced. This was also a response to Chirkov's (2009) critique stating that there was a lack of working models of culture to guide acculturation research. Newer models, such as the CTM, have also addressed this point and that is why it will be used to guide a part of this project (to be discussed in the next chapter). Chirkov's final critique of acculturation research centered on studies ignoring the role and the function of language in acculturation and that there was a need for more practical application for the findings of research. Based on these shortfalls, the author recommended that acculturation researchers do more to understand the home culture, understand and compare the host cultural context with the home culture, and study newcomers' experience during their transition along with the meanings they assign to various situations and experiences.

Critical theorists like Chirkov have generally viewed acculturation concepts in psychology as not aligning with immigrants' experiences, overly simplified, and ignoring its fluidity, complexity, non-linearity, and ongoing nature (Schinke et al, 2013). Acculturation research in sport psychology has also not taken the role of the social context into consideration (Schinke & McGannon, 2014) and lacked cultural diversity (Blodgett et al., 2014). Even with the growth in athlete acculturation research in Canadian contexts, there is still a need for greater examinations of these acculturating contexts and research conducted by members of the non-dominant cultural context. Ryba (2017) has also noted that with the prevalence of interactionist

views that have dominated recent examinations of acculturation, the role of structure and sources of power in the acculturation of newcomers has largely been ignored. While much of the recent acculturation research in sport psychology by Schinke and colleagues has examined much of the aspects of acculturation, they also continue to call for further research examining its complexities from varied qualitative methodologies.

Much of the previous research in a Canadian sport context has focused on the acculturation experiences of amateur and elite immigrant athletes (Ryba et al, 2016; Schinke et al., 2016a; Schinke et al., 2017; Schinke et al., 2013) and Indigenous athletes (Blodgett et al., 2014) but a gap exists in related research pertaining to other specific populations of newcomer athletes. My interest in the Canadian sport context comes from my position as a Jamaican immigrant pursuing higher education at a university in Manitoba, Canada. This qualitative work will continue to add to the cultural sport psychology literature on acculturation analyzed from the perspective of a newcomer in a Canadian university context. The focus on the specific population of newcomer varsity athletes will be an attempt to examine the acculturation of a specific sport population in Canada with the aim of understanding their lived experiences and how their acculturation experiences are impacted by the varsity sport context in Manitoba. This latter point is crucial because, as Ryba (2017) noted, the social context has a significant bearing on the psychological well-being and acculturation experiences of the newcomer.

## **Rationale**

Athlete acculturation is growing in importance and has become an important topic for sports psychologists (Schinke et al., 2016a) with implications for everyone involved in the newcomer athlete's sporting context. This becomes increasingly important as large numbers of

athletes cross national borders for the pursuit of personal and professional development. Nadeau et al. (2016) indicate that even though the sporting context plays a key role in newcomer integration as well as in attracting newcomers to smaller cities, there is still a need for more understanding related to the extent to which sport can help the newcomer adapt. Schinke & McGannon (2014) propose that research which contributes to the understanding of the relationships within the newcomer athlete's sports context and also a context that promotes more cultural inclusivity will be beneficial for all involved in the context and for sport psychology consultants. This will aid in creating culturally sensitive and inclusive sport spaces (Ryba, 2017; Ryba et al., 2018) and aid in newcomer athlete retention and adjustment. This approach will also increase newcomer understanding for sport teams, coaches and systems of the acculturation process and what can be done to assist newcomers through this process (Schinke et al., 2016a). Also, there is a need for understanding how the newcomer athlete's acculturation experiences outside of the sporting context impacts their daily lives and for a greater understanding of the acculturation phenomenon as it relates to the newcomer athlete's experiences (Schinke et al., 2017).

The need for more work in understanding newcomer athlete acculturation and its benefit to those involved in the sporting context and sport psychology consultants is what guides the rationale for this project. Much of the research from a Canadian context has focused on the acculturation of amateur and elite immigrant athletes or Indigenous athletes but not much can be found with a specific focus on newcomer varsity athletes. My interest in this specific population comes from my position of being an ethnic minority immigrant pursuing graduate level education in a Canadian university in Manitoba with the aim of addressing this gap in the literature. As noted by Chirkov (2009), "ignoring acculturation issues or addressing them

superficially in the current age may have tremendous costs – political, economical and socio-physical.” (p. 95). These are costs that I believe cannot be taken lightly in our current Canadian climate that is heavily influenced by immigration. The purpose of this master’s thesis project will be to increase our understanding of newcomer athlete acculturation in Canada by examining the experiences of newcomer athletes in the varsity context with a particular focus on how the sport context and the non-sport context (educational) have influenced their acculturation experiences. This project will seek to answer the question: What are the acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba?

### **Implications**

This project will have implications for research on the acculturation of newcomer athletes in Canada and practical application in assisting coaches, organizations and peers who interact with newcomer varsity athletes in the Canadian sport context by providing further insight into their acculturation experiences. This project will add to the literature on newcomer athlete acculturation, more specifically to newcomer varsity athletes, which is an answer to multiple calls for more research in the area. This project will also provide insight that could prove useful to coaches and organizations that interact with newcomer varsity athletes and could also inform further research in the area that could relate to the youth sport context. Finally, this project would play its part in answering Sport for Life’s (2018) call to sport and physical activity organizations to “spend time understanding where the newcomers have come from, and what they have gone through in order to settle in a new country” (p. 30). These implications position the research as a contribution to efforts at improving student-athlete mental health and well-being while aiding in their positive contribution to the wider community, city and nation. It is hoped that this research

will encourage further work in examining newcomer varsity athlete acculturation and the promotion of a culturally sensitive sporting context in Manitoba.

### **Chapter 3 - Methods and Methodology**

This chapter will begin with a description of the theories and perspectives that informed the methodology of the project and of the methods that were employed in order to conduct this examination of newcomer varsity athlete acculturation. This will be followed by a detailed look at the participants that were chosen as well as the context from which their recruitment took place, while indicating what sampling technique was used. Afterwards, a description of the data collection and analysis tools and procedures that have been selected with justification for why they are seen as suitable for this project. The chapter will conclude with a look at the reflexivity of the researcher followed by a consideration of the barriers that affected the success of the project.

#### **Methodology**

According to Markula and Silk (2011), “the aim of an interpretive project is to understand the individuals’ behaviours, meanings and experiences within particular social settings” (p. 31). Though undertaking research into lived experiences can be viewed as complex (Parry & Johnson, 2007), the use of an interpretive approach will allow for an in-depth understanding of experiences and meanings (An & Goodwin, 2007). For interpretivists/constructivists, “individuals make multiple meanings of the social world based on their experiences: an understanding of reality is relative to an individual’s context and experiences.” (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 37). These meanings, behaviours and experiences are created as they come into contact with others around them. This project follows the understanding of a relativist ontology (multiple realities based on the meanings attached to it by the individual) and subjective epistemology (how you can know or understand that reality),

which are foundational standpoints of the interpretive/constructivist qualitative research paradigm.

This paradigm was seen as the most suitable for approaching this project because of the alignment of its focus on understanding the meanings attached to the lived experiences of individuals with the project's aim of examining and understanding the lived acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes. This paradigmatic focus continues through the methods that were used to collect data from participants (semi-structured interviews), analysis of the data (interpretive thematic analysis), and the use of theory to "frame and analyse the topic of interest and... connect the topic with larger social and cultural issues" (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 60).

Some lines of social constructivism and social constructionism have been associated with the critical qualitative research paradigm (Markula & Silk, 2011), focusing on the relationship between the structures of power within society and how they impact human behaviour and understanding. While these perspectives have helped to inform current understandings of acculturation, the methods employed for this project took a more interpretive approach on understanding experiences and meanings of participants instead of critiquing the structures of power related to newcomer athletes, sport, and the university context in Manitoba.

## **Methods**

According to the Government of Manitoba (n.d.), the universities and colleges in Manitoba are Booth University College, Brandon University, Canadian Mennonite University, Providence University College, University College of the North, Université de Saint-Boniface, The University of Manitoba, The University of Winnipeg, Assiniboine Community College, École Technique et Professionnelle, Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology, and Red River College. University sport in Canada is governed by U-Sports with 56 universities registered as members (U-Sports, n.d.). The only members of Canada West, the regional U-

Sports conference to which Manitoban universities belong, are Brandon University, the University of Manitoba, and the University of Winnipeg (Canada West, n.d.). The Manitoba Colleges Athletic Conference (MCAC) is the governing body for intercollegiate sports in Manitoba and the member institutions are Red River College, Brandon University, Assiniboine College, Canadian Mennonite University, Université de Saint-Boniface, Providence University, and the University of Winnipeg (MCAC, n.d.). Research ethics board approval for this project was received from the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) at the University of Manitoba.

**Participants.** Seven (7) newcomer varsity athletes were recruited from universities and colleges in Manitoba using homogenous sampling and snowball sampling. The inclusion criteria included that the participant had moved to Canada between 2013 to present (a five year period), was a current member of their 2018/2019 varsity sport team, and had not been born and raised in Canada or the U.S.A. Though persons born in the U.S.A. who move to the Canadian sport context would have been considered as matches for the Statistics Canada (2016) definition of immigrants or non-permanent residents, these athletes were excluded from this project because of the possible similarity in cultures due to the proximity of the countries. Five years was chosen because that is the maximum eligibility timeframe for U-Sports participation. Participants who met the mentioned criteria regardless of gender, type of sport, category of sport (individual versus team), and year in sport program were recruited for the project. The range of years (1-5) involved in their varsity sport environment gave a more holistic perspective of varied acculturation experiences. An

examination of the 2018/2019 rosters for the varsity sport teams of the universities and colleges in Manitoba, using the institutions' websites, was conducted in order to identify potential participants (49 athletes).

Of the seven (7) participants who took part in this research project, five (5) were male and two (2) were female. Their specific sports teams have been omitted from this document because of the possible social/reputational risk associated with including this information. This could possibly result in the results of this study affecting the relationship that these athletes have with those in their varsity sport context. Similarly, their country of origin or cultural heritage will not be identified. The country classification terms in the United Nations' 2019 World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP, 2019) report have been chosen instead as the identifier for the countries of the participants. These categorizations are developed economies, economies in transition, and developing economies. A breakdown of the study's participants can be found in Appendix A.

**Participant recruitment.** After receiving ENREB ethics approval, potential participants who met the criteria or key contacts at the relevant institutions were contacted using telephone and/or email. The project was explained to the athletes who were then sent the recruitment letter (Appendix B) and asked to indicate their interest in participating in the study. Where key contacts were concerned, they were asked to pass on details related to the study to athletes who met the criteria. Once an athlete agreed to participate in the study and then completed and returned the consent/assent form (Appendix C), snowball sampling was employed and the athlete asked to identify and share details about the study with other information-rich candidates for inclusion in the research (Markula & Silk, 2011; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Once provided with contact information for these athletes, the process was repeated until data saturation was reached

with respect to the information coming out of the interviews. The use of homogenous sampling and snowball sampling represent purposeful sampling in qualitative research. This means that participants were not selected randomly but were specifically chosen because it is believed that they were best suited for answering a particular research question (Markula & Silk, 2011).

**Data collection.** Multiple methods were used to collect the data necessary for the completion of this project. A reflective letter to their younger self, semi-structured interviews, and a reflexive journal were the chosen data collection methods for this qualitative inquiry.

*Letter to your younger self.* The use of the letter was inspired by creative analytic practice (CAP) which is normally used in the representation of research (Markula & Silk, 2011; Parry & Johnson, 2007) and aimed at articulating the experiences of research participants. CAP is “storied, evocative or alternative writing” (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 181) and while it can be seen as similar to narrative research, it aims to include the researcher’s voice in the use of “literary devices to represent empirical material” (p. 182). Parry and Johnson (2007) indicate that CAP research, a term coined by Richardson (2000), intentionally aims to show the link between the qualitative research process and product, and to connect the audience with the research. Alternative ways of representing research using CAP include the use of confessional tales, autoethnography, poetry, ethnodrama/theatre, ethnographic non-fictions, and musical performances. For the purpose of this project, the letters were not used to represent the research findings but to inform the creation of questions for the interviews and for comparison with the data collected during the interviews (the primary method of data collection). According to Braun and Clarke (2013), some secondary sources (e.g. online forums where people write about their experiences or perspectives) may be useful to answer experience, understandings and perceptions, accounts of practice, and influencing factors type-research questions. Such

secondary sources are valuable because we can access people's experiences and perspectives without shaping their responses through our data collection questions and methods.

The participants were asked to write a letter to their younger selves that was submitted to the researcher prior to conducting face-to-face semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. They were also provided with the links to a website (The Player's Tribune, n.d.) where other athletes have written similar letters and a copy of a letter the researcher wrote to his younger self (Appendix D) as an example. A letter to your younger self is written from the perspective of what a person might advise a younger version of themselves if given the opportunity. This often includes crucial lessons or points in time that the younger self is yet to experience. Written retrospectively, the author becomes a narrator speaking from a point of experience as they offer guidance to their young self. Current and former professional and elite athletes from across the globe have written such letters and have posted them on the website The Players' Tribune. Athletes who have contributed have the opportunity to retrospectively describe key moments and experiences in their lives and detail them in a way that may be informative and beneficial to others.

In this project, the letters allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences in more depth than in an interview setting and allowed the researcher to gather more depth and richness of insight into the lived experiences of the participants. Chirkov (2009) indicates that such documents from newcomers can be beneficial for researchers because of the rich information they provide about the culture and experiences of the individual. The experiences of the athletes shared in their letters informed the creation of questions for the interview instead of being informed solely by the researcher. This is similar to the use of participants' Mandala drawings by Blodgett, et al. (2014) as a means of facilitating interviews with Indigenous athlete participants.

Some of the participants from that study indicated that the use of the drawings allowed them to reflect on and share things they never shared with anyone else, which provided a personal relief. The use of the letters can be seen as similar to narrative work which is considered to be retrospective meaning making with the aim of organizing life experiences, but consistent with the interpretive perspective that sees research as “a narrative through which participants share their experiences with the researcher” (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 34).

*Semi-structured interviews.* According to Schinke et al. (2013), in-depth information into experiences can be gained through individual interviews. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted in English with each participant at a mutually agreed place and time that was convenient for the participant. The location guidelines for qualitative interviewing articulated by Braun and Clarke (2013) were followed. They state that one should select a location “in which the participant feels comfortable and you feel safe... quiet as possible... little in the way of distractions... comfortable seats, a table/surface to place the recording equipment on, and convenient for the participant.” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 91) The interviews lasted between 30 to 80 minutes.

An interview guide (Appendix E) was created to allow for discussion related to the participants’ acculturation experiences. The guide was flexible and allowed for further discussion related to information that arose either from the letters or during the interview. According to Sparkes and Smith (2014), the use of semi-structured interviews will allow the participants to share more in-depth information related to the meanings attached to their experiences while allowing the researcher to gather deeper knowledge about their participants. All participants were able to meet with the researcher face-to-face and as such, there was no need for the

utilization of synchronous computer-mediated interviewing (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), such as those done with Skype or Facetime.

The cultural transition model (CTM) proposed by Ryba et al. (2016) was used to categorize the questions asked during the interview. The first section of questions were focused on the participants' demographics and pre-transition related experiences. Examples of such questions are: 'What did you do to prepare for your move to Canada? Why did you chose to come here from x country? In your letter you mentioned x about playing y sport in z country. What was going through your mind as you thought about playing x sport in Canada?' The second section of questions focused on acute cultural adaptation and examined the acculturation experiences of the athletes as they settled into the host culture varsity sport context. Examples of such questions include 'What has it been like playing in your new sport context? How does playing x sport in Canada compare to playing in your home country? What are your experiences like managing sport and school in Canada? In your letter, you mentioned x about your coach. What role did they play in your experience settling in Canada?' The final phase of questions examined the socio-cultural adaptation experiences of the participants. Examples of these questions include: 'How involved are you at school and in your community and what role does sport play in that? If there is anything that you could get now that would help you feel more settled into Canadian life, what would it be and why? What advice would you give to other newcomer varsity athletes if you had the opportunity? I remember you saying in your letter that you feel x about playing sport and living in Canada now. Can you tell me a little more about why you feel that way?' Structuring the questions in this way was deemed as beneficial for a first-time researcher and was useful in organizing the inquiry of the participants experiences into a coherent and sequential story.

***Reflexive journal.*** A reflexive journal was kept by the researcher where, after each interview, notes regarding any observations by the researcher during the interview were recorded. This is based on the recommendation by Sparkes and Smith (2014) to take field notes as soon as the interviewer is able to after the interview, detailing observations of participant behaviours during the interview. During data analysis, the journal was used by the researcher to record possible emerging codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with the data analysis being conducted manually and with software, in order to reduce researcher bias. From an interpretive/constructivist standpoint, this reduction in bias aims to limit the impact of the researcher on the study and can be seen as a form of analytic triangulation (Markula & Silk, 2011). With the researcher writing from the position of being a newcomer pursuing studies at a university in Manitoba, the use of the journal for note taking was essential for allowing the researcher to monitor personal impact and biases, and identify key observations throughout data collection and analysis (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

**Data analysis.** The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher and the data analyzed inductively using Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for conducting an interpretive thematic analysis, which were also previously used by Schinke and colleagues. Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for conducting an interpretive thematic analysis were revised in 2012 and 2013 by the authors with added recommendations for researchers. The original six steps proposed in 2006 remain the same. Familiarization is the first step and this is where the researcher immersed himself in the data during transcription of the interviews, as well as reading, and re-reading of the transcripts. During this process and after each interview, the researcher made notes about possible emerging ideas and notable aspects of the participants' experiences. These notes were made in the reflexive journal kept by the

researcher. During step two, initial coding took place as each transcript was examined for notable ideas and then compared across the entire data set in a systematic fashion. These codes were placed into emerging themes and sub-themes and the related content from the data collated into each theme and sub-theme in step three. In step four, a thematic map was created as the emerging themes were examined and reviewed with respect to the extracts and data collected. The researcher determined whether or not the content, codes, and themes matched and whether or not a coherent pattern or story emerged from the organized data. The themes were then clearly defined and named in step five which was followed by the production of a report in step six using parts of the extracts that have been identified as relating to the research question being asked. In order to remain paradigmatically consistent with interpretive work, the data was analyzed inductively which allowed for a reflexive approach. This approach allowed the researcher to identify themes as they emerged from the participants' responses in relation to the phenomenon being investigated. The coding of the data was done manually and electronically using the Nvivo 12 software package available to the University of Manitoba.

