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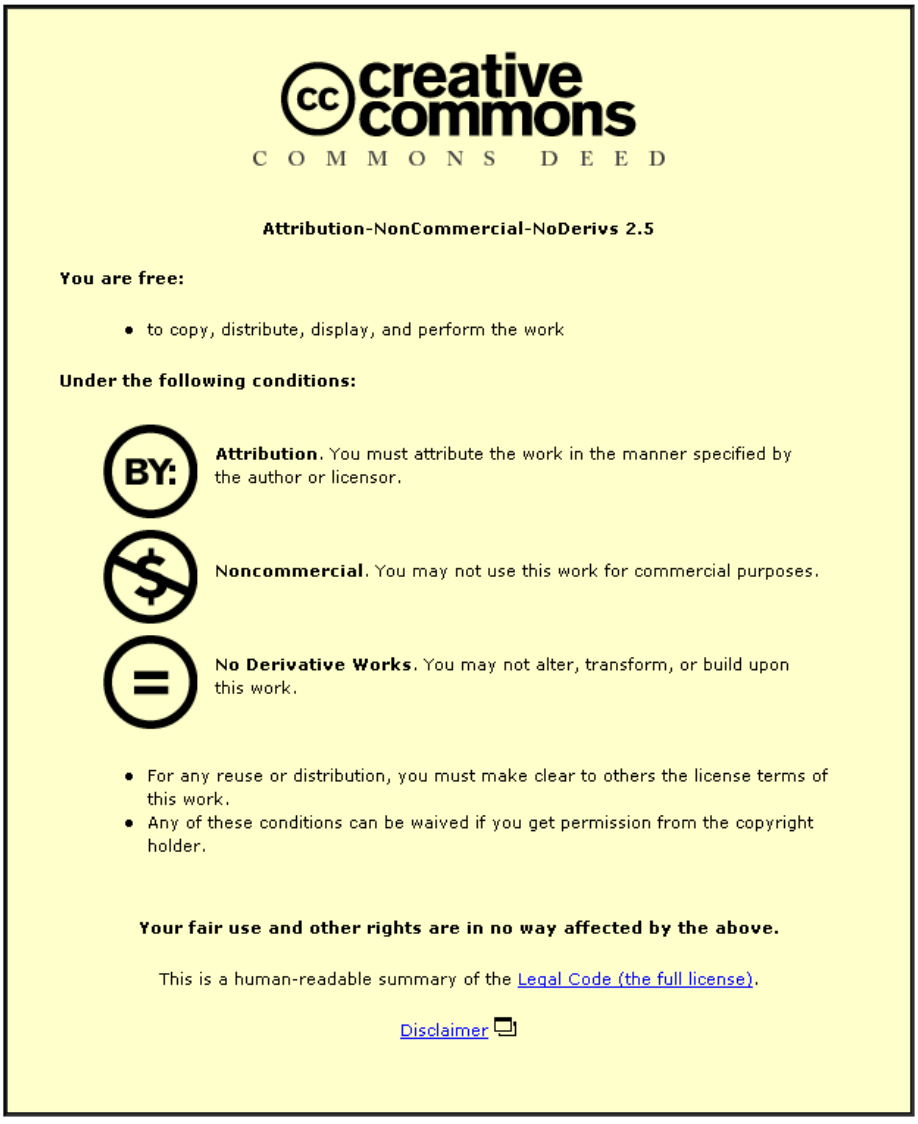

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PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CAREER TERMINATION AMONG GREEK FEMALE ELITE ATHLETES

by

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A Master's Thesis

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“The silence when arrives is desperate. You need a great strength to handle the situation and become ready to hang your shoes out….”

Voula Patoulidou, Greek Olympic medallist

Abstract

Objectives: The main objectives of this research included an investigation into (a) the reasons for sports career termination, (b) the support provided to athletes from coaches, family members, partners and friends during sport participation and after their decision to terminate the sporting career and (c) issues involving their adaptation to life after sports.