***Trustworthiness.*** The aim of this process was to produce research that follows the guidelines for qualitative trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and that “represents the ‘real’ experiences of the participants” (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 38). Manning (1997) provided consideration for assessing the authenticity of constructivist research and these categories were considered during the production of this project. The first category is fairness, which entails informed consent, member checking, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, reflexivity, and peer debriefing (Markula & Silk, 2011). Fairness examines how much the viewpoints of the participants are, “represented in a fair manner” (Shannon & Hambacher, 2014. p. 2). Informed consent was

requested from all participants before they took part in the research project. Where member checking is concerned, the transcripts were shared with participants and their feedback solicited before their contents were included in the data analysis process. Upon completion of the study, a summary document was also shared with the participants and their opinions and perspectives requested before acceptance. With each interview lasting a minimum of 30 minutes and a maximum of 80 minutes, not including pre-and post-interview discussions, it is believed that sufficient time was spent with participants to gain a significant understanding of their perspectives. Persistent observation took place through multiple readings of the transcripts from the interviews with the participants. Keeping a reflexive journal and being held accountable by the research supervisor allowed the researcher to acknowledge his reflexivity and how it may affect the analysis of the data. As the researcher was conducting data analysis, the findings, codes, themes, and rationales were shared with the researcher's supervisor in order to limit any bias that could be introduced based on the researcher's position as a newcomer pursuing studies at a Canadian university. The research supervisor was essential in ensuring that the researcher maintained awareness of his reflexivity. While a relativistic perspective does not hold criteria for judging research as absolute (Sparkes, & Smith, 2014), following these guidelines added to the strength and trustworthiness of the project. Peer debriefing occurred as the findings of the research were discussed with fellow graduate students and the researcher's supervisor.

Ontological authenticity examines how much the participants' perspectives or awareness of their social environment were increased or awakened by their participation in this research

project (Shannon & Hambacher, 2014). This is assessed through the use of dialogical conversations, openness of purpose, an emic perspective, a caring researcher-respondent relationship, and the participants being a part of the growth of the research process (Markula & Silk, 2011). As participants shared their stories, whether written or verbally, they started to engage with the meaning of those experiences, as well as how much they impacted their perceptions towards their home and host cultures. The purpose for the research was articulated to participants in their recruitment letter and before or after the interview. With the use of a variety of participants' quotes during the write up of the results of this project, the researcher believes that significant voice was given to the experiences of the participants. Also, the researcher endeavoured to build relationships with participants prior to conducting and during interviews in order to ensure that depth of and sufficient understanding of the participants' experiences occurred. Examples of how the research informed or helped with participants' understandings of their own acculturation experiences are included in Appendix F, as recommended by Manning (1997).

According to Markula and Silk (2011), educative authenticity speaks to having internal audit mechanisms in place for the research project. The use of member checking, having a clear purpose of the research, and the role of the research supervisor helped achieve this. Catalytic authenticity began with the co-construction of the research themes based on the expression of the participants' experiences and analysis and solicited feedback initiated by the researcher. To achieve accessibility of the findings and the practical use of the results of the research, the researcher will seek to publish the findings of the project in peer-reviewed journals and provide a summary of the findings to the participants and the varsity sport programs attached to the universities and colleges in Manitoba. The final category, tactical authenticity examines how the

use of the findings from the research project will be negotiated between the researcher and participant, as well as how the confidentiality of the participants will be maintained. While speaking with participants, the researcher articulated the purpose of the research and what he intended to achieve with the results. Participants voiced their support for the need for research in this area and how it can be used to benefit other newcomer athletes through the sharing of its results with the varsity sport programs at colleges and universities in Manitoba. As agreed upon with ENREB, any directly identifying information related to the participants remains solely in the possession of the researcher and will be destroyed six months after the completion of the research project. The research ensured that no directly identifying information for the participants was used in the dissemination of the findings of this research project.

### **Reflexivity**

In interpretive/constructivist inquiry, the researcher and participant have an impact on each other in the creation of knowledge, resulting in a co-constructed reality (Markula & Silk, 2011). Nevertheless, the researcher does not intentionally try to influence the findings of the research, but is aware of the potential to do so. As a newcomer studying in Canada, the researcher was aware that his immigration status had the potential to influence whether or not participants agreed to become a part of the study as well as to what depth they shared about their experiences. Information related to the researcher's status emerged during recruitment discussions with participants as the researcher explained his motivation for conducting the study. Participants, while speaking about their experiences in the host cultural context, sometimes asked if I could relate or if I had experienced the same thing. Sometimes, they would even make 'us' expressions, including me in the categorization of who would have the related experience being spoken about. I believe that having the perception of 'insider' in the eyes of the participants resulted in them possibly sharing greater depth about some of

their acculturation experiences in the host cultural context. For any participants previously known by the researcher from the University of Manitoba, the researcher maintained a professional but relaxed atmosphere. The researcher also ensured that the participants did not feel obligated or forced to take part in the study by stating it before and after conducting the interview. As it relates to the analysis process, the researcher had moments during the process where he was relating the experiences of the participants to his own. In order to ensure that the researcher did not analyse the data from a biased perspective, the researcher shared the anonymized transcripts with his supervisor and included her at each step of the analysis process.

## Chapter 4 - Results

In examining the acculturation experiences of the newcomer varsity athletes in their host cultural context, three major themes emerged as crucial aspects of their journey. These themes are: a) Challenges Settling into the Host Cultural Context, b) That's My Support System, and c) Context and Positionality. These themes were further broken down into sub-themes that provide deeper insight into their acculturation experiences (see table below). The pseudonyms of the seven participants, all from developing countries, are Anthony, Chris, David, Jordan, Marcus, Margo, and Michelle.

Table 1

### *List of Themes and Sub-Themes*

| <b>Themes</b>  | <b>Sub-Themes</b>   |
|--|---|
| <b>1. Challenges Settling Into the Host Cultural Context</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Examining Structure</li> <li>b) Social Considerations</li> <li>c) Where's My Mental Health?</li> </ul>  |
| <b>2. That's My Support System</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Family and Friends Are Integral</li> <li>b) The Importance of Coaches, Staff, and Teammates in the Varsity Context</li> <li>c) The Need for More</li> </ul> |
| <b>3. Context and Positionality</b>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Viewing Canada Through a Practical Lens</li> <li>b) The Spectrum of Cultural Identification</li> </ul>  |

## Challenges Settling Into the Host Cultural Context

This theme highlights the difficulties faced by newcomer varsity athletes after moving to the host cultural context. The athletes spoke about facing difficulties of either a structural, social, environmental, economic, and/or psychological nature while settling into life in Manitoba. These experiences played a role in framing their perceptions of aspects of the host cultural context and their approach towards managing these difficulties. The resulting sub-themes are: a) Examining Structure, b) Social Considerations, and c) Where's My Mental Health?

**Examining structure.** This theme represents the various challenges the newcomer varsity athletes had in relation to anything that could be related to a system or structure in the host context. In this case, systems or structures represent anything in the host context that could be categorized as institutional, physical, and/or environmental. Athletes spoke about having a positive initial experience after moving to their host cultural context. Marcus, speaking about what it was like to come to Canada and move into residence, noted, "It was, I will at least say it was like going to a hotel and just realizing that, I'd moved into residence, and realizing that this is a hotel." Margo also mentioned that,

... like honest like we always say like the first like months, is just like, I talk to all my like international friends and like the first month is just "Everything's so beautiful". Because you, new place... like a beautiful place, a better place. So, everything is flowers.

The time of year a newcomer athlete arrives seems to play a part in shaping that initial experience. Margo continued by noting that, "... everything's so beautiful here, like we came in

the summer, so everything's so beautiful, like the city... honest like it was not that hard... it was fun." Chris also shared that,

... the environment was new it was like okay, it was different, everything was cleaner. When I came here it was, it wasn't cold so you know that was, that was pretty cool... I knew I was to expect some cold temperatures but you know I came here when it was pretty warm... seeing new people, the new exper..., everything was just like, I was just soaking it all up.

Michelle had a different experience when coming to Manitoba during the winter. In relation to being picked up by friends and experiencing the weather she noted that, "... they pick me up at the airport and they show me the snow, literally [chuckles], so it was very ehm, shocking." While being 'shocking' for her, she still noted positive feelings related to her initial experiences when saying, "I like it because everything was new for me so eh, and the fact when I travel is that ahm, I love to try new things every time, so, I fall in love with Canada because of that." Her initial positive association with being in the host cultural context outweighed her initial shock in experiencing the climate in Manitoba. Participants also highlighted the dichotomy of emotions they experienced during this period. Jordan stated,

... it was weird like leaving all my friends and family but at the same time I was kinda excited to like, to like see and venture the world, 'cause I'd never left (home country)... before that so, yeah, it was kind of a new experience for me. I was kinda excited but sad at the same time.

This initial affinity wore off as the newcomer athlete wrestled with the realization that their new context was not what they thought it would be. Athletes indicated that this could be for a variety of reasons such as their research about what life in Canada is like, or even their expectations about what their life would be like after moving to their host cultural context. As a result, the athletes started to compare their home and host cultural contexts, leaning towards or preferring the way things were back home. Margo stated,

... oh before like, I thought it was perfect. I thought I was gonna come like, I don't know just because if you see Canada has so much more mon..., I don't even know if they have much more money than (home country) but like, they actually use their money for good purpose. Like in (home country), they don't... I thought it was completely different, and, and that was like, that was huge because those things started to come I was like "Oh man, like Canada is not what I thought.

David learned French in order to prepare for life in Canada based on his research showing that the country is bi-lingual. After coming to Manitoba, David came to the conclusion that, "... the French I learned was basically useless, 'cause Manitoba doesn't really speak French. So, it was a waste of time and money on my end... basically I was misinformed." David's use of online content as preparation for what life in Canada may be like also, "... took a toll on... how I built relationships" especially because, "when you google something in the western world you see the gory stuff that happens in the States." His perspective of Canada shifted as he realized that Canadians "... were way nicer much, much later after I landed."

The athletes also experienced some disenchantment with their varsity sport context upon realizing that particular aspects did not meet their expectations. David stated that, "... it was basically under my expectations like, I expected more from the program." While speaking about his experiences with school spirit in Manitoba, Chris noted that,

... here you just see, maybe like 50 people in the stands. It's sparsely populated but back home, the stands would be full. You have people celebrating, cheering the noise level, the energy, you know it's-it's you know, it's just a step back from what you're used to.

There were also positive perspectives articulated by the athletes in relation to the varsity sport system. When speaking about the greater level of recognition athletes receive in Canada as compared to her home country, Michelle stated, "... as a student-athlete I have a lot of benefits of school and also, in terms of financial benefits and recognition. That was something that I was looking for back home as well and I probably never get it."

The athletes also spoke about the struggles they faced adjusting to aspects of the systems within the host cultural context. These frustrations with the system become evident as they struggled to adjust to the Canadian structure in general as well as the educational, healthcare, and varsity sport systems. Margo indicated that her initial interactions with the structure in Manitoba were favourable as she noted, "... then you come here and you see things actually work here, like work here. I mean like, [sniffles] traffic works, like the people are more polite and there is no like crime... things like actually like work." This was short-lived as she wrestled with the things that were in sharp contrast to her own culture saying, "... people here not as warm, there's no beach, the winter sucks." Her frustration continued as she navigated, "...

having to like pay your bills, find place to live, and then you like, take like, having to take health card.” David shared his frustrations with the taxation system in Manitoba by stating,

... it’s not a very friendly taxing system... That is a big one, even on international students, that is one of the main reasons why they even wanna leave. It’s not like they don’t like it here but if ah, I mean there’s obvious reasons why I’d wanna stay in Canada, but those are the reasons why I’d wanna leave.

Marcus shared some of his general frustrations as he settled into life in Manitoba. He stated, “I didn’t even know where to get a winter jacket... didn’t even know there’s a winter boots... where to go... how to use this bus.”

The education system presented the newcomer varsity athletes with its own set of challenges. In some instances, the athletes found the system to be more favourable than what they were used to in their home countries. Anthony shared that, “... the education system... it’s like way better here sometimes... like back home when they would throw all those like subjects at us... I found that really hard and like here’s a little bit more laid back.” Conversely, Margo indicated that while she found her classes easier here in Canada, she felt that “... it’s a lot of load, like they give you so many assignments and stuff... and so many huge papers.” The athletes’ struggles with the education system here in Manitoba were not limited to their classroom experiences. Some found navigating the administrative side of things difficult. David shared the difficulty he had with his career advisor when he said,

... when you go to an advisor or career planning it was assumed that you know. It’s always, in Canada there’s always this assumption that you know... there’s no

attention for the immigrant child... there's no, nobody knows your perspective... nobody knows that it's hard to navigate the web. Looking at all these classes, nobody knows that we don't know some of the courses.

This frustration extended to the varsity sport context where David bemoaned the lack of funding support for athletes by sharing, "I (represent) for university/college but I still gotta apply for external scholarships... I gave (sport) priority here, and ahm, it really took a toll on my school 'cause like, I'm giving something priority that is not paying back."

The athletes also spoke about the frustrations they faced with various aspects of the health system here in Manitoba. This was primarily as a result of experiencing injuries while participating in sport in the varsity context. In speaking about her experience after getting injured, Margo stated that,

... the health system, like if I was back home, I would probably have my surgery like say, week of my injury. Here, I waited like, I don't know, four months, so like that killed me... the rehab system here is completely different from home.

She continued by sharing that she would have received much more attention and care if she had sustained the same injury in her home country and as a result, her perspective of the rehab system in Manitoba was that it is, "messy and not like proper." She clearly distinguishes that it is, "... the system right, not the people. It's the system here is completely different." For her, this perspective was with specific reference to Manitoba as she indicated, "... that's not Canada, that's what I learned, Manitoba's like that, other provinces are little different because some of them have private staff." She also detailed that, "It felt like when people treat

me here it's just like, you're one more that I'm treating" and as a result of all her frustrations with the healthcare system,

I just like cried so much in front of (coach) and was like "(coach), I cannot do this anymore like I'm, I'm done like, this health system here, like this physio system, like it's just killing me like, my dream is just destroyed because of it."

The athletes also spoke about the difficulties faced as they tried to balance school, sport, work, and their related responsibilities. Chris shared,

... that was another challenge you know, I didn't think I got really used to the school work, balancing school work and (sport) fully... I had to work because you know now I had to pay bills you know, just to help out... having to travel to school you know, maybe like four hours in total each day... I have work maybe like four times for the week, then I have class... then I have training almost every day... balancing everything in... my first couple years here, my first three years here... I haven't mastered it yet.

Anthony also spoke about his challenges finding balance in saying, "... cause like I work six hours or so... I found that to be very challenging just like, trying to keep up with school kinda, 'cause I'd a lot of things going on." Marcus also shared,

... so many nights I thought, "I can't do (sport)". I need a diet for it, I need hydration with it. Coming home, and saying, "Oh I'm too tired. I can't make food." Sleeping without food, I've done that so many times when I came here and ah, getting up... I have to get to class, can't make breakfast... just go to class, coming back... I don't have time for food, let's go training. Managing your schedule was one of the hardest things.

As some athletes settled into their host cultural context however, they found that this experience of trying to find balance has helped to develop resilience and make them stronger. Margo stated that, “(sport) really helped me in school, it always had. Although like, you just feel extremely busy the whole time, but I feel like it made me a better student.” Jordan also shared that,

Managing sport and school... it actually takes a lot of practice to get used to managing it but once you get it, it's like not hard, but at first it was like, I would just like have my mind only on sport.

On an environmental and socio-economic level, the athletes spoke about having to manage their experiences with the weather, finances, and nutrition, all of which affected their perception of what was favourable or not in their host context. Jordan shared, “What was hard about moving here? The weather for sure.” Michelle also shared, “Oh my God, my arrival to the airport was crazy... I didn't know that the winter was here... I only brought my summer clothes. I didn't have jackets or ski pants or boots. I didn't have anything.” Anthony also noted that, “I remember like, experiencing like, just 10 degrees for the first and I thought that was the worst, and I could not believe it could get colder than that so, that was not fun.”

Managing finances in their host context was a common topic with the athletes. This became even more apparent in trying to participate in sport and manage their nutritional needs for sport. Anthony shared,

I found it kinda hard too 'cause I'm just like, we didn't really have much money when we came here so... I wanted to like join a (sport) club and stuff like that but I really

couldn't 'cause like it's pretty expensive to like even join them so, I really had to stick to the school (sport) team 'cause I didn't have to pay that much.

Regarding his specific experience with finances in varsity sport, David mentioned that the costs associated with having to "buy equipment" and the personal expenses that come while travelling were challenges he faced. Relating to the varsity sport context, he noted that, "... they just give you money for food... and then they cover the hotel." Having to be responsible for other expenses on trips with his team was still a struggle for him because of his financial situation. These experiences shared by the athletes capture how much of an adjustment it was for them as they encountered the various systems or structures here in the host cultural context.

**Social considerations.** When speaking with the newcomer varsity athletes about the aspects of the host cultural context that made it difficult to settle in or adjust to their new context, the social interactions with members of the host cultural context emerged as one of the significant factors. These social considerations include trying to make sense of cultural differences in how one interacts socially, how hard it was for the newcomer to make Canadian friends, learning and adjusting to language and communication differences, and facing discrimination and prejudice.

As the athletes settled into their host cultural context, the more they interacted with the culture, the more the differences with their home cultures became apparent. As they articulated their struggles rationalizing those cultural differences, it was common for athletes to draw comparisons between their home and host cultural practices. Of his early experiences with the culture in Manitoba, Jordan noted that,

I was just so used to that lifestyle that when I moved here I had to like, like restructure how I did things, you know what I mean? Like, 'cause like, you act one way there and it's okay but you can't act the same way here you know, 'cause people act differently in a first world country as to a third world country.

He continued by sharing, "... dressing differently for sure... we were just going out shopping and getting what that we liked and apparently it wasn't [laughs] the in thing." As it relates to his social interactions, he said, "I'm able to be my full self now... but still like, there's certain things that I can't do around people... because they don't like that." Michelle also shared that,

... it's been very tough for me because of the culture, eh, it's a little bit different... because of our cultural differences and they're kind of cold... I came from a country eh, with a background where people used to hug each other, to say hello every time, to just laugh all the time... it's been a cultural shock, a huge cultural shock.

This culture shock even extended to the sport context where she also noted, "... another thing that is different like the way they play and the way we used to play back home." Trying to play her sport became an obstacle, as she had to adjust to and adopt the host culture style of how her sport was executed. On a social level, she noted that it was harder to connect and build networks here in Manitoba because, "... everyone is busy here and also myself, it's very tough to make those great connections... to build that networking... because of the cultural differences maybe." Anthony also noted that even though as a newcomer he wanted to make those connections with persons in the host culture, he had to be very cognizant of what he said and how he said it. He shared,

I'm not too sure, 'cause I know that here [exhales], I know that here ahm, people are different. And back home like, you say something back home and then here you say and like it could be a problem so I just like make sure like to be a little more sensitive with stuff that I say. Like, just like not to say any and anything pretty much.

Anthony also struggled with how interactions occurred between age groups in the host cultural context. In comparing how people spoke to the elderly and persons in authority, he noted,

... back in my country just the way people like talk to teachers and stuff like that... respect everyone, stuff like that. Here, when I got here it was, I was kinda shocked... just the way how people like talked to older people and... how they like talked to teachers... I found that way different too.

Making social connections proved challenging for most athletes as they struggled to make friends with those from the host cultural context. This area seemed to be of significance as athletes attempted to adjust to life in another culture. Margo noted that, "... making Canadian friends is pr..., like really hard... first of all they're super different from (home country) friends... like they, like don't hug... they don't like contact as much." This drew comparisons with what friendship meant, as well as the depth associated with it in her home country as she shared,

... in (home country), like honest like if I meet someone today like, tomorrow we are going out for drinks and stuff and we are friends. Here like, it takes a long time like to actually be fr..., close friends you know like... you don't, don't feel it.

Chris noted that it was a “culture shock” when he found that, “. . . it was not that easy to make friends because it was just more of a culture thing where they’re all friendly, but that doesn’t mean that it’s so easy to become friends.” This was highlighted in one of his examples when, being new to his team, he approached his teammates and started talking with them. Upon seeing one of his teammates at school another day he recalled,

“Okay I remember that person” so, you know I was trying to like, say hi but they you know, they just held their head straight and walked so, you know, I caught on to that really quickly and I realize that it’s, it’s prevalent in almost like every aspect. . . every situation I would see it happen. So I realized that okay, so it’s more about whenever you have to deal with someone, they would deal with you the most friendly way but that doesn’t necessarily mean they want to be your friend. . . it’s not like back home because I’m used to that back home you know, once you make a friend once, it’s usually a friend wherein. . . no matter what, you probably could call on them. . . you see them somewhere, they won’t pretend as if they don’t know you.

This later impacted how he made friends as he would take an approach of making friends but knowing “where to draw the line” in relation to depth of friendship. Jordan also shared that it was “a little bit difficult for me to make friends” but the element that made it hard for him was being used to having the ability to be blunt and frank with conversations in his home country. In relation to the host cultural context in Manitoba he shared, “. . . here you get, you can’t really say certain things to certain people, or they get hurt by it. . . it was kinda difficult for me.” Of his home cultural context, David noted that you are “liked for who you are” but as it relates to the host cultural context, he posited that,

... here, before somebody gets to know who you are, it's like, you have to pass that ahm, you have to pass the stereotype they have in their head of you. You have to prove to them that you're not what they think of you before you qualify to even be on that possibility of being a friend, and most of the time if you don't even talk to the person they don't even give you a chance. It's really hard to make friends.

Anthony found it "hard to make friends" and attributed it to the fact that "I'm not a very talkative person" as well as finding it difficult to relate to "... different stuff like their music here, I didn't listen to their music... or, their sports ah, hockey." He also mentioned struggling with having "a very small circle" while lamenting, "I didn't have any (home country) friends when I came here."

Discussions with the athletes gave a hint to why it was hard to develop "strong" friendships with some persons in the host cultural context: the closeness of previously established friend groups and finding it difficult to break into them. Margo noted that,

It's hard to connect with Canadian people and then they all know each other and you don't know anybody in your class and then, they see you're not from there so they kinda like, "Is she gonna be good in my group, I don't know." And then I felt like bad, as like I didn't wanna like talk too much 'cause like... they're gonna think I'm stupid... So like that's pretty much how I felt, at the very beginning.

She did note, "... right now I know a bunch of people here so like now it's easier, but at the beginning like in the group projects, I would feel like I hate it so much." Chris stated,

... as it relates to the athletes... I guess because most of the athletes on the team are not international athletes... most of them know each other from high school days, so you know the relationship they, that they have with each other you know, is closer... it's a bit harder for me to come in and fit into that dynamic... we would have to train, that's when we would communicate but outside of that, you know, nothing really happens.

David noted that, "When you come here people are already in like ah, small cliques" but gaining more acceptance and developing friendships increased for him in later years in the varsity sport context. For Jordan, being a newcomer in high school before coming to university/college was beneficial to his university/college experience. He said, "... coming like, in high school actually helped out a lot because now I know like, some of the people who come, go here to (university/college)... and not knowing anyone." The athletes also indicated that the varsity sport context is helpful in this regard with Jordan noting, "... it's been helpful in a way because like, being on a sports team, you make lots of friends. Like, you're kinda forced to make friends." David also noted that, "... you get invited to... a lot of things... the sport factor also helps me socialize with people very easily."

Language and communication differences between newcomer varsity athletes and members of the host cultural context emerged as another social factor that impacted how well the athletes settled into the host cultural context. Marcus shared that for him the,

... language barrier, was huge. I barely knew English and I knew how to write English... that was huge. Communicate, okay communicate but how? Like, who to communicate, you're just answering yes, okay, no, like those one word answers. So that was a big thing too to find someone who knows your language, to communicate with the same language

too so you can express more 'cause you're... already shy... both don't speak the same language. It's hard to share... express your feelings in some language that you don't even, you barely even know.

Margo indicated that initially she "still struggled little bit with English" but it mainly affected her when she had to write assignments and make contact with other social groups. She stated that, "I was not as, as involved as I should because I was fear of like, making mistakes with English." Michelle also shared her struggles with language after coming to Manitoba as she stated, "... yeah the language was the most important at the beginning of my (sport) career in Canada, because I didn't know any word in English."

For athletes who knew sufficient English, language was not so much of a problem but they still shared their struggles with communication in the host cultural context. David shared his struggle with the supposition that newcomers were already aware of the details related to anything they needed, especially if they can speak English well. He stated,

... like they don't really explain anything here... they don't treat you as an immigrant they just treat you as everybody else. They just assume you know things... but like in reality... just feeling your way through the darkness. I mean, once, once they hear you have good English, they just kind of assume that you've been here a while

His conclusion after his interactions was that, "... when you're a minority, nobody really thinks about you and they don't really communicate down to you any information regarding anything."

The final social consideration shared by the athletes in relation to their experiences in the host cultural context is facing discrimination and prejudice. Though not seen as a common or predominant issue, when encountered it still had an impact on the athletes as they negotiated their new cultural context. Marcus shared that, "... there were some people who met me once and they were like, "Why do you guys even move here?" Like, we don't need you guys here." He maintained a positive perspective and this gives insight into how he coped with facing any prejudice or discrimination. He says, "... you can go negative off about that or do something positive that can change their mind." He also kept a practical view of it in sharing, "I will be blunt, there will be a racism side of different people... like not such and such a country, that's every country." Margo wouldn't go as far as saying that she has experienced prejudice or discrimination but she shared that,

... like Canadians super friendly and stuff but you see sometimes like a little bit of, I'm not saying like prejudice against like immigrants but like you see little, they treat you different right, like in some ways... different in good ways, different in bad ways sometimes.

For David, it was highlighted in how he felt while others from the host cultural context viewed him. He shared, "... yeah, and I also felt like, when I'm standing at the bus stop, when people are driving by I also felt like I'm being watched, or being judged or something like that." For David, this may have been related to the negative view of North America given by the media when he did his research to come to Canada. You can still see that it affects his view of interactions in the host context as he shared, concerning athlete socials in the varsity context,

“... like ahm, if it’s a retreat, make sure it’s... school organized... ‘cause if it’s student organized, they just invite who they see.”

**Where’s my mental health?** Some of the participants spoke about mental health issues experienced as they navigated the host cultural context. These expressions were related to experiences of isolation, loneliness, and depression, which was also impacted by how much they felt disconnected from home. The athletes also discussed elements of determination and resilience that were employed in order to overcome the challenges they faced in their host cultural context and these strategies helped to motivate the athletes while serving as coping mechanisms. Finally, participants spoke about the need to reach out for help from various sources in order to reduce the effect of any negative mental health experiences within the host cultural context.

Many participants expressed feelings of loneliness or that sensation of feeling as if they were on their own. These prompted instances of athletes isolating themselves further and/or feeling depressed. Michelle shared that, “... sometimes here in Canada, the fact of being alone, like ah, once you’re a newcomer you don’t know anybody in this country... most of the time I’m by myself.” Margo noted that “my mentality was the main, main issue because... I was in a completely dark place... when you’re in dark place like, you just attract more dark things and then you start think, seeing things like really bad.” After having the opportunity to go back to her home country for a period, of the experience she stated that “... going back home was the best thing I did because not only got health..., a little healthier for my body, but for my mind.” She tried to put a positive spin on her experiences by sharing that these instances of feeling alone have helped her to “... become independent and not, not depending so much on people, having

time for myself” but she still followed that with the declaration that “... sometimes you don’t want that, you feel, I feel pretty lonely sometimes here.” Chris also spoke about his feelings of loneliness in saying, “... that was another challenge for me you know, I didn’t have anyone that I could really go through most of what I’m going through with.” Speaking about the kind of support he had from his best friend back home he noted that, “... I haven’t really found that in anyone here ‘cause it’s like I’m on a path and I don’t think anyone else is on that path with me.” Of his experiences, Marcus noted, “... there will be so many sleepless, sleepless nights, the, that affect your school. You sleep like; you’re not sleeping whole night, that’s including jetlag, that’s including homesickness, that’s depression.” One particular example highlighted how much missing his family affected him as he shared that “... coming here I probably, I have slept on a Skype, while they’re on Skype live for first months.”

The newcomer varsity athletes also spoke about facing loneliness and isolation in their varsity sport context. Margo shared that, “... you can feel pretty lonely because like you expect something and you don’t receive that in return from like your teammates. She rationalized it by stating that,

... for them, what they gave me might be like the support they, like it’s normal for them but like, I’m used to a lot more than that you know what I mean, and so that’s why I don’t blame them, but because it’s just how they are you know.

David started to question himself when examining the approach of those in the varsity sport context to him. He stated, “I could have quit. Like, there’s so many times I’ve thought of quitting ‘cause it was taking a toll, mental health and everything, it’s like going through the like

“Do they not like me? What is this?” He also mentions trying to find different groups to associate with in order to “ease the pain.”

Some athletes mentioned trying to take a positive view of things in order to deal with feelings of loneliness. Michelle noted that because of the presence of coaches and the support they gave “you will never be alone” even though “sometimes you’ll feel alone.” Marcus attempted to get out and connect with others in the host culture but he shared, “... getting out and talking to people and sharing, even though I was social person, I was talking to people, I was laughing in front of them, but they didn’t know what was going inside of me.” Marcus shared many recommendations related to getting out as a newcomer varsity athlete and his main rationale was,

... otherwise, you... you’re gonna depress yourself. You’re gonna go on depression side and then it’s hard ‘cause, no matter what, depression in general, if you don’t talk to someone, no matter what kind of depression that is, it can be home sickness, it can be in general different kinds, it’s moving away from family, if you don’t talk, that will hurt yourself.

Showing determination and resilience, sometimes through having a positive mindset, became a useful tool for the athletes as they navigated the challenges in the host cultural context. Margo shared that having a positive mindset became crucial for her as she experienced injuries in the host context. She stated,

... determination... it was always big on me like... ahm, positivity was like it-it's tough. I don't think I was positive all the time, but I try not to let people see that I was not, you know what I mean? 'Cause like, during my injuries..., it was pretty dark place for me.

When faced with difficulty and thoughts of returning home, Chris stated that he "... had already made up my mind that you know what, I'm gonna, I can survive." Jordan remembers telling himself that,

... times will get hard because like, it's not like, this isn't your home..., this is gonna be like a completely new experience to you so like, just be patient and... try to persevere through all the hard comes and... all the struggles... just keep your head up man... nothing is gonna stay bad forever... just keep trying. Keep trying until you, you finally like, find a way to make it through and you'll be, you'll be good.

Michelle spoke about her motivation for persevering in stating, "I have in, on my shoulders my family's responsibility" while also associating managing difficulties with the natural way of life in sport. She stated, "I have ups and downs right, but I think that's life and especially in the sport industry." For Marcus, whenever he felt like giving up, he remembered, "... those tears I saw in my mom's eye" when he was leaving his home country. He felt an obligation to continue because of the sacrifice his parents made in sending him to school in Canada so that he could have a greater opportunity. Enduring and accomplishing his goals was his way of paying them back. Chris summed it up in saying, "I never let that get me down you know. I still try to put in the work, you know, in my studies, you know, I just try my best to make it work."

The athletes also expressed how crucial it was for them, or for other newcomer varsity athletes, to reach out for help whenever they faced any mental health challenges while adjusting to their host cultural context. Marcus recommended that other newcomer varsity athletes "... don't hesitate to talk to someone." Of his own experience he shared,

... it's the best thing that I did as a social person, I got out. Otherwise I would have probably killed myself inside, like not talking to someone. You get, you will find people that are on the same boat as you, there are people, every batch comes. There's a lot of internationals that, you will find people. And then from there, then you will find the, like local people, and don't hesitate to talk.

Marcus also highlighted that resources are available for newcomers even though he wasn't aware of them when he was experiencing his difficulties adjusting. He shared, "... just get out, talk to people... you will find friends, and then our counselors. They're, if you don't feel comfortable, there're resources. I didn't know at that time... again you're not looking for them then you won't know." Margo also echoed the notion that there are resources available to help by saying, "... look for outside sources and look for, you're gonna find people that wanna help you eventually. That's why I did, like I, I found people that really wanna help me." Marcus was the most open about his emotional challenges with adjusting in the host cultural context. This seemed to be as a result of his close bond with his family. Of one of his experiences he shared,

... don't hesitate to talk. Sitting alone, crying, I remember I sat at, like, by the river for like a whole night sometimes thinking that okay like, "Where am I?"... Like, if something happened back home like, can I get a flight right away? Like, I actually looked at the flights, "What if I need a flight in two hours? Can I...?" They were like, "Not

really.”... It’s for sure hard but the one thing I would change... I wish I would have got to people quicker, I think I was a semester or two semesters late.

### **That’s My Support System**

This theme examines how the related support systems were crucial in helping the athletes adjust to life in their host cultural context. The specific sub-themes related to these systems articulated by the athletes were; a) Family and Friends are Integral, b) The Importance of Coaches, Staff, and Teammates in the Varsity Sport Context, and c) The Need for More. All the systems became significant bases for learning and understanding their host cultural context and had implications for whether or not the newcomer varsity athlete experienced their new culture in a positive or negative light.

**Family and friends are integral.** This theme talks about the key role that family has played in the athletes’ adjustment to their host culture. One role the family played was in the provision of encouragement and advice when the athletes faced challenges. Another role played by the family was in keeping the athletes accountable by checking up on them, especially family members not living in Canada, in order to make sure they were doing well. The athletes also spoke about the implications for the settlement process when this familial relationship is tested or strained.

The importance of the family as a support system was emphasized in experiences shared by the newcomer varsity athletes. One way this emerged was how close the athletes remained to their family members who were either in the host cultural context or back in their home country. Margo noted that her “dad was always a big support” and shared that the closeness she had with

her family made it difficult to miss out on important moments and events because they were far away from her. She stated,

... my family too right, they're back home like, mother's day now and my sister's ahm birthday and then I was not there. I was like crying because like oh my God, I don't know if I wanna miss that any longer.

When asked about what would have made their experience settling into the host cultural context easier, most athletes noted that having their family and friends from home would have been the best thing for them. Jordan shared,

... my family for sure man, and, and my friends... if I coulda still had them when I came here I would've been so well off... that was just like my whole like circle, my whole support system before I came here and when I came here I pretty much lost all that, except for my mom and my brother. So, kinda had to start over.

For Marcus, this connection with his family was very essential and showed in how much he kept in contact with his family. He shared,

I was so close to them I would call them any minute... walking towards (sport), I'll call them, and my mom knew that I would call her this time... I would walk from residence to (sport), even if there was a time difference, but she knew you would call and they were always there, calling back... family supported me... I was with them every minute.

The supportive role of family in helping with settling, providing advice, and financial support also played a key role in how the athletes adjusted to their host cultural context. In relation to his uncle, David shared, "... my family has always been there for me and my

uncle... also advised me a lot on how to tackle school work and to balance everything, which I had no idea of so that really played a major factor.” While noting that there were positives and negatives related to having this support, he shared that his uncle still played, “... a big role, he did help me clear a lot of things.”

Family members who were living in the host cultural context prior to the athlete coming also played a significant role in introducing the athlete to the host culture way of life. Anthony shared,

... my cousin, she’s the one that helped us to come here so that’s who I pretty much lived with for, for a little while when we first came here... she... pretty much just like show around and told us everything we need to know.