Method: Data gathered through a combination of semi-structured interviews and in depth life histories from eighteen and two female athletes respectively. The interview schedules were developed in order to generate data relevant to sport career termination issues. Specifically, the questions were guided by Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model of career termination. Participants were twenty Greek female former elite athletes in track and field athletics who achieved success at the international level. The data were analyzed using a deductive-inductive approach following content analysis procedures.

Results: Thematic categories emerged relevant to reasons for career termination included discord with coach and issues with the sporting community (e.g., athletic federation), as well as burnout. Relationship issues linked to support with coach and family were linked to adaptation to career termination. Finally, in terms of the quality of adaptation the main thematic categories were adjustment difficulties (e.g. lack of interest outside sport) as well as occupational and financial difficulties.

Conclusions: The findings supported the main components of Taylor and Ogilvie's model. Moreover, the findings provided rich information relevant to what it is contained in each of these components. Overall, the findings suggested that Greek female elite athletes in track and field athletics find it difficult to adjust to life after sport. Interestingly, it transpires that athletes who stayed in touch with their coach and the sport environment generally experienced a better adaptation to post-sport life.

Key Words: Sports career termination, athletic retirement, social support, transitions, content analysis

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The investments that athletes and the people around them make at the elite stage of competitive sport are in the physical, social and financial level and are done made during a long period of time. Someone from outside sport might consider the athletic career as a smooth development. Nevertheless, research has shown that sporting career is characterized by specific moments or situations. These moments and situations are called “transitions” (Wylleman, 2002). Human life is characterized by various transitional events that are often unpredictable. Individual’s occupational planning (Hopson & Adams, 1977), educational processes (Newman, Lohman, Newman, Myers, & Smith, 2000), getting married, having a child, retirement from the workforce and dying (Cummings & Henry, 1961; Kubler-Ross, 1969), are included in the most important events in one’s life related to the concept of transition.

In sport psychology, over two decades or so, there have been several theoretical and empirical endeavours from the scientific community to examine the process of transition. About 20 years ago, the athletic retirement process received little attention probably because the athletes were considered simply as a part of the wider population where money and fame were far beyond them. But, in recent years there have been an emergent interest regarding the athletic transition process. This might be due to athletes from most sports received more publicity and became from athletes to media-athletes which increased their social significance (Torregrosa et al., 2004).

Lavallee and Wylleman (2000) identified a total of 226 scientific references (94 theoretical/applied; 132 empirical) related to this subject. Research has shown that several sports career transitions can be identified such as the beginning of sports specialization in which the young athletes begin to specialize in their sport and skills, the transition to intensive training in the chosen sport, the transition from amateur sports to professional sport, the transition from the culmination to the end of sports career and, lastly,

sports career termination (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004). Similarly, Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) defined the athletic career as “the succession of stages and transitions that includes the athlete’s initiation into and continued participation in organized competitive sport and that is terminated by the athlete’s voluntary or involuntary discontinuation of participation in organized competitive sport” (p.52).

Every transition can be experienced with relief, depression, joy or other similar psychological feelings or with the combination of some of them depending on one’s perception of the situation (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). All athletes are expected to leave one day the high-performance sport area and to find new challenges and a new way of living (Alfermann, 2000). Thus, sports career termination can be characterized as an inevitable event that will happen sooner or later in every athlete’s life. Athletes end their sport career due to several reasons including age, injury, low performance, gradual change in sport status, problems with the sport community or other interests. Howevere, whatever the reason, retirement is a transition from athlete to former athlete. Logically, this is a normal consequence of participation in high performance sport and the end of a career in such a young age could signify the beginning of a new one. But, Ogilvie and Howe (1986) have described the process of sport career termination as traumatic where athletes experience feelings of loss, despair and hopelessness. Leaving the sport environment, athletes may struggle to find their identity, resulting in confusion, low self-esteem, self-confidence and eating disorders (; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2005; Zaichkowsky, King & McCarthy, 2000). In addition, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) described athletic retirement as a very difficult process with mixed emotions, fluctuating from relief to crisis, which is influenced by specific factors such as the age at the time of retirement, athletic identity or income (Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, & Delignieres, 2003). This process of transition can be experienced as a positive or negative crisis transition, which requires a certain amount of social psychological adjustment to the post-sport life. A crisis transition takes place when an athlete has to make a special effort to successfully adapt to the new way of life, from athlete to a “normal” person. Unsuccessful adjustment often