Family also proved to be a major source of encouragement and motivation for the athletes in their host cultural context. Margo shared that the family member who came with her to Canada was a “... big support, and like emotional support as well right, like, I mean like I have a lot on my chest, and it’s with him that I take everything out of my chest.” This family member was there to provide support through difficult times. This support ranged from helping Margo manage with the frustrations related to her injuries to helping to prepare meals for her. She shared that he was so integral to helping her navigate her journey in the host cultural context that “... without him like it would be a lot harder. Just that emotional support and the everyday like by my side and stuff like that.” Jordan shared,

I remember my, my mom actually was just like “Yo, like, don’t worry you’ll get used to it like, it’s only like, it’s not gonna be this bad all the time”... I definitely needed those words of encouragement at the time though. Yeah, both me and my brother.

In speaking about how integral his family was to his adjustment in the host cultural context, David shared that, “... they played everything. They, they were my backup. Ah, my mom really supported me through everything and she’s the one who believed me through everything.”

Family also played a key role in helping the newcomer varsity athletes adjusting to their host cultural context by checking up on them regularly and holding them accountable. Jordan shared,

It was huge, it was huge, if it wasn’t for my family I don’t think like, I would be the person I am today. So like my, my mom and my brother, like they’re always there... like if they see I’m not like doing something right or I’m going somewhere like, you know what I mean? Like, they just like tell me out like “You shouldn’t be doing that” or like, what “Yo, like what are you doing?”... they’re always there supporting me... that’s my backbone.

Marcus also shared that instances of his family checking up on him also extended to his sport participation and his academic performance. While talking about adjusting to some of the struggles he faced with managing a busy schedule and getting the proper nutrition, Marcus reflected that he would “... start to lie to your family. Your mom calls and says, “Did you have dinner” you’re like, “Yes I did”, when you didn’t.”

Family also proved essential in helping some of the athletes preserve aspects of their home culture. Jordan stated, “Well we, my mom and my brother, like we, that’s all we speak is, at home is (native language) and my mom always cooks (native food). She’ll be playing (name of musician) in the kitchen.” Jordan also hinted that the need to set an example for his younger sibling might have played a role in his approach to settling in the host cultural context. He stated,

I always try to like be a positive role model, like model for him... that actually probably is like a big part of the reason why I matured early too... I could kinda help him out’ cause I saw he was struggling... I think him seeing me being successful is like, kinda like driving him to be successful in a way you know what I mean?

As beneficial as family have proved to be to the newcomer varsity athlete in the host cultural context, a negative relationship with family members in the host cultural context also had the opposite impact. Speaking about the negative relationship he had with his father, Chris mentioned that the tensions made him “grow resentful” to the point where he,

... thought that you know, one day I’m a just you know, save my money and, and move out, you know. And ah, it so happened that, that did happen but I wasn’t fully prepared and when I did move out ah, things didn’t go as planned.

This was his only regret in relation to moving to the host cultural context as he wished for a better relationship with his father, connecting this troubled relationship with how he adjusted to life in Manitoba. He shared, “... one of the main things would have been you know, having a better relationship with my father and then from there, I guess I would have felt more comfortable with certain things, ahm, just life in general.”

As integral as family have been to the newcomer varsity athletes in their adjustment in the host cultural context, the support of friends also played a key role. While not as close as family members, friends became integral in providing necessary emotional and social support at crucial times for the newcomer varsity athlete. Michelle spoke about some Canadians she met while in another country and how they were there to welcome her and introduce her to life in Canada. The lack of friendships is what prompted many to share that having their friends from their home country would have been helpful in settling into life in Manitoba. Margo shared, "... this place would be awesome if I had that emotional support with me like, my family and friends." For many of these athletes, the friendship and support they sought, enjoyed, or lamented focused on the varsity sport context.

**The importance of coaches, staff, and teammates in the varsity sport context.** With the sporting context forming the base of social interactions for newcomer varsity athletes in the host culture, the related interpersonal relationships played a crucial role in how the athlete learned and settled into the host culture. The coaches, staff, and teammates were the primary sources of social contact in this context and this theme examines how both have been either helpful or hurtful in the newcomer varsity athlete's adjustment to their host culture. The athletes positioned the varsity sport context in the host culture as both helpful and hurtful in their adjustment to living and adjusting to a new cultural context. Michelle shared her perspective on how important the sport environment is for the athlete. She stated, "... your connections with your teammates... with your coaches or staff members are crucial for your success." Speaking about his experience in the host culture varsity sport context, Marcus stated,

I feel like the reason I got through when a lot of the other non-athlete internationals talked to me and they even come and tell me like, “‘Marcus’, you got through, you did this good, the reason, ‘cause you’re an athlete.”... family that builds up around you as an athlete, it’s hard to build up when you’re not an athlete.

He noted that he did not know who would have helped him if he was not a student-athlete and believed that without the support he received in this setting, “I would’ve gone back.”

Anthony shared that without his involvement in sport and school, “I just don’t think I would have as many friends.” Jordan echoed this sentiment in saying, “I definitely think I wouldn’t have made as many friends because... if I wasn’t playing sports I’d like, I’d just have classmates who I’d just see in class and then after school like, just go home.”

The athletes articulated that coaches and staff were significant factors in how they experienced their host cultural context. The participants noted how the coaches and staff formed the base of support within this context, with the experiences of the athletes with their coaches being predominantly positive. Margo shared that, “... my coach, it’s easy to say... probably was like the most important like support for me, (coach) helped me so much.” She mentioned that her coach was always there for her and even at times when she felt “by myself like so alone like in the team”, her coach was still there to “... (coach) was always give me support... take me for dinner... take me for lunch, (coach) gave me job.” She continued by stating that, “... if it was a different coach, I don’t know if I could, could have done it.” She went even further in sharing that when she contemplated giving up and leaving her team, she thought about all her coach had done for her and decided, “I’m staying for (coach).” Chris also shared a moment where a coach intervened positively at a time when he thought of giving up varsity sport. He stated,

I was like... it's just my time to just focus on my schoolwork and just work... and I remember the coach he had someone speak to me, one of his athletes and I decided okay I, I would just give it another year.

Chris continued to share instances where a coach “looked out for me”, instances where they shared, “a really good relationship”, and even go as far as to where “... he would be on the phone... for a very long time you know, just motivating me.” Jordan also spoke glowingly about one set of his coaches, describing them as providing “... a kind of a backbone, just like supporting me.” He goes even further to highlight his coaches and teammates as the people outside of his family that he feels “like talking to them about anything” because “they would just pretty much support me.” For Michelle, the support of her coach and staff has been integral in her journey as a newcomer varsity athlete. She stated,

In Canada, I'll say, okay regarding my coach and the staff members, I'll say they were, they are, because they are the most important part for me. Like they were the ones who were helping me with everything like, my language skills, my technical and physical skills as well, and I'm very grateful that they have been very patient with me as well, ah otherwise I couldn't make it.

She underscored this when asked what advice she would give to other newcomer varsity athletes by saying, “... your coach is gonna be your fundamental, like your base in your sport... make a good connection with your coach and ehm, also rely on your staff members from your team.”

As helpful as the coaches and staff members have been to the newcomer varsity athletes, some spoke of instances where interaction with their coaches left them with a negative view of the host culture and, in particular, the sporting context. David stated, "... problem with coaches is that they don't really tell you what you're going there for. They don't tell you if they're gonna cover your living." This emerged as he was recalling his issues with the level of communication and dialogue he had with his coaches. Furthermore, when asked what role his teammates and coaches played in helping him to settle in the host cultural context he shared, "I can't really say, I can't think of anything. They just ahm, they just gave me the facility."

Participants also spoke about how much support their teammates provided or failed to provide, as well as how this presence or lack of support affected their adjustment to the varsity sport context in Manitoba. The athletes shared that their teammates provided support in contexts in and out of the varsity sport context. Jordan spoke about teammates making him feel welcome by "inviting me out to things" and Michelle shared that when people came up to her and simply said, "Good morning, how are you?", it "... makes a difference, especially because of my culture, oh, if someone just come... and try to start a conversation. I will appreciate that." For Margo, "... your teammates support, like it's more than anything." This was also true of the support she received from her teammates outside of the varsity sport context. Of one particular teammate she said, "... she like helped me a lot like, when I had class with her she, I would always be in her group." Additionally, the support of her teammates helped her overcome some of the negative feelings she had in relation to her time in the varsity sport context. Of her most recent experiences she noted that, "... this last year was like crazy, like everything that I told you it's like almost like erased, because this year it's like I felt like a lot more love and support and everything." For Marcus, the active way in which teammates supported, encouraged, or assisted

him was instrumental in helping him to settle in the host cultural context. In speaking about the varied ways his teammates helped him he shared,

... it was so hard for me to learn English, but talking everyday with my training partners, and them trying to explain me how their school system works, how this course works, okay this course, I'll help you out... okay take these kind of notes for this course. Like that guidance that I got as a student-athlete through my coaches, seniors, even juniors, like I took help about from English, from when I was in third year or second year from first years. Their English was better if they were Canadians.

This support was even more apparent after he performed well while representing his university/college in his first opportunity to do so. After he did well, he noted, "I was someone after that (performance)... [as compared to] when I was before that (performance)". With the increase in interest from teammates and coaches, which included them "started getting me involved in their like, team culture"; he was quick to refrain from definitively saying that the interest shown in him was solely as a result of him doing well in sport. He shared,

I'm not gonna say that they wouldn't have, they wouldn't, they all are really nice people. I feel like they still would, but personally I think it was more than what they would normally do, yeah, 'cause I was little okay.

Another critical role teammates played in helping newcomer varsity athletes adjust to their host cultural context was by showing interest in the newcomer athletes' home culture openly. Anthony shared that,

I feel like that's one of the things that would always make me feel welcome is that like, they appreciate my culture and my background. They love it a lot so, that's what make me, makes me feel like I pretty much belong.

Michelle echoed those sentiments when speaking about how her teammates approached her to find out more about her background. Of their interest in her culture and background she stated, "... those kind of things I really appreciate that and, like they were cu... curious about my culture, that's, that's nice." This willingness to engage in cultural exchange was beneficial to the newcomer athlete in also helping them to learn more about the host cultural context. Anthony noted that,

I wasn't like really used to people in that sense 'cause I didn't have much friends until like I got to (university/college). I made them through (sport), being on the same team... going to many... athlete socials and ahm, them like inviting me to like parties... gaming nights and stuff like that, it really made me adjust and just like really understand the Canadian culture.

In David's case, one of the athletes he met in his host cultural context took on a role as mentor to him and played an important role in helping him to adjust to the host culture. He stated, "... he's the reason why I got a really big friends group after that actually. He treated me really nice... and he took me up as his brother, we train together... everywhere I'd go, he'd be my spokesman."

Some of the newcomer varsity athletes also shared their experiences with teammates that were hurtful to them when trying to adjust to the host cultural context. Margo shared that for her,

“... classes was, was not that hard. It was easier than conversa..., like talking to my like teammates.” She spoke about feeling lonely as a result of not having a reciprocal relationship with her teammates. She shared an example of a moment when she was doing well in her sport but even with this success, she “... felt like my teammates hated me.” This feeling was compounded when she got injured. She shared, “... when my injuries came I was like not playing... no support from my teammates. So it was like all bad... just horrible.” Chris shared his feelings of disconnection from his teammates when saying, “... we are all so separated. The only time we get to really connect is when we’re (involved in sport).” For Jordan, he dealt with the perception that, “... you have to be good at that to be fully integrated” resulting in critical comments from teammates he categorized as friends. While their comments were surprising to him, he indicated that he used those comments as a source of motivation. He shared,

... at the same time it was like, it made me get better. It made me wanna get better so much more so that, it pushed me to work harder... those guys were my like, those guys were my friends but it’s like... them making those comments pushed me to like be a better player.

David shared examples of teammates excluding him because of the perception of him being a competitive threat or because the culture within his sport fosters an individualistic nature. He noted, “... if somebody’s going to the gym most of the time they won’t tell you “Come work out with me”, like they go do it alone.” He reasoned that,

... in other sports like (other sport), ah, you move as a group. Like if you’re driving you’re like “Oh, who needs a ride?” you know? But in (his sport) it’s like, “just be there at the (venue)”. They don’t really care how you got there.

Even as it relates to other athletes asking him about his country, David shared that their questions were about a specific topic but, "... that is basically as far as it goes." He also noted that in his experience, other newcomers who attempted to join his sport, "... didn't last even half a year before they dropped ahm, (sport)." And his reasoning was, "... 'cause of just how it doesn't feel like home." Michelle shared a similar perspective after encountering her varsity sport context in Manitoba for the first time. She stated,

Ah the first time when I went to a practice... was very shocking for me because once practice was done, ahm, all my teammates left right away and they drive, drove their cars and just leave and I was by myself.

She hinted however that things changed as she spent more time in her varsity sport context. She noted that, "I didn't feel like a very welcoming environment. However, with the days ahm, I start feeling more... small connections with some of my teammates." While those connections with her teammates have improved, she noted that the closeness and support she feels is only with some of her teammates. Regarding the support she received after sustaining an injury, she shared, "... those simple things I really appreciate it but not all of them have done so."

**The need for more.** The participants all acknowledged that while there are support systems put in place by the varsity sport context in Manitoba, there is a need for more support specific to newcomer varsity athletes and the issues they face. These include forming more connections in and between sport groups that will allow newcomer athletes to make connections and share experiences with other varsity athletes. The suggestions were not limited to interactions between newcomer varsity athletes but also with other host culture members in the

varsity sport context. Participants also spoke about the need for ensuring that sport psychology services are put in place to help newcomer athletes address any mental health issues or struggles they face related to adjusting in their host culture. The athletes also spoke about the need for having more discussions around cultural sensitivity and awareness as well as more events that allow for culture expression or exchange in the varsity setting.

In speaking about connecting with other newcomer athletes, Chris shared his rationale for suggesting having a support system in place that is specific to newcomer athletes. He stated, "... based on our culture, we tend to, we tend to do better when we have people around us that you know, know what we're going through... people that you can relate to." This is what informed his suggestion to establish a mentorship program where newcomer varsity athletes that are just joining their teams could be paired with other newcomer athletes from their culture, or even another culture, so that they can help them adjust to their new context more easily. In sharing how he would envision carrying out this function in his own sport he said,

... like for me now, if I should see an athlete from (home country... on the (sport) team right now, most definitely I would you know, try and make friends with them because I know what it's like, I know how it feels to you know, to come here and not have that support.

His concern is that if he doesn't have the opportunity to pass on all that he has learned from his experience, the newcomer varsity athlete who comes after him will "... have to just try and figure it out... not having you know, that support... no one to really go to show him where to go for certain things, you know that support system." Marcus, similarly, believes, "... a buddy system would be huge."

Jordan shared a similar perspective to Chris as he spoke about the merits of having cultural support in place for newcomer varsity athletes. He proposed that, "... (universities/colleges) could have like, like more culture groups... like a bunch a people from like that culture... you guys do things together... just like people who understand what you're going through right now." Michelle went a step further in sharing,

... not only with athletes here or, what I'm thinking is ah, the (university/college) can help them to connect with those ah, social groups that are on campus from their countries you know, as I did with the (home culture) Club.

In relation to her experience she stated, "I was lucky and I found them but for those athletes that they don't know if their people from their country here in Canada, the university can advise them." She believes that such a network will be helpful to the newcomer athlete as they adjust to their new culture. For her, "... the first month or the settlement will be easy somehow for them."

Some of the athletes spoke about the lack of events tailored to newcomer varsity athletes. Chris noted that, "... there's not a lot of events here that brings the (home culture) crowd out." This was in reference to events at the varsity and provincial level. Marcus noted that while the "(University/College) is doing a lot of things, there's a lot of events that goes down but I feel like a lot of internationals don't know about it." For him, there is a greater need for ensuring that the newcomer athletes are made aware of what cultural options are available to them. While recognizing that activities such as international night on residence and international orientation are beneficial, he called for more events that allowed for newcomers and locals to have more interaction. He shared, "... you gotta mix internationals with the locals. When you have

international nights or international event, you're inviting only internationals. You wanna invite internationals and locals to meet them." From Anthony's perspective,

... they can have like better programs in place for like all athletes the like weren't born here kind of thing... gets all of us together so we could meet each other 'cause like, you only get to see the people in your group or sport... I feel like if everyone kinda comes together and just like, could like maybe socialize a bit more like, you feel that like you're not alone sometimes.

David believed that these opportunities for cultural exchange through events would "ease that bubble in-between so there's more interaction" and "help students gel more together." Finally, Marcus believed that more opportunities for newcomers and locals to live together would be helpful in the cultural adjustment for newcomers. He stated, "More homestays... I've had some friends that lived with the families and those are their actual families. They literally say "This my Canadian mom."... feel like homestays helped."

The athletes had other suggestions for initiatives that could be implemented to help them adjust more easily to their host cultural context. David spoke about the need for services that would focus on newcomer varsity athlete mental health. He shared,

... they need to make sure ahm, ah, sport psych is ahm, is mandatory... they need more attention than ah, than other athletes who are already here... for them it should be mandatory and it should be explained to them why, and... that it's to their benefit.

Michelle called on universities/colleges to "... help them with ah, you know housing advice and... yeah with financial support." Marcus called for more, "volunteers to take people

around” and help them with the basics of adjusting to the culture like “where to get a winter jacket.” He was thankful for his, “resident advisor” who “took shopping for internationals” and filled that gap for him. The final suggestion from the athletes was for more education for varsity athletes about cultural sensitivity and awareness. David stated that universities/colleges, “... should also educate ahm, Canadian student-athletes on the element of diversity... and ah education on diversity and just more acceptance of newcomers.”

### **Context and Positionality**

This overall theme examines the acculturation strategies employed by newcomer varsity athletes in their host cultural context. The specific positionalities and perspectives that inform the athletes’ perceptions of the host culture is discussed with support from the sub-themes: a) Viewing Canada Through a Practical Lens, and b) The Spectrum of Cultural Identification.

**Viewing Canada through a practical lens.** This examines how the athletes maintained a practical approach and perspective towards being attached to and staying in the host cultural context. It represents a pragmatic approach wherein their heart was with their home country but they favoured a practical attachment to Canada because of the opportunities presented by staying in and connecting with the host cultural context. This perspective was what helped the athletes rationalize the need to be associated with the host culture whether they had an affinity for it or not. Speaking about why he was still involved with varsity sport, Chris shared, “I really want to get something out of this (sport). I love the sport. My biggest dream is to compete internationally.” This led to him having, “a new perspective... a new drive...” especially with the possibility of him attaining citizenship soon. As a result, he believed that, “... more doors

will be opened. More, more motivation you know, things to look forward to.” This became his rationale for not wanting to return to his home country. He shared,

I’ve already started this journey. I’m not really looking to turn back or you know, to end this journey, I want something out of this journey. I have put in a lot... I’ve already committed to it so... if I had the option to go back home I probably wouldn’t take it.

For Jordan, his love for sport and the “possibility I could go pro” were integral in how he viewed his willingness to stay in varsity sport. Speaking about the opportunities presented to him here in Canada he mentioned, “I definitely intend to stay in Canada, maybe even the States because there’s just like a lot more opportunity... than there is back home... I personally wouldn’t move back... there is a lot more you could do... over here.” This was also the case for Michelle who articulated that,

... because I come from a developing country, you can notice the gap between developed countries and developing countries... you can see that there are more opportunities in terms of... employment... having a house or raising a family... to travel abroad... attend a... high eh, level post-secondary school. So, those kind of opportunities back home are very limited so, I will say that here in Canada, once I settle here, those opportunities, ah or the doors for all, all those opportunities will be open for me.

Marcus also spoke about the role opportunities played in his attachment to the host cultural context. He shared, “... it’s all opportunities. I have, haven’t made my mind if I’ll go back... depends on parents. I want them to come here too, maybe spend summer here, winter back, but I will be attached to Canada.” He went even further in highlighting how making use of

the opportunities afforded to him in the host cultural context would allow him to contribute to building his home country and culture. He shared,

... if there any way I can stay here and help people back home, I would do it, and if there is some way I could spend some time there and go help people, come back, work here, I'll do it... I would work here and that way I'm helping them better. The resources I can bring from here and help back home people that would be better as compared to if I stay back home and help them.

From a different perspective, David noted his attachment to the Canadian context was not driven by what he could gain from remaining involved in it, but from how much he believed it contributed to his growth and development. He stated, "I identify with the Canadian more, funny enough... as much as (home country) plays a big role in everything, Canada has really built me to be the man I am." This informed his desire to represent Canada in his sport because, "... you do things for somebody who has invested something in you. I don't really think (home country) has invested much in me."

It is interesting to note however, that once the perception of benefit or opportunities offered by the host cultural context diminished, the athletes' attachment and perspective of the host cultural context shifted. Margo shared,

... everything was worth it. Like being far from home, far from my friends, far from everything, missing family, Christmas... it was like worth it if I was pursuing my dream, and everything was working and it was totally worth it... but now that everything

happened and then I might not even play (sport), I don't know if I wanna stay here, 'cause Canada for me was like, (sport) you know?

**The spectrum of cultural identification.** This theme examines the fluid nature with which the athletes negotiated their host cultural context, including showing a desire to have a deeper relationship with the host cultural context. The athletes found themselves clinging to either their home cultural identity, host cultural identity, or feeling caught in-between as they navigated their experiences within the host culture. These approaches take many forms and the first of those is where the athlete clings to their home cultural identity while making a clear distinction between their identity and that of the host culture.

Chris was intentional in distancing himself from the host culture. He even went as far as viewing acculturation, in his interpretation it meant becoming like the host culture, as a negative thing. Chris shared,

I don't see myself, ahm, fully accultured to Canada, Canadian culture... some people they fall prey to acculturation but for me I believe that you know, (home country) is just a part of who I am, no matter how long I stay here. I'll always be able to tell the difference between my culture and their culture and always be able to draw that line and say... I know how to, to be a part of it but I am not the Canadian culture.

That has led him to choose to, "... just hold on to most of the people that I know from back home." While not as critical, Michelle differentiated herself from the Canadian culture when speaking about how people interact socially. She shared, "I identify myself with my country. Ahm, because I consider myself like a happy person you know, ahm, very welcoming

and very open, yeah. And here, I've been facing the opposite." When asked about her preparation to come to Canada, she noted, "I'm not that kind of person that plan everything, that's more a Canadian thing." Jordan also emphasized how his family maintained home cultural practices and, while he felt settled in the host cultural context, his home culture was still integral to him. His reasoning was that,

... there's no way I'm gonna ever forget like where I come from... even if you like move away from your ho..., like your home country to a host country, like, that shouldn't be something even like remotely close to like being in your mind, you should never forget where you come from.

Marcus positioned himself as a representative of his home culture in the host cultural context. When asked which culture he had a greater identification with he shared, "I identify myself as a home for sure... I feel like I'm still representing something... even though this is the home, second home now or first home... I'm still representing something, so, for sure, my back home culture."

Some athletes attempted to address what they perceived as negative aspects of the host culture by influencing elements within the host culture with aspects of their home culture. As Margo recalled a time when her varsity sport context was negative, she shared that she "contaminated them with my positivity" in order to change the atmosphere within the team. Chris worked with his coach to incorporate some of his training from his home country in order to help him achieve his performance goals. He shared, "I speak to him about different things, you know, things like my experiences back home so as to, you know, have him incorporate it in training." Michelle's approach was to aim to find ways to teach members of the host culture

more about her culture. She hoped to, "... find activities for them and yeah trying to get, eh involve like a lot of Canadians with us and teach them about our cultures and make them feel at home... at home like in our home." Marcus had the same thought process as it relates to dealing with members of the host culture who show prejudice or discrimination. He encouraged newcomers to "... do something even for them or in general that they can see that hey, like my mentality is wrong like, they do good things for us, or they're helping our culture, they're helping our city."

Participants also spoke about rationalizing the host culture approach in order to explain or make sense of why any behaviour was contrary to that of their own culture. This allowed them to position themselves as counter to the host culture with the understanding that both are okay. Regarding the level of connection she felt with her teammates Margo shared, "I'm used to a lot more than that... that's why I don't blame them... it's just how they are... it's not how I'm used to being... it's completely different." Michelle articulated the same position as she shared about trying to integrate into her team. She said,

I still try to do my best... to try to understand my teammates and staff members as well and ah, because, it's their culture. It's how they, they behave in their daily life so, I cannot change that. I just need to adapt and to respect as well and to learn... about them and to be able to connect at some point. So I'm being patient and yeah, that's basically the, the most difficult thing in terms of cultural settling.

Marcus also gave insight into his thought process as he wrestled with differences between his home and host culture. He shared, "... it took time for me to accept that... this is different..."

It's not bad or it's not right. Some we did back home, that's not right or this here is not wrong. Doesn't matter it's just a different culture.”

There were also instances where the athletes felt uncertain of where to identify as they wrestled with the pros and cons of both their home and host culture. As she wrestled with struggling to identify with either her home or host culture Margo stated “... when I go back to (home country), I don't feel completely home, and when I'm here I don't feel completely home.” In trying to rationalize which context would be more preferable, she wavered between two opinions as she said,

... it's not that (home country) is better than Canada... Canada has a few things that's better than (home country) but, there's no perfect place. And that sucks because [laughing] I don't know where I should stay. It would be easier if there was one.

This left her feeling “in between” her home country where “you could not get out of home without being scared all the time” and her host country where she was “safe and in a nice place, but without the emotional support.”

Athletes also spoke about moments where adopting aspects of the host culture, whether willingly or unintentionally, became either essential for existing within the host cultural context or a natural progression due to continued interaction with the host culture. When explaining why he adopted the host culture's style of dress, taste in music, and food preference, Anthony shared, “I feel like I did that to like mainly fit in... to relate to way more people here, 'cause, as I said, there's not many (native of home country) here... to like... talk to about that stuff.” Jordan found himself watching how people acted in order to “... emulate how other people like, make friends

and try to make friends that way too. And then it, it kinda worked out for me.” For Michelle, once she recognized that her desire for further connection with her teammates after practice was not going to be a possibility, she caught on to the way of doing things and adopted the same behaviour. She stated,

... with the next days I just get used to it and you know, once practice is over I just take my stuff and head home and try to do another different activities as well with other friends and yeah, continue with my life.

Athletes also spoke of instances when they found that they started exhibiting characteristics of the culture they once viewed as negative, either without knowing the change was taking place or as a sign of futility when trying to resist those characteristics of the host culture. Margo noted that “... after (a number) of years you start getting used to it and you start like almost getting contaminated by that... I started like to become more like them a little bit.” One of the ways she noted she changed was that she started, “not caring too much.” Chris believed that this adoption of the host cultural norms was “... a psychological thing.” For him, “... when you associate yourself with certain crowds or... a certain lifestyle for you know, a certain period of time, sooner or later you start to adapt to it. You start to become your environment.” When sharing an example where he was shocked by behaviour he observed at school in the host cultural context, Anthony noted that,

It’s just something I think I just got used to... just seeing it happen all the time, I pretty much got immune to it. I still like treat people the same as I would back home like, just with respect and everything... it didn’t really change me, I just like kinda adjusted to it, just got immune.

Interestingly, he felt so adjusted to the host cultural context he believed it would be “hard to go back” to his home country. While noting his love for his family and culture back home, he still reasoned that it was because of, “... being here and getting used to this system... how good it can be sometimes.” On a positive note, David shared that the friendships he made in the host cultural context allowed him to participate in certain activities he would not have done previously. He shared that, “I don’t do rock climbing but at some point I ended up doing rock climbing ‘cause of, ‘cause friends who are in sports.”

Finally, athletes shared their desire for integration and further interaction with the host culture. This showed that even with the negative experiences faced within the host cultural context, the newcomer athletes desired to have a deeper connection with the host culture. When sharing about his desire to connect further with members from the host cultural context, David shared,

I’m tired of this whole having friends who you relate to. I want people who are completely different from me to associate with me. I don’t want this whole ah, cloud in between... they’re not monsters, we’re not monsters. We can intertwine, like there’s nothing wrong with that. That would really help me settle with the Canadian... it’s not like we’re not ready to learn, it’s just that we need that association to happen already.

For David, the communal versus individualistic mindset is also something he would want to see change in the host cultural context. He noted, “... things are different here, I wish it would be like more of a community than, than individualized setting. That is what I love back, home, if you have a kid back home, they get raised by the community.”

## **Chapter 5 - Discussion**

As newcomer varsity athletes settle into their host cultural context, they face a greater level of stress as compared to their counterparts (Foo, 2015). With the increase in immigration in the Canadian context, understanding their acculturation experiences (successes and challenges) has become imperative for ensuring that these athletes are given the requisite support that facilitates positive acculturation in their host cultural context. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba with the aim of gaining further understanding of how this specific population experiences acculturation in this particular context.

In this chapter, the findings based on the experiences shared by the newcomer varsity athletes from this research project will be discussed. The areas of focus will be the acculturation challenges faced by the newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba, how the athletes managed their acculturation experiences and, the key role support played in their acculturation experiences in Manitoba. Of particular note, arising from this study, are the support for previous perspectives of acculturation being a fluid, non-linear, ongoing, and complex process (Blodgett et al., 2014; Schinke & McGannon, 2014; Schinke et al., 2013), the practical approach taken by the athletes towards their acculturation experiences, the relational impact of pre-existing host culture social groups, the varied support received in the varsity sport context, and mental health considerations related to newcomer varsity athlete acculturation.

### **Challenges and Acculturation Experiences**

The adjustment and acculturation experiences of newcomers moving to a host cultural context are impacted by a variety of factors. These include (but are not limited to) finding employment, navigating new contexts such as school or a sport team, managing finances, and

language and communication differences (Foo, 2015; Nadeau et al., 2016; Schinke et al., 2013; Zacheus, 2010).

**A snapshot of newcomer varsity athlete acculturation.** The experiences of the newcomer varsity athletes in this study have given us a snapshot of how they experience acculturation within the varsity sport context in Manitoba. Acculturation has been positioned as a fluid, continuous, complex, and ongoing process (Blodgett et al., 2014; Schinke & McGannon, 2014; Schinke et al. 2013). Sam (2006) states, “(S)ince acculturation is a continuous process, an individual may adopt different strategies at different times, and to deal with different issues” (p. 19). Whether one looks at the acculturation strategies chosen based on cultural maintenance and desire for social contact (Berry, 2006a) or the degree to which the experience is shouldered or shared (Ryba et al., 2018; Schinke & McGannon, 2014; Schinke et al. 2013), it is acknowledged that the interaction between the two elements influences the response and acculturation experience of the other.

Schinke’s work has been significant in relating newcomer acculturation as adaptive or maladaptive based on whether it is shared or shouldered (Ryba et al., 2018) and this position is informed by the social constructionist approach to the study of acculturation. Schinke et al. (2013) first considered acculturation in light of the extent to which it was shouldered or shared by the newcomer athlete. This means that as newcomers seek to adjust to life in their host cultural context, their acculturation experiences are influenced by how much they are left to navigate them on their own or with help from members of the host culture. Schinke and McGannon (2014) later built on this concept in positing that newcomer athlete acculturation be examined in relation to how much navigating this process is experienced as the athlete’s responsibility, with limited reciprocity, or with immersed reciprocity. When considered as the

athlete's responsibility, acculturation is viewed through the lens of the athlete navigating learning and adjusting to a second culture without assistance from members of the host cultural context (Schinke & McGannon, 2014). The athlete is still expected to meet, "... the host sport context's expectations or risk being branded as an outsider" (Schinke & McGannon, 2014, p. 68). Limited reciprocity, according to Schinke and McGannon (2014), means that the newcomer athlete learns and adjusts to the host cultural context with limited help from its members. This help from the members of the host culture is positioned as encouragement instead of a strict requirement but the expectation remains that the newcomer athlete adopts the host culture practices (Schinke & McGannon, 2014). Immersed reciprocity highlights a process where the acculturation experience and responsibilities are shared by everyone in the acculturating context. When this happens, "... all are learning to include and value various cultural standpoints... realizing and accepting that sport contexts are diverse in cultures and nationalities" (Schinke & McGannon, 2014, p. 71). The authors also posit that acculturation can be experienced positively by the newcomer athlete in all three approaches but the degree to which it is experienced positively increases as reciprocity from members of the host culture increases. Schinke and McGannon's (2014) work has formed the basis for much of the acculturation research informed by social constructionism (Blodeggt et al., 2014; Ryba et al., 2018; Schinke et al., 2017). Their theoretical position informs this study exploring the lived acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba.

The athletes in the study encountered a multiplicity of instances where they were left to experience adjusting to their host cultural context on their own, were given limited support from the host culture, and/or given significant support by elements of the host culture. Consistent with the literature (Schinke & McGannon, 2014), the level of support or reciprocity given by the host

culture had a direct bearing on whether the newcomer varsity athlete experienced acculturation in a positive or negative way. The more reciprocity received by the newcomer varsity athletes from the host cultural context, the more positive their acculturation experience in that specific context. The experiences and responses of the athletes to those experiences support the social constructionist's view of acculturation being fluid and ongoing with further consideration for how that is contextually experienced.

Berry's (2006a) conceptualization of acculturation reveals the particular stances taken by athletes in response to acculturative stress and the strategies adopted by the host culture in a multicultural context. The authors note where the newcomer athlete chooses integration when the host cultural context prefers multiculturalism, separation when segregation is preferred, marginalization when exclusion is preferred, and assimilation when a melting pot is preferred by the host context (Berry, 2006a). The experiences of the athletes in this study supports perspectives that these strategies are not linear but vary depending on what the newcomer experiences in that context based on the approach of the host cultural context. Further, the individual and social conceptualizations as to what is an acceptable response from either culture are considerations. We have seen where the newcomer varsity athletes fluctuated between approaches and perspectives based on how the host culture approached them, both in general and in specific moments.

While a fair presumption would be that athletes can be expected to have achieved more balance depending on time spent in the host culture, length of time in the host culture did not automatically mean that the athletes felt more integrated into the host cultural context. The athletes in this study shared experiences that show that they have learned to approach

acculturation by compartmentalizing each experience while considering previous information. They choose a strategy based on the context and interaction. It is not solely indicative of a transition along the acculturation spectrum as the athlete may revert to the strategy they feel is socially acceptable as a coping mechanism depending on what they encounter in a specific moment or situation. Does this mean that we now consider acculturation as a fluid reality that has been constructed by the newcomer athlete in order to achieve mental, social, and emotional stability? Is it a process of them getting to a point of where they feel they have reached a consensus as to what strategies are relevant to employ as they navigate a new way of life? Does this mean we look beyond Interculturation (Sam, 2006) and varied concepts of integration? These are questions to consider as we broaden our understanding of how we view the study of acculturation.

**A practical approach to acculturation.** Weedon's (2011) conceptualization of accommodation, where a more pragmatic view is taken by the newcomer with regards to accepting host culture norms and in order to maintain home cultural practices, gives insight into the experiences shared by some of the newcomer varsity athletes in this study. For many, viewing their time in Manitoba through a practical lens allowed them to develop mental, emotional, and social mechanisms for dealing with their experiences, whether positive or negative, in the host cultural context. This went beyond attempting to maintain their own cultural identity and/or making contact with the host cultural context. The decision to rationalize or keep a practical view of their approaches and experiences hinted at the desire to establish coping mechanisms for navigating their new reality. Therefore, regardless of the approach taken by the athlete or the host culture, the need for self-preservation and perceived emotional stability was paramount to the athletes' acculturation approaches and understanding of their experiences. This

does not negate the desire to choose conflicting approaches but it lends an explanation to what the athlete would consider to be their own socially constructed understanding as to what it means to find balance or successfully navigate life in the host cultural context.

**Social elements of the host and home culture.** Culture is at the forefront of understanding acculturation. Defining it, however, has proved challenging (Sam, 2006). This is why it becomes imperative to understand what those cultural definitions and differences are in an attempt to understand the process of acculturation. Sam (2006) states,

Closely linked to the definition of culture is the issue of “cultural context.” Acculturation does not take place in a “vacuum” but at a specific time and place – cultural context. It is therefore meaningless to speak of acculturation if the context under which the two groups are in contact is not understood (p. 22).