creates lowered self-esteem, emotional distress, increased sensitivity to failure, and confusion. Factors that can ease the course of transition include: high motivation, positive attitude towards training, competitions and sport career as a whole, active coping with difficulties, trust in coach and psychological climate (FEPSAC Position Statement 3). What makes the sports area unique is that high-performance athletes have invested a great deal of effort and their identities over a relatively short period of time and at a young age.

Additionally, sport career is also different from other careers, such as a professional career, because it frequently ends at a much younger age than the usual retirement age and often happens suddenly. Another factor that makes athletic retirement different is the uniqueness of the “athletic identity” (Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). Sport is, for elite level athletes, the energy that moves their lives. Thus, leaving the sport environment, voluntarily or not, does not only mean disengagement from sports but also a change of his/her identity; he/she is no longer an athlete. As Curtis and Ennis (1988) stated: “retirement means leaving a valued position that is high in recognition and prestige, and in some cases, high in income” (p.87). Usually that leaves a major hole in the athlete’s life and leads to a negative reaction.

Nevertheless, Coakley (1983) described retirement from sport as a “rebirth” rather than an end. Curtis and Ennis (1988) stated that athlete retirement should be conceptualized as a liberating experience which athletes accept with relief and face as an opportunity for development. Koukouris (1991, 1994) was perhaps one of the first Greek researchers who attempted to analyze retirement from sports with Greek athletes and he found that the majority of athletes had a healthy career termination from sports. So, why do some athletes succeed in having a well-adjusted post-athletic career while others fail?

For the purpose of this research, the terms “event” and “process” will be used to describe the phenomenon of sports career transition. Coakley (1983) contested the belief that the sport career transition is an event that inevitably results in identity crisis and adjustment problems. Instead, he

believed that the sport-career transition is a process and should be viewed as an opportunity for personal growth and development in other life domains. He suggested that focusing on retirement as an event can be damaging to research attempts in this area. Torregrosa, Boixados, Valiente, and Cruz (2004) supported Coakley's view and they added that retirement from sport should not simply be perceived as an event, but instead, a process that should begin shortly after the athlete becomes engaged in his/her career. Nevertheless, according to Baillie and Danish (1993), elite athletes, like most individuals when facing a transition, experience a period of adjustment, external and internal factors, like coping resources or personal relationships can determine whether the adaptation process will be positive or negative. Interestingly, viewing the sport-career transition as a process can assist sport psychology consultants to help athletes individually prepare for their sport-career transitions given their individual perceptions of the situation, personal resources, coping strategies and developmental experiences (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

1.1. The Purpose of this study

Using the conceptual model of adaptation to career transition (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998) as a guide, the purpose of this study was to examine, using qualitative methodology, the perceptions, subjective experiences and feelings of Greek female former elite track and field athletes, the reasons for ending their careers, the transition to life after sports, their post-competitive life and the support they may have received for a successful adjustment to their new life after sports. Despite the extensive research that exists on athletic retirement, little research has been conducted on female top-level athletes and no previous study has examined Greek female elite track and field athletes. A further objective of this study was to add information to the understanding of the athletic retirement process specifically among Greek female athletes from track and field athletics. In general psychology, the elements of gender, ethnicity or sport, which characterize a study and make it unique in the literature, could be considered as limitations of that study. In contrast with these views, these characteristics should be delimitations of a