Berry (2009) and Chirkov (2009) discussed whether previous considerations of acculturation allowed us to examine culture and its role in understanding how acculturation is experienced. In any examination of acculturation, it should prove beneficial to gain a further understanding of the idiosyncrasies of both the home and host culture in order to better understand the acculturation process (Chirkov, 2009). This helps in conceptualizing why the newcomer has an easy or a hard time adjusting to their host cultural context. Such an examination would help in providing more clarity related to newcomer athlete experiences of culture shock (Schinke et al., 2013).

For the participants in the study, making friends or developing close relationships with members from the host cultural context proved difficult, with a variety of reasons emerging as explanations for this. The difficulty making friends or establishing close relationships also made it difficult for them to achieve a deeper attachment to the host cultural context. The variance

between socially constructed concepts of friendship in the host and home cultures seemed to be a significant source of difficulty for the newcomer varsity athletes in their host context in Manitoba. Athletes noted that while they have been able to make friends or establish social connections in their host context, it falls short of their expectations of 'friend' based on their personal experiences. Participants contrasted the 'warmth', depth of attachment, and expectation related to support characterizing friendship in home cultural contexts and the seemingly superficial and conditional friendship experienced in the host culture. This expectation could be related to the cultural expressions of friendship based on the participants' geographic origin. The conflict in definition and expectation of friendship seemed to contribute to culture shock and cause the newcomer athletes to withdraw from the host culture or establish their own social construction of friendship as a coping mechanism or explanation for host culture attitudes and behaviours. The level of reciprocity (Schinke & McGannon, 2014) between the newcomer and those in the host culture helped define the expectations and definition of friendship. In some cases, those from the host culture who made any significant attempt to connect with newcomer varsity athletes were either seen as contrary to the host culture or their actions viewed with suspicion by the athletes. When asked what they would want most of all from their home cultural context to make their adjustment to the host cultural context easier, most newcomer varsity athletes in the study articulated the desire to be reunited with the friends they had in their home countries. Most athletes indicated that they miss the level and type of friendship they enjoyed back home.

For the participants, one significant element that affected the ability to make deeper social connections was the perception that the members from the host context, whether in academic or sport settings, kept very strong previously existing social groups. Newcomer varsity

athletes found themselves on the periphery of these relationships and the difficulty faced when trying to establish a connection with anyone in these groups proved either futile or disheartening. With some social groups established from previous levels of schooling, newcomer varsity athletes found it harder to break into such tight-knit associations at the varsity level. This led to the perception of them feeling as if they were the 'other' in such social groupings, also possibly giving rise to further feelings of loneliness and isolation. This could lead to the perception of limited or no reciprocity (Schinke & McGannon, 2014) as the newcomer athlete attempts to settle into their host cultural context. In cases where the newcomer is already apprehensive or shy, these feelings of loneliness and isolation can further inhibit attempts to settle into the host cultural context. Interestingly, newcomer varsity athletes who attended some level of high school in the host cultural context before moving to the university/college context noted how helpful such social groups were for them as they transitioned institutions, making their acculturation experiences in the varsity context more positive. Nonetheless, these athletes still noted difficulties developing further social connections and support within the varsity context. Interpretation, however, is key as it emerged that based on what was perceived by the host cultural elements as support, a welcoming atmosphere, and immersed reciprocity may be interpreted differently by the newcomer athlete based on their varied social definitions of these elements. This may call for further inquiry into the study of the interpretation of behaviours from both the perspective of the newcomer varsity athlete and the key social elements of the host culture varsity context, such as coaches and teammates (Blodgett et al., 2014; Schinke et al., 2013).

Language and communication has been shown to have an integral role in how a newcomer experiences acculturation (Masgoret & Ward, 2006; Schinke et al., 2011; Weedon,

2011). For the participants of this study, some struggled communicating with teammates, classmates, and performing in contexts where they were not as proficient with the dominant language. Even for some who were proficient with English, in order to experience a more successful adjustment in their host cultural context, they opted to adopt the vocal practices and idiosyncrasies of the host culture and repress their way of speaking English as informed by their home culture. Both were coping mechanisms aimed at helping the athletes gain acceptance from the host cultural context. Some athletes reported feelings of being on their own or feeling judged by others when it came to their language skills and abilities. Some also shared experiences where members of the host culture made significant attempts to help them to learn the language, teammates in particular. The more teammates and others in the host cultural context reached out, the more confident the athletes became and the more they were willing to take risks and make mistakes with language. This also created opportunities for cultural exchange and learning.

Communication of concepts or key information is another related area where some athletes felt as if those within the host cultural context only gave what they thought was necessary information. The newcomer athletes were expecting people to try to ensure they had access to all the information and that they were provided with what was needed. This difference in perception could again be attributed to what the host culture considered normal in relation to the provision of information and support. The resulting implication is that the host culture may feel that they are providing the necessary support to the newcomer athlete but it is not perceived as such by the newcomer based on their cultural assumptions as to what support is supposed to look like.

**A look at the impact of host context structure.** For the purposes of this project, structure will be defined as any system, policy, or organization encountered by the newcomer

varsity athletes. When the newcomer varsity athletes came into contact with various elements of structure within their host cultural context in Manitoba, the difficulties experienced shaped the lens with which they viewed the host culture and by extension, the host culture's perception of them. For example, while adjusting to the weather was a more significant issue at the start of their journey settling into the host context, the athletes faced more lasting difficulty with the way their educational, varsity sport, and in particular, healthcare systems operated. Whether experienced individually or with varying degrees of intersection, the difficulties faced in these contexts helped to create a narrative of what it means to be a newcomer varsity athlete in their host cultural context. Athletes spoke about the ease with which they were able to adjust to learning in the university/college context in Manitoba, with minor differences with assessment and course load. The educational system in Manitoba seemed more desirable to the athletes and became a representation of what it meant to settle into a system in their host cultural context. As they continued to navigate this context, the most significant issues faced seemed to relate to anxiety over language differences, being treated differently as a newcomer, and the lack of communication and guidance from key representatives from the system.

In the context of access to healthcare, while there was a surplus of services, it was disconcerting to athletes to have to face extended periods of injury and recovery, especially without sufficient financial support. This resulted in the perception of a host culture that did not care and the health care system being viewed as cold and frustrating to navigate. Due to this perception, the athletes experienced a range of emotions related to longing for home, comparing home and host cultural contexts, and negative feelings of rejection or marginalization.

Athletes felt a greater push from these systems to adapt to and adopt what is considered the normative behaviour or expectation. Athletes were mostly left to navigate these systems and

their idiosyncrasies with varying levels of reciprocity (Schinke & McGannon, 2014). This painted a negative picture of the host cultural context leaving the athlete feeling disconnected from their host cultural context and longing for systems more like those in their home cultural context. As a result, the athletes moved further away from wanting to interact with these elements in the host cultural context, especially because it became a negative representation of what defined the host context. With the varsity sport context representing a significant part of the newcomer athlete's social and support system, this approach led to a negative view of their acculturation experience. This struggle between frustrations with structures within the host context and preferred structures in the athletes' home context left athletes conflicted about what was desired and what was expected (by them and by their host cultural context). The varsity sport context contained elements of this phenomenon as athletes appreciated the additional resources, recognition, and opportunities but wrestled with the context falling below expectations, the lack of communication, and a perceived lack of support.

The newcomer varsity athletes in this study faced issues of finding balance related to managing school, sport, and having to work as a means of sustaining themselves or contributing to the success of their families. This bore some level of stress, which could have contributed to the general pressures that the newcomer athletes felt, while compounding the effects of other acculturation challenges faced while attempting to settle in their host cultural context. The athletes who articulated that they came from cultures where one does not typically manage these three factors, seemed to express greater difficulty navigating this challenge. Coming to Manitoba, where this practice seemed to be the norm, made it more difficult for the athletes to adjust to and manage their efforts to settle into the host cultural context while managing simultaneous or conflicting responsibilities. Whether out of necessity (having to support oneself

and/or family) or borne out of interactions with the host cultural context, having to balance these responsibilities had some bearing on the athletes' perceptions of what adjusting to and successfully navigating the host cultural context entailed. Those that found balance in managing the various responsibilities in their host cultural context have been shown to experience more positive acculturation in their host cultural context (Ryba et al., 2016).

That athletes also spoke of experiences where interacting with aspects of the structure in the host culture helped them in navigating the acculturation process. In addition to some of the examples mentioned previously, warm weather, getting support from a resident advisor who assisted with educating newcomers on the necessities for winter, and facing easier educational requirements assisted in making aspects of settling into life in Manitoba easier for the athlete. These experiences seem largely overshadowed by negative experiences with and perceptions of the structures they interacted with.

From a critical standpoint, this focus on structure allows a deeper look at how systems either support the newcomer varsity athlete or reinforce dominant narratives of rejection or inferiority. This examination may include an assessment of how systems are set up, what can be done to educate newcomer varsity athletes about the prospective challenges in their host cultural context, as well as putting things in place to help them navigate these challenges. Ryba et al. (2016) posit that the organization's role in the successful adaptation of its newcomer athlete bears as much consideration as the individual athlete's difficulties. The level of host culture reciprocity (Schinke & McGannon, 2014) communicated by the host cultural context to newcomer athletes can go beyond interpersonal interactions, as the way the system was set up became more representative of host culture attitudes than overt social interactions. As we have seen from the participants' responses, the systems they interacted with also communicated

whether or not the newcomer athlete was expected to navigate their host cultural context on their own, with limited reciprocity, or with immersed reciprocity (Schinke & McGannon, 2014). This experience became the socially constructed perception of what it meant to be a newcomer athlete in the host cultural context, and therefore a representation of what it meant to be a newcomer in that context. While athletes acknowledged that the way systems were set up in the host cultural context may have been different as compared to how systems operated in the athlete's home cultural context, this rationalization did not eliminate any perceptions they had towards the host culture systems.

From a policy standpoint, it is possible to examine how socially constructed perceptions and treatment of newcomers has been passed down through the structure, reinforcing the narrative of the newcomer as the other. For example, the Government of Canada's policies regarding sport are passed through Sport Canada to U-Sports, which then filters down to the university/college varsity sport teams. In essence, the approach towards newcomers by the systems and persons within it at the varsity sport level can be a representation of the perceptions and narratives passed down through the structure by those in power. The Government of Canada's 2012- 2022 Canadian Sport Policy calls for the, "use of sport to build the society, economy and share Canadian values" (Government of Canada, n.d.). While this statement can be seen as aimed at the benefit of all within the Canadian context, some may interpret it as assimilationist in nature, communicating a need for Canadian values to be shared without leaving room for greater appreciation of and exchange with other cultures. With Canadian universities increasing international student-athlete recruitment based on the desire to attract talent and build ratings (Grbac, 2014), newcomer athletes can be perceived based on the value they bring and not

on their value as human beings. Much more research is required to unearth, unpack, thoroughly examine, and understand the extent of this phenomenon.

**Paying attention to newcomer varsity athlete mental health.** The research suggests that newcomers face a range of mental health issues (such as homesickness, isolation, loneliness, and problems adjusting) when experiencing acculturation in their host cultural context (Schinke et al., 2011; Weedon 2011). Participants in this study shared experiences of homesickness, isolation, loneliness, and depression. This stemmed from the separation they felt from their home culture, whether it be a physical separation from their home country and family, or the culture shock faced while navigating life in their host cultural context. Some expressed that these feelings were experienced while maintaining interactions with persons in the host cultural context, giving rise to the perspective that encouraging social interaction may not be the only solution for addressing these issues in newcomer varsity athletes. Research confirms that the separation from home or one's home culture, especially if there are significant points of attachment in one's home country (such as family) can have a significant psychological impact on the newcomer (Schinke et al., 2011). Participants indicated that the lack of support and information played a part in how well they navigated that process.

In order to cope with the challenges faced by newcomer varsity athletes, they developed a range of coping mechanisms. Some sought out interaction with their home culture (such as joining related clubs or finding people or activities associated with their culture), attempting to make friends with members of the host culture, learning more about the host culture, or dismissing the differences in culture as something natural in order to make sense of it. Notwithstanding, it was evident that when faced with significant challenges such as rejection from the host cultural context and/or issues back home (such as a death in the family), the

athletes would struggle to maintain positive mental health. Athletes articulated that there is a greater need for mental health and coping support for newcomer athletes. They also mentioned the need for athletes to be made aware of how and where to access these services. One such example given was the call by athletes for the provision of sport psychology services for newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba. The important role of support staff, such as a sport psychologist, in the positive acculturation of newcomer athletes has been highlighted throughout the literature (Kontos and Breland-Noble, 2002; Ryba et al., 2016; Schinke et al., 2016b; Schinke et al., 2017; Schinke & McGannon, 2014; Schinke et al., 2011;). None of the athletes indicated that they sought out the services of a counselor when faced with issues of mental health, consistent with the perspective shared by Smith and Khawaja (2011) in relation to the underutilization of student counseling services.

One other consideration going forward as it relates to mental health and newcomer varsity athletes is to examine what role theories and initiatives surrounding the concept of resiliency can play in helping newcomer varsity athletes adjust to their host cultural contexts. Pickren (2014) defines resiliency as, “a personality trait that helps in psychological adaptation in risky or adverse life situations” (p. 17). The author indicates that the various elements of the social context (such as the educational context and familial connections) have been shown to play a crucial role in newcomer resilience. The newcomer’s cultural practices were highlighted by the author as a source of tension with the host culture or strength for the newcomer. He also notes the importance of considering the newcomer’s concept of self, identity, and cultural maintenance in understanding the newcomer’s adjustment to their host culture, as well as the role they play in developing resilience. Examining the host culture and the newcomer from the perspective of building mutual resilience where both see each other from a position of value with

the ability to “enrich the host society” (p. 19) may prove beneficial in developing resilience among newcomers and the host culture as both deal with the effects of the acculturation process.

### **Support and the Newcomer Varsity Athlete**

Support during acculturation has been shown to be one of the key determinants of its successful, continuous navigation. Smith and Khawaja (2011) note that international students sought out a variety social support networks in order to mitigate the stressors experienced during acculturation. These range from familial support to the support of friends from the host culture, home culture, or another international culture (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

**The integral role of familial support.** Familial support in particular has been shown to be integral for maintaining positive well-being (Foo, 2015). Lee (2018), in his grounded theory study of Korean immigrant adolescents, found that the family unit formed a base of psychological and informational support for the newcomers whenever they faced acculturative stress. Many of the newcomer varsity athletes pointed to the key contributions of family in helping them to adjust to their host cultural setting. The ways family members helped in their acculturation experiences was through the provision of emotional, social, financial, and motivational support. Family members also helped to share the experiences of going through the process of acculturation, providing an outlet for the newcomer varsity athletes when they faced struggles in the host context or struggled to make sense of cultural differences. This reduced the feeling of being ‘on your own’. Familial support was also essential in helping athletes keep close to or maintain their cultural identity as well as share in attempts to learn and interact with the host culture. As one athlete conceptualized it, the family formed a base of support for the newcomer athletes, whether they were located in Manitoba or elsewhere. However, what happens when this breaks down? While the presence of familial support can be beneficial for the

newcomer varsity athlete, participants experiencing conflict within this unit felt increased stress and feelings of 'being on their own'. This means that the other social players within the host cultural context (e.g., coaches, teammates, and peers) became that next level of support that the athlete leaned on. This can either be helpful or hurtful for the athlete as they navigate acculturation as it depends on whether their sport contexts promotes or inhibits reciprocity (Schinke & McGannon, 2014). If the other social relationships are already troubled, then the likelihood that the athlete chooses isolation from the host and home cultures, defined as marginalization by Berry (2006a), increases.

Another dynamic that Ryba et al. (2016) note is how other family members experience acculturation may also affect how the newcomer athlete experiences acculturation. In this study, examples emerged of athletes making a greater effort to settle into the host cultural context because of the implications it had for another family member. Their approach towards the host culture and acculturation was motivated in part by needing to set a positive example that would allow someone from the familial support unit to successfully navigate their own acculturation experiences. This places the athlete in the position of simultaneously needing to give and receive support at the same time. Athletes also used their responsibility to their families as motivation to adjust to or give the perception of adjustment to living in their host cultural context. Regardless of all the ways familial support is shown to be significant for the newcomer varsity athlete, the level of support received from the sport context also plays a crucial role in how they experience acculturation (Ryba et al., 2018).

**The supportive role of the varsity sport context.** The social context (Ryba, 2017), and in particular the sport context (Schinke & McGannon, 2014; Schinke et al., 2013), play pivotal roles in how newcomer varsity athletes experience acculturation. Schinke et al. (2016a) noted

that support is more likely to come from familial agents rather than the receiving culture. Newcomer athletes can be met with a lack of support or willingness to help, lack of cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness, and an overall unwelcome atmosphere (Ryba et al., 2018; Schinke et al., 2017) as well as the pressure to acculturate forcefully (Weedon, 2011). Sport has been shown to be both beneficial (e.g., increased autonomy and self-esteem, learning more about the host cultural context, and social inclusion) and detrimental (e.g., segregation, isolation and discrimination) for newcomers (Garrido et al., 2012; Nadeau et al., 2016; Ryba et al., 2018). The culture within the sporting context is key in contributing to the experience of the athlete within that context. The duality of the host culture sport context is echoed as Elbe et al. (2018) states, “(S)port may facilitate the acculturation processes by strengthening the bonds among members of ethnic groups or by enhancing interaction between members of different cultural groups, but may also highlight cultural differences, and foster ethnic controversy” (p. 179). They suggest that it is important to look further at the various factors within the sport context, particularly its characteristics and composition, as these play a role in the integration of newcomer athletes into the sport context. Elbe et al. (2018) highlight the coach as key in the creation of such an environment.

The culture within the varsity sport context becomes the key point of focus for assisting in newcomer varsity athlete acculturation. Lee (2018) noted that the school context that supported cultural diversity was integral in reducing levels of acculturative stress experienced by newcomer adolescents. Our participants’ experiences of navigating acculturation highlighted the coach in their varsity sport contexts as crucial to their settling into, understanding, and making sense of their varsity sport context in their host culture. They have had more helpful than hurtful experiences as most athletes found their coaches to be supportive, encouraging, understanding,

and willing agents in helping the newcomer athlete to not only settle better in their host cultural contexts, but to achieve high performance. As one of the most impactful agents in the varsity sport context in the host culture, the coach was seen as a 'base of support' for some of the newcomer varsity athletes, with some assuming a parental or mentorship role for the athlete. This, along with previous associations from their home cultural context, positioned the sporting context as the athlete's new 'family' in the host cultural context. This is also especially because the sporting context for the newcomer varsity athlete became their primary source of interaction with and understanding of the host cultural context. Athletes even spoke of coaches engaging in cultural exchange in order to better understand them or help them settle better into life in the varsity sport context in Manitoba. When coaches have shown either limited reciprocity (Schinke & McGannon, 2014) or none at all, athletes seemed more likely to choose isolation from the host culture, including the varsity sport team.

Based on the perspectives of the athletes in this study, teammates were also an important element of this new 'family' for the newcomer athlete in the varsity sport context. Lee (2018) notes that, "peers who invited immigrant adolescents into their groups and encouraged them to join school clubs together played a critical role in ensuring the adolescents adjusted to the host society well" (p. 112). Teammates became significant representatives of the host cultural context and were integral in how the newcomer athletes experienced their host culture. They were also there to provide support, help with language and social adjustment, help with cultural exchange, and provide mentorship. In these instances, athletes had a more positive experience learning about and existing in their host cultural context. On the other hand, difficulty breaking into existing social circles, lack of support, criticism, competitive cultures, and feeling disconnected

made adjusting to their host cultural context more difficult. The newcomer varsity athletes based their approaches to these situations on the level of reciprocity of their host culture teammates.

In relation to support and connectivity within the host cultural context, the athletes called for more initiatives to foster greater support and cultural exchange between newcomer varsity athletes and those within the host cultural context. Participants noted that while an athlete orientation and opportunities to connect on residence existed, an official program or culture that fostered connectivity seemed to be missing from the culture within teams and administrations. The newcomer varsity athletes suggested making more connections between and within sport groups for newcomer athletes to meet with each other as well as to interact with others from the host cultural context. They indicated their desire for more opportunities to engage in cultural exchange while also noting that opportunities to increase cultural awareness/sensitivity would be beneficial for teammates within the host culture context. This sentiment echoes the views of Kontos and Breland-Noble (2002) who also highlighted the need for increased cultural sensitivity and awareness from elements within the host sport contexts when working with athletes from a different sport cultural context. These suggestions from the athletes also show a desire to integrate even more. While support from their own culture was desired, they also showed a leaning towards wanting to connect even more with the host cultural context. Other suggestions from the athletes to create mentorship programs, host more events tailored to newcomer varsity athletes, and to make an intentional effort to ensure newcomers are aware of services available to them coincide with Schinke et al.'s (2013) call for the creation of formal networks for immigrant athlete support. This would prove beneficial for both the athlete and those in the acculturating context.

## **Limitations**

This study included some potential barriers that affected how the study was conducted and results obtained. The barriers that the researcher had no control over, known as limitations, related to the language that was used to conduct the interviews, the researcher's proficiency conducting research-related interviews, and participant recruitment at other universities and colleges outside of the university to which the researcher is associated. The interviews were conducted in English, as that is the only language with which the researcher is proficient. All participants were able to understand the researcher and the researcher had no issues understanding the participants. There were some moments during some interviews where the researcher had to repeat himself upon request by the participant for clarification. Added caution was taken to ensure that the participants understood the questions being asked by the researcher and that the experiences conveyed in the letters and interviews were exactly what the participants meant to share. The researcher ensured full understanding by the participant before moving on from a question where a participant needed clarification. For the second limitation, the researcher had familiarity conducting interviews in various other settings, including athletic team assessment and those related to recruitment and employment as a Human Resources Assistant/Officer. This project was the first time that the researcher conducted specific research-related interviews. The use of Ryba et al's (2016) Cultural Transition Model (CTM) was employed in the creation of a structure for the interview questions and this allowed for a seamless flow from one topic to the next during interviews. The researcher also made adjustments to the interview guide based on feedback from his supervisor and one of his participants, which helped to ensure that the guide was improved as the interviews progressed. The third limitation was the sampling method (snowball sampling) used for participant recruitment at multiple institutions. Whilst snowball sampling worked to recruit information rich participants for the study, recruiting from some institutions proved more difficult than

others because of less familiarity of possible participants with the researcher. Obtaining ethics approval from multiple institutions required multiple ethics applications and the researcher expected that using snowball sampling through key contacts and athletes would have been sufficient. Key contacts and other athletes were very helpful with the recruitment process; however, it was a little more difficult than expected. If the researcher were to conduct this study again, he would obtain ethics approval from each university and college in Manitoba as well as obtain research ethics board approval to place posters in common areas frequented by athletes, such as their training centres/gyms.

### **Delimitations**

Those barriers placed in the study by the researcher, known as delimitations, relate to eliminating participants who were raised in the U.S.A. and including participants with varied years in varsity sport. While newcomer athletes raised in the U.S.A. would qualify for participation in this study based on the definition of newcomer used by Statistics Canada (2016), they were eliminated because of the perceived similarities in their culture and the culture here in Canada. These similarities would mean that even though they would experience acculturation to some degree, their experiences are likely to be less representative of the acculturation experiences of newcomer athletes coming from a cultural background with greater differences. The second delimitation related to recruiting participants with varied years of varsity sport participation. The wide range of varsity sport experience can be seen as a limitation because the athlete's acculturation experiences and perspectives could differ based on their length of time in their varsity sport context. Conversely, it was helpful in capturing a wide range of perspectives, giving a broader picture of the newcomer athlete acculturation experience.

This project was conducted in a manner that was paradigmatically consistent with interpretive research inquiry. As the lived experiences of newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba were explored,

the methods and analysis employed focused on unearthing the richness within the data in order to expand our understanding of acculturation. The researcher, while understanding that the reality was co-constructed with the participants (Markula & Silk, 2011), remained aware of his position as a newcomer to Canada and also ensured that personal bias or opinion did not influence the findings of the research. This project was feasible, executable, and relevant when considering the multicultural nature of Canadian society.

### **Contributions to Research**

This project contributes to the literature related to the study of acculturation in the Canadian context. Particularly, this study has been conducted with participants from the varsity sport context in Canada, a population which has largely been missing from the literature. Additional concepts that have emerged are the consideration for specific social aspects of the host cultural context in Manitoba that impact newcomer varsity athlete acculturation, the practical lens through which these athletes approach acculturation, and the role of structure in the in how they experience acculturation. This study was also conducted from the perspective of a member of the non-dominant group (the author being a newcomer) in the Canadian context which has also largely been missing from the literature. Finally, this study also answered the call for the study of acculturation using varied interpretive methodologies (Blodgett et al., 2014; Schinke & McGannon, 2014; Schinke et al., 2013).

### **Recommendations and Future Directions for Research**

**Theoretical considerations.** The experiences and perspectives of the newcomer varsity athletes in this study have provided us with an idea of how they experience acculturation in the varsity and educational contexts in Manitoba. Further studies examining other varsity sport

contexts and the experiences of the newcomer athletes in these contexts across Canada will allow us to gain further insight into the lived acculturation experiences in other provinces to determine the similarities and difference based on provincial culture. This will also give an understanding of the various cultural idiosyncrasies, host and home, that may need to be considered in acculturation research in the Canadian context going forward. With this in mind, it is recommended that social context, host cultural norms, and home cultural norms be considered in the study of and conceptualizations of acculturation in the future. The emergence of the impact of pre-existing social groups on newcomer varsity athletes' attempts to establish social connections with the host culture is one related area that could receive further attention in acculturation research in Canada. I also agree with the recommendation for more acculturation research incorporating the perspectives of coaches, teammates, and other sources of support for the newcomer varsity athlete (Schinke et al., 2013). Incorporating the various perspectives of the athlete and other key social players, especially the host culture in the acculturating context (Morela, Hatzigeorgiadis, Sanchez, Papaioannou, & Elbe, 2017) will help to provide researchers with greater levels of understanding related to the acculturation phenomenon in general and specific contexts.

These steps will help in supplying those within the host cultural context (e.g., coaches, teammates, and administration) with a greater level of understanding of how the newcomer varsity athlete experiences acculturation as well as how they can help make this process a positive one. This would help the varsity sport context in Manitoba play its part in answering Sport for Life's (2018) call to sport and physical activity organizations to "spend time understanding where the newcomers have come from, and what they have gone through in order to settle in a new country" (p. 30).

Also, further examinations of the structures within the host cultural context from a critical lens will allow for researchers to identify and address structural barriers that may exist in the host cultural context that make newcomer varsity athlete acculturation difficult. This examination could extend to the degree to which the varsity sport context mirrors the overall sport and national structure in their attitudes towards newcomers. Schinke and McGannon (2014) noted that consideration for how the elements of the broader structure are constructed has a bearing on the climate created within the related context. As Ryba (2017) notes, while such an examination may take place in the “privileged space of whiteness” (p. 126), there is a need to consider how the values of the host cultural context inform practices at every level of the structure. Finally, further acculturation research could look at the role resilience-based approaches could play in helping newcomer varsity athletes navigate acculturation challenges in their host cultural context.

**Methodological considerations.** From a methodological standpoint, this qualitative project played its part in answering the call for more varied epistemological and methodological approaches to the study of newcomer athlete acculturation (Chirkov, 2009; Schinke & McGannon, 2014; Schinke et al., 2013). The use of the letters written by the athletes to their younger selves allowed the researcher to gain valuable insight into the experiences of the athletes while allowing the athletes to examine their own experiences prior to engaging with the researcher in the interview setting. The researcher found that this contributed positively to the depth of discussion when conducting the interviews with the athletes. Some participants articulated how therapeutic it was to write out and talk about their experiences settling into their host cultural context. The use of such documents is largely missing from the newcomer athlete acculturation literature in Canadian contexts. Chirkov (2009) mentioned that letters written by

newcomers would help to provide “information about the cultures being examined and people’s experiences within them” (p. 101). The use of such documents could prove useful in breaking down the elements of the home and host culture that make acculturation difficult for the newcomer as a part of research going forward.

With the background of the researcher (i.e., a newcomer studying at a university in Manitoba) possibly having an impact on elements of the study, keeping a reflexive journal and being held accountable by my supervisor throughout the project proved beneficial in ensuring that the researcher was aware of and could negate any bias in the interpretation and analysis of the data. There were instances where the researcher struggled with separating his own experiences with those of the participants. Having those systems in place allowed the researcher to remain accountable, to be paradigmatically correct in not trying to influence the findings with his own interpretations (Markula & Silk, 2011), and to produce research that was more representative of the experiences of the participants than those of the researcher.

**Practical considerations.** The practical solutions stated below are based on the suggestions of the newcomer varsity athletes who participated in this study. While universities/colleges in Manitoba may have initiatives in place to assist their newcomer student population, the athletes indicated that more could be done to assist in their adjustment into their host cultural context. Having a mentorship program in place for newcomer varsity athletes was seen as a solution to providing the athlete with a support system in their sport context to whom they could relate. Whether these athletes are from the same newcomer culture or not, the athletes believed that this mentor would be able to identify with and educate the other athlete on the various acculturation experiences, positive or negative, in the host cultural context. Another level

to this articulated by the athletes would be to create cultures that foster more inter and intra-group interaction between newcomer and host culture varsity athletes. These could exist in the form of events or established practices within the varsity sport context. The athletes also encouraged the execution of more cultural awareness/sensitivity workshops for host culture members within the varsity sport context. I would take it a step further and recommend these workshops for all members within the varsity sport context while encouraging the development of more cultural exchange opportunities. Finally, athletes indicated that the presence of sport psychology services would be helpful in providing them with an accessible avenue for receiving support for issues related to newcomer varsity athlete mental health and well-being. These suggestions support the recommendation by Schinke et al. (2016b) that sports psychology consultants, “consider supporting the acculturating athlete, and in relation, seeking support from peer athletes and coaches from the receiving country” (p. 358).

## **Conclusion**

This master’s thesis project aimed to explore the lived acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba with a view to answering the question: What are the acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba? A qualitative examination of their experiences, using social constructionism as a guide and a novel approach to data collection, revealed themes focusing on the challenges faced while trying to adjust to the host cultural context, the significance and varying levels of support received by the athletes, and the pragmatic, fluid, and ongoing nature of their acculturation approaches. This is consistent with much of the literature.

Emerging from the research is the key role that pre-existing social groups and various idiosyncrasies of the host cultural context played in how the newcomer athletes perceived the responses and attitudes of those within the host cultural context. In examining issues of structure,

the varsity sport context played a significant role in the newcomer varsity athlete's experiences of acculturation, with the level of reciprocity from teammates and coaches being a key area of focus. There also emerged consideration for how the systems within the varsity academic and sport context either support or frustrate the newcomer varsity athlete in their attempts to adjust positively to their host cultural context.

More research into the acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes across Canada, research incorporating the perspectives of other key social agents in the host cultural context, and that incorporates the idiosyncrasies of the host and home cultures is recommended in order to expand and further inform our understanding of acculturation in Canada. Further research is also needed from a critical standpoint to examine the extent to which the structures/systems in the varsity sport context help or hurt newcomer varsity athlete acculturation. Such an examination could help with the conceptualization and execution of streamlined policies and procedures related to newcomer varsity athlete adjustment throughout varsity programs in Canada, U-Sports, and Sport Canada.

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### Appendix A: Participants

| <b>Name of Participant<br/>(Pseudonym)</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Country of Origin<br/>Classification</b> | <b>Sport Type</b> |
|--|---------------|---|-------------------|
| <b>Anthony</b>                             | Male          | Developing Economy                          | Individual        |
| <b>Chris</b>                               | Male          | Developing Economy                          | Individual        |
| <b>David</b>                               | Male          | Developing Economy                          | Individual        |
| <b>Jordan</b>                              | Male          | Developing Economy                          | Group/Team        |
| <b>Marcus</b>                              | Male          | Developing Economy                          | Individual        |
| <b>Margo</b>                               | Female        | Developing Economy                          | Group/Team        |
| <b>Michelle</b>                            | Female        | Developing Economy                          | Group/Team        |

## Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Letter



Faculty of Kinesiology  
and Recreation Management

102 Frank Kennedy Centre  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada R3T 2N2

Research Project Title: An exploration of the lived acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba

Principal Investigator: Craig Brown, Cell # [REDACTED]

Research Supervisor: Dr. Leisha Strachan, Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management, [REDACTED]

My name is Craig Brown and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management at the University of Manitoba. My advisor is a faculty member. I am conducting research on the topic of newcomer varsity athlete acculturation (the process of learning a new culture in a different cultural context) and the various experiences and challenges that occur during this time. This is a graduate level research project that aims to explore this phenomenon in Canada. The study will consist of individual interviews involving participants from the following category:

1. Newcomer (immigrant or migrant) varsity (university or college) student-athletes

This participant recruitment letter has been sent to you electronically as you are an individual who has met the criteria for involvement in this study and I would like to interview you in order to learn more about your experience. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked firstly to write a letter to your younger self about your journey so far as a newcomer athlete in Canada. This letter is written from the perspective of you sharing anything about your experiences in life so far that you believe would be important for a younger version of yourself to know. You can choose to write to yourself at any age of your life (i.e., you at 11 years old or 8 years old). Examples of these letters can be found on the website The Players' Tribune at the following link: <https://www.theplayerstribune.com/en-us/collections/letter-to-my-younger-self> and you can use any of these examples for inspiration. After you have completed the letter and returned it to me, you will then be asked to participate in a one-on-one face-to-face interview about your experiences, at a time agreed upon with you that will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Once the interview has been completed, within two months you will be asked to review the typed transcript of that interview, which will take approximately 30 minutes. The information shared in the interview will be used to gain knowledge about your personal experiences related to being a newcomer athlete in Canada. This will help in gaining a greater understanding of the

experiences of the newcomer athletes in a Canadian cultural context and the challenges and key issues they face while adjusting to life in this different cultural context. The questions asked will focus on your experiences with sport in your home country and in Canada, the interactions you had/have with teammates and coaches in the Canadian varsity sport context, and your general experiences of what it was like to settle in Canada.

Each interview will be audio recorded using a small digital audio recorder to allow for the subsequent transcription of each interviewee's observations, while I may also take notes during the interview. This material will only be used for research purposes and will be securely stored for the duration of this study. The digital recorder and interview notes will be stored in a locked cabinet in the Qualitative Research Lab at room 125 Frank Kennedy Centre, to which I, apart from the departmental backup, have the only key at my personal residence. All digital files generated by the interviews (e.g., transcripts) will be saved on the hard drive of a computer that is password protected (a password that only my advisor and I will know) and on a USB drive that will be stored in the previously mentioned cabinet. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript of your interview within six to eight (6-8) weeks of the interview. Your feedback is requested within three (3) weeks' time, after which it will be assumed that revisions are not needed. Once the study is completed, you will be informed of the findings.

You will have the option to review, verify, and if necessary modify your comments by adding or deleting any material. Only I will have access to the primary research data. You will have access to the transcription of your interview and letter to your younger self. All audio recordings, observation notes, and transcription notes will be destroyed in December 2019. The recorded interviews will be deleted from the audio recording device while all digital files will be deleted from hard drives and any other electronic storage devices. Paper records will be shredded.

Please be assured that you are under no obligation to participate in an interview. If you do choose to participate, you may at any time during the interview refuse to answer any question(s), or withdraw without penalty from the study. I will also provide you with contact information for a counselor should you feel the need to contact them. You will be free to raise questions or concerns with myself throughout the interview and will have the opportunity to view the transcript of your interview before the completion of this study. You will be given the option to choose whether you want to be identified within the study and its published results either by your name or by pseudonym. If you choose the latter, any details that might be used to identify you directly will be removed from the transcript and your name will not be used in the published study.

Although the findings of this study will primarily benefit you by giving voice to your experiences as a newcomer athlete in a Canadian sport context, by participating you will be contributing to the production of new knowledge about Canada's newcomer athlete population. You will also be providing policy makers and institutions with vital information that could inform their approaches to immigrant athletes going forward.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122, or e-mail at [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

I am hopeful that you will be interested in participating in this study. If you are, could you please get back to me by phone [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED] and I will arrange a time and location to meet at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Craig Brown

## Appendix C: Informed Consent/Assent Form



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Kinesiology  
and Recreation Management

102 Frank Kennedy Centre  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada R3T 2N2

Research Project Title: An exploration of the lived acculturation experiences of newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba

Principal Investigator: Craig Brown, Cell # [REDACTED]

Research Supervisor: Dr. Leisha Strachan, Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management, [REDACTED]

My name is Craig Brown and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management at the University of Manitoba. My advisor is a faculty member. This consent/assent 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.

This is a graduate level research project, which seeks to further understand the experiences of newcomer (immigrant or migrant) varsity (university or college) athletes as they encounter and learn a second culture in a new country. With Increased newcomer athlete participation in Canadian sport contexts, there is a growing need to understand the challenges they encounter in their new context. There has been a lack of research examining their acculturation (process of learning a second culture in a new cultural context) challenges and as such, this project will seek to understand their experiences, acculturation, and to identify key issues concerning the acculturation of newcomer varsity athletes in Canada. This study is informed by the concept of this acculturation experience as a socially constructed (informed by their interaction with those around them) process. This line of research is expected to give voice to those who have gone through these experiences with the aim of informing other newcomer athletes, policy makers, and institutions about the successes and challenges of newcomer varsity athletes in Manitoba.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to write a letter to your younger self, (see the link for an example: <https://www.theplayerstribune.com/en-us/collections/letter-to-my-younger-self>), complete one face-to-face interview that will take about 30 to 60 minutes, and to review the typed transcript of that interview, which will take approximately 30 minutes. Each

interview will focus on your experiences as a newcomer varsity athlete in Canada and will be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient to you. The questions asked will focus on your experiences with sport in your home country and in Canada, the interactions you had/have with teammates and coaches, and your general experiences of what it was like to settle in Canada.

Each interview will be audio recorded using a small digital audio recorder to allow for the subsequent transcription (by myself) of each interviewee's observations, while I may also take notes during the interview. This material will only be used for research purposes and will be securely stored for the duration of this study. The digital recorder and interview notes will be stored in a locked cabinet in the Qualitative Research Lab at room 125 Frank Kennedy Centre, to which I, apart from the departmental backup, have the only key at my personal residence. All digital files generated by the interviews (e.g., transcripts) will be saved on the hard drive of a computer that is password protected (a password that only my advisor and I know) as well as on a USB drive that will be stored in the locked cabinet. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript of your interview content within six to eight (6-8) weeks of the interview taking place. You will have the option to review, verify, and if necessary modify your comments by adding or deleting any material. Your feedback is requested within three (3) weeks' time, after which it will be assumed that revisions are not needed. Once the study is completed, you will be informed of the findings.

You will be given the option to choose whether you want to be identified within the study and its results either (i) by your name or (ii) by pseudonym (see below). If you choose this second option, any details discussed during the interview that might be used to identify you directly will be removed from the transcript and your name will not be used in the study. If you choose to waive this right, you will be asked for a second time, after you have read your transcribed interview, if you would like to continue to be identified by your name or if you would prefer to revise your decision and be identified by pseudonym. You have this option of waiving confidentiality because you are over the age of 18 and have the right to be identified by your name if you so choose. For participants below the age of 18 years of age, your parent/legal guardian will be required to indicate whether or not you can be identified by name or pseudonym. The potential risk of waiving confidentiality is the fact that you are a public figure and may not want your actual name associated with what you discuss as your past experiences or opinions could potentially become public knowledge.

Only you, myself, and the research supervisor will have access to the primary research data. You will have access to the transcription of your interview, letter and the anonymized data, while only I will have access to the original recorded material. All audio recordings, observation notes, and transcription notes will be destroyed in December, 2019. The recorded interviews will be deleted from the audio recording device while all digital files will be deleted from hard drives and any other electronic storage devices. Paper records will be shredded.

You are under no obligation to participate in an interview. If you do choose to participate, you will be free to raise questions or concerns with myself throughout the interview and will have the opportunity to view the transcript of the contents of your interview, if you wish, before the completion of this study. You may withdraw from this study at any time, by notifying me and all paper and digital records of your participation will be destroyed.

You will not be subjected directly to any physical or emotional risks beyond the most minimal risks. While there is a potential that discussing your personal history and experiences of athletics in this setting may be connected with uncomfortable memories, you should be assured that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer nor would you be expected to divulge any information that you are not comfortable sharing. If you do feel discomfort at any time, you can pause or stop the interview. We will also give you the option to be referred to a trained counselor who will be ready to assist you. Please remember you do not have to answer any question you do not want to and have the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

Although the findings of this study will primarily benefit you by giving voice to your experiences as a newcomer athlete in a Canadian sport context, by participating you will be contributing to the production of new knowledge about Canada's newcomer athlete population. You will also be providing policy makers and institutions with vital information that could inform their approaches to immigrant athletes going forward. The findings of the study will contribute to my master's thesis and as such, the analysis of the data as well as direct quotes included within the thesis will be made publicly available after the successful defense of the thesis. If you would like to receive a brief (1-3 pages) summary of the findings, they will be provided to you no later than October, 2019.

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 researchers or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

For participants below the age of 18 years of age, your parent/legal guardian will have to sign in the section below confirming that you are able to participate in the study.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Coordinator at

204-474-7122, or by e-mail at [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's/Legal Guardian's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(For participants 17 years and younger)

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please indicate how you would like to be identified within this study:

By name: \_\_\_\_\_  By pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

*Note: You have the option to revise your preference when you review the transcript of this interview.*

2. Please indicate how you would like to receive a copy of your focus group transcript for review:

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Post: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

3. If you would like to receive a summary of the findings of this research, please indicate the method by which you would like this delivered to you:

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Post: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix D: Letter to My Younger Self

Dear 30 year old Craig,

You're gonna make it. Everything you know will change. The next few years will be filled with highs and lows but remember one thing, it will all make you stronger.

You've been through a lot in life, but now everything looks like it's moving in the right direction. Your career is progressing. Your family is doing better. You're done with school... absolutely done. And guess what, you're about to marry the love of your life. You've been waiting for a looooong time, and it will be worth it. You and [REDACTED] will get married and it will be a beautiful, and tiring, day.

A lot will change from this day onward.

Your first year together will be harder than you thought. You and your beautiful new wife will live on opposite sides of the island and only see each other on weekends. You will travel a lot, learn a lot, and struggle through trying to wipe her tears away each time you say goodbye. But you're gonna make it.

After that year things will get better. Everything in your life will start to make a turn for the better. You will go through the growing pains of learning to live together but you will both be better for it. Be patient with her, and with yourself. You won't learn it all overnight. Oh yeah, the January after that you will be 'promoted' to the very job you've been dreaming about for years. Yup, it seems like it's impossible now but things will work out in a way that will allow you to take over that position and finally, finally launch your career in Human Resources. Things are looking up. It will be a tough year of learning but you will make it.

One year on though, things will change. They are going to make your whole department redundant. Yes, redundant. You never thought that would happen at that company, but it will. You will have a lot to deal with. While wrestling with your own pain and sense of loss, you will have to manage it and play a pivotal role in helping almost 200 people manage theirs over the next year and a bit. You will be placed even further outside of your comfort zone. People will attack you too but just remember that they are hurting and they don't mean it. Even this letter may not be enough to really prepare you for what you're about to face but as you help an entire company transition through a change in ownership, you will have to learn a lot of things the hard way but it will all make you that much stronger in the end. There will be a lot of scars left after it all but, yeah you guessed it, you will make it.

Through it all, you and [REDACTED] will grow even closer to each other, friends will show up in immense ways, your family will rally around you, and you will know more about H.R. and managing departments than all your years of school taught you. Just hold on while you go through it.

More change is coming.

The funny thing is that in the midst of growing in your career during this time, you will start to get a tug in a different direction. Yup, you guessed it, migration. Yes, you said you would never do it. You were happy being in your beautiful island of [REDACTED] and even with everything that has been going on, you and [REDACTED] are doing well in all areas. But, you will really start thinking about it and funny enough, you guessed it again, you will start thinking of going to Canada, another thing you said you would never do. Nope, I'm not joking.

There's another thing that will happen that will continue this trend; you're thinking of going back to school. Yes, you swore you were done with school after finishing your Masters. You're gonna do it though. You're going back to school but this time, you're going to pursue something you love. You're going to have some great discussions with potential grad school supervisors but two will stand out to you the most. You're going to settle on going to Winnipeg to study at the University of Manitoba and believe me, you will have no regrets. Before this all happens though, there's something I forgot to tell you, your health will take a turn for the worst, and it will change and challenge so much of what you know and believe.

Do you remember when you were much younger and they diagnosed you with prolapsed discs in your lower back? Do you remember the years of physiotherapy? Do you remember having to eat on your stomach or not being able to stand or sit for long? Do you remember the pain? The incessant pain that brought tears that men say they never shed. Do you remember? This will be worse. I know you cannot imagine it, but believe me, it will be.

So, you've made up your mind to move to Canada with your wife. You have resigned from your job (this is still crazy for even me to think about) and you will do a routine removal of all of your wisdom teeth. Everything will go well and in no time you should be back to your regular self, at least, that's what you will expect. Just a couple days after your procedure though, you will start bringing up all your food, and it will get progressively worse in the space of a few hours. Before the night is over, you will end up in the hospital in need of a few bags of fluid just to get you back to basic recovery. I think they almost lost you. You see, while you thought you were following the prescribed steps for recovery, the pills you were taking were ripping your stomach walls apart and ironically, another pill was masking what was happening so you thought

everything was okay. This would lead to the start of an ordeal that will take more than six months of recovery.

You will have to learn to eat food from scratch again, from liquid to soft to solid. You will end up in the hospital a few more times before that year is done. You will lose weight (not that you had much in the first place), your blood pressure will drop and at one point you will be at approximately 79/57. ■■■ will barely sleep because she has to stay beside you on the sofa to make sure that you make it each night. You will go through recovery without painkillers because your stomach cannot manage it. You will have to leave the front door open so that your neighbours can come and check on you in the daytime when ■■■ is at work. It will be a long time before you get to go outside and in order to get direct exposure you will either have to go out on your balcony for a short time each day or drag yourself to the end of the hallway on the third floor of your apartment complex. Why? There's a window at the end of it and for a little while each morning, enough sunshine comes through it that will help. You will shed a lot of tears. You will develop pain in multiple sections of your back (yup, your back again) and because of that, it will hurt to sleep. You will either have severe back pain or unbearable acid reflux. You will end up having to choose one or the other each night depending on which is less painful. You will question God, a lot. Let us not talk about the financial toll this will take on you. That redundancy actually came in handy. But guess what, you will make it.

By the end of it though, you will recover, you will learn to exercise/play basketball again while managing the pain in your stomach and chest. You will get better and even though to this day, you still have to be more careful with what you eat. Your faith in God will be stronger. You and ■■■ will get closer. And, after a little while, things will start to get better again. That recovery

time will also give you time to prepare for moving to Canada. You will take the lead on this and you will go through a lot of packing up, a lot of organizing, visiting friends and family to say goodbye, and making sure that you are ready to move. By that time you will have accumulated so much stuff. Sigh. Stop hoarding.

Saying goodbye will be harder than you think. You have visited many countries but this is different. This is all you've known as home. If you were doing it on your own then maybe it would be easier but you also have [REDACTED] with you and you wonder, before even boarding the plane, if you're making a mistake. You don't even have family or friends in Winnipeg. Yup, you've never heard of it before. Like Marta who told her younger self to get on the bus, I tell you now, get on the plane. You will both make it.

This is a new beginning and though you are filled with wonder and excitement, you're afraid of the unknown. You don't know what to expect. Will it all work out? Will everything go wrong and you find yourself heading back to [REDACTED] in a year? Where will you live? Was it a mistake? These are just some of the thoughts that will hit you when those airport doors open and you feel the wonderful Winnipeg wind in October. There's a reassurance though. You know it's gonna work out. It has already started.

Friends of your friends have picked you up from the airport and they will play a crucial role in your new journey. They will take you into their home for a while until you find a place to live. They will show you how to get around. They will teach you where to go and what winter clothes to buy. They will treat you and [REDACTED] like their own children and you will feel like it. You have heard the horror stories of other newcomers to Canada. Many find it hard to get a good job or find a good place to live. Many go back home quickly, hating the day they set foot in Canada.

The winter in Winnipeg is an experience itself. Your first winter, you are going to wonder many times if you made a mistake. But you will make it.

It will feel like a roller coaster as you find support from so many people that you will meet.

School will stress you beyond measure but halfway through you will have recorded some of the best grades you have ever gotten. You will get sick a lot because of the change in seasons. You will have quite a few nosebleeds and the dryness from your apartment baseboard heater will cause your throat to dry out while you're sleeping, causing you to wake up struggling to breathe. You will miss the food you love. You will miss a lot of the people you love. You will miss special days and important events. It's not easy to go back home. It's expensive, really expensive. There are days you will feel empty as you think about all the things and people you miss.

You will meet a lot of good people though. They will make it worthwhile. You're going to work with a football team (yes, you will have to start saying soccer) and it will be one of the best things that have ever happened to you. You will see God's provision like never before. You are going to be in your research lab one day, writing a letter to your younger self, smiling gently and thinking to yourself, "I know it was hard and some days are still pretty rough, but almost two years in, I have no regrets and it was worth it."

So, I know this is a lot to take in. In a few years, you will be a different man who has grown through adversity and learned so much. As you face the journey ahead of you, hold on to your faith, love the people in your life, and treasure each moment. No matter how hard the journey gets, just remember that it will be worth it and you will make it.

Signed,

Craig

## **Appendix E: Interview Guide**

### **Demographics and Pre-Transition Phase**

1. How old are you?
2. Where were you born and raised?
3. Why did you start playing sport?
4. What sports were you involved in when you were in your home country and why?
5. What were your early experiences like with sport in your home country? What similarities and differences do you notice with sport in your home country and Canada?
6. Why did you choose to come to Canada from your country?
7. What made you choose this particular university or college?
8. What did you do to prepare for your move to Canada?
9. In your letter you mentioned (...) about playing (sport) in your country. What was going through your mind as you thought about playing (sport) in Canada? (example of question informed by letter)

### **Acute Cultural Adaptation**

1. How long have you been living in Canada?
2. What sports are you involved in here in Canada?
3. What was your experience like when you moved to Canada?

4. What are your experiences like managing sport and school in Canada?
5. Has your involvement in university/college sport been helpful or hurtful in settling in to life in Canada?
6. What has it been like playing in your new sport context and how does it compare to play your sport back home?
7. How does playing (sport) in Canada compare to playing in your home country?
8. What role did your teammates, coaches, and peers play in helping you to settle in Canada?
9. Is there anything specific they did to make you feel welcome? If so, what? If not, why do you think they made this choice?
10. In your letter, you mentioned (...) about your experience with your coach at your college/university. What role did they play in your experience in Canada? (example of question informed by letter)
11. Did you face any challenges with your sport environment and if so, what were they?
12. What role did family support play in your experience settling in Canada?

### **Socio-cultural Adaptation**

1. Why are you still involved in sport?
2. Do you intend to stay in Canada when you have finished your university studies? If so, why? If not, what are your plans?

3. Would you prefer to stay in Canada or go back to your home country? Why?
4. How would your life/Canadian experience have been different if you were not involved in sport and school?
5. Do you believe that you identify more with your home culture or host culture? Why?
6. What are your best sport memories from back home and in Canada?
7. How involved are you at school or in the community and what role does sport play in that?
8. Do you have any regrets about moving to Canada? Why?
9. What advice would you give to other newcomer university athletes in Canada if you had the opportunity?
10. If there is anything that you could get now that would help you settle more into Canadian life, what would it be and why?
11. I remember you saying in your letter that you feel (...) about playing sport and living in Canada now. Can you tell me a little more about why you feel that way? (example of question informed by letter)

## Appendix F: Respondents' Growth Responses

### Chris

I found it, it was good for me to really just you know, open up and just you know, just give a perspective on my life you know. It's somewhat like a reflection of what I've been through for myself you know, just listening to myself speak it, it's like okay, an out of body experience. Just sitting down listening to myself speak so you know, even things that I didn't know that I had inside of me I was able to just bring it out, strengthen my, my resolve for certain things you know. You know, I, I'm able to, I remember, you know I was able to pull back on stuff that used to motivate me you know, things that I almost didn't remember you know. Things that I was almost letting go so to speak you know, I'd be able to bring it back so I'm like okay, this is me, this is who I am, so to speak, I'm not forgetting myself so, I, you know, I really enjoyed this conversation yeah.

### Marcus

Athlete: for sure that helped so much and, I don't even have an answer to be honest with you, you asked me, just blew my mind that I don't even have an answer to say, I don't know if I would've been here.

### Margo

Interviewer: ahm so you, you mentioned just a while ago that there's a change, the longer you've been here, it's the more like, everything isn't wiped away but, some of these things have gotten better, yeah, what do you think is the reason for that?

So like [sniffles] maybe because ahm, I changed a little bit, you know the contamination thing, maybe I just became a lot like them and then not caring too much, and also, ahm, like a lot of players knew me.

**Michelle**

Oh my God. That's, that's a good question. I honestly don't know [laughs]. Like, probably I'd be only you know, working and ahm, studying of course and maybe, something that I did back home that worked very well for me was volunteering. Volunteering in different organizations like different NGO's, ah, I really like to help people so, when I quit [name of athlete's sport] back home, that's what I did. I joined different organizations and start working with you know, biologists or constructors or I don't know, people from like engineers, whatever. So, I think the volunteer, volunteering experience is very, how you say, fulfilment?