study and could help to maybe generalize results to that specific group of athletes but not generalize or predict results to every group of athletes from every nation or every sport. In the present study, the fact that Greek elite female athletes from track and field athletics were chosen to be studied aims to help future studies to have a specific base to begin, expand the results and regarding athletes who belong to that group to be more aware of this process that will happen sooner or later in their life. The findings aim to help guiding the counselling profession by describing what athletes understand about this process and how they perceive and confront this situation. Interestingly, until the completion of this study, no evidence existed in the literature using Taylor and Ogilvie's model (1994). One research study that also used the same model and was published after the completion of the present study is Coakley's (2006) work where its results partially supported the main components of Taylor and Ogilvie's model. Coakley's study aimed to discover the cognitive processes that enable athletes to experience subjective well-being after retirement. The results of this study indicated that the conceptual model of adaptation to career termination fails to acknowledge the potential for varying levels of cognitive, emotional, behavioural and psycho-social determinants and their influence on subjective well-being and the sport-career transition.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section presents studies that exist in the literature about professional and amateur athletes' retirement experiences. It includes the following theories and models; thanatological theory, social gerontological theory, Stambulova's (2003) Athletic Career Transition model, Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model of transitions faced by athletes, Sussman's (1972) analytical model for the sociological study of retirement, Schlossberg's (1981) model of human adaptation to transition, Sinclair and Orlick's model, (1994), and Gordon's model (1995). These models and theories have been used to explain the event or non-event of sport career transition. Then, Taylor and Ogilvie's (1998) conceptual model of adaptation to career termination will be described and the reasons for using this model as a guide for this research will be presented. Finally, as one of our aims was to investigate how social support affected the athlete during his/her competitive years and after sports career termination, an overview of the concepts of social support and personal relationships on athletic retirement will be outlined.

2.1. Athletic retirement as an abrupt event

Much research has attempted to explain the phenomenon of career termination based on the theory of thanatology, the study of death and dying, and on the theory of social gerontology, the study of ageing. It was discussed that there are remarkable parallels between the chronological retirement and the process of athletic career termination.

2.1.1. Thanatology

The word thanatology is derived from the Greek Language where the word "thanatos" means "death". The first conceptual approach, thanatology or otherwise the study of death and dying, has been applied to situations

where the individual is socially dead while is still biologically alive (Rosenberg, 1982). Both Lerch (1982) and Rosenberg (1982) have used the theory of “social death” as a model for explaining the psychological and social changes on athletes during sports career termination. In fact, Rosenberg claimed that athletic retirement is akin to social death where the individual may be rejected or isolated from the former in-group due to his/her loss of status. This perspective was applied from Kubler-Ross’ (1969) “stages of death and dying” (Lerch, 1982; Ogilvie & Howe, 1981) which explained the nature of the adjustment to retirement, as a process where the athlete may move through stages similar to those experienced by the dying patient: shock, denial, anger, depression and understanding or acceptance. In addition to the previous two models (“social death”, “stages of death”) Lerch (1982) discussed another thanatological model that revealed interesting similarities between the socially dead retiring athlete and the biologically dead hospital patient: the thanatological theory of “social awareness” (Glaser & Strauss, 1965).

Glaser and Strauss (1965) suggested that there are four different types of “awareness context”: *Close, suspicion, mutual pretence and open*. In general, *closed awareness* means when the patient is unaware that he/she is dying even though his/her environment is. In the domain of sports, *closed awareness* could be used when the athlete is not aware of plans (e.g., from the manager or the coach) to release him/her from the team. *Suspicion awareness* is when a patient suspects that he/she is going to die and his/her environment attempts to confirm this suspicion. In the sporting area, *suspected awareness* exists when the athlete perceives changes in his/her personal interactions (e.g., less verbal communication or no communication at all) with the coach or other and suspicions of being released from the team are produced. The *mutual pretence* refers to a situation when the patient, doctors, and family know that the patient is dying and they behave as if nothing is going to happen and the inevitable death is not going to occur. Applied to sport, *mutual pretence* exists when no matter how well the athlete performs coaches, managers and the athlete knows that the inevitable career ending is not too far. And finally, in the *open*

awareness context, the athlete and all the people around him/her, face the fact that the athlete's sporting career is nearing a conclusion with open acknowledgement.

In terms of the "stages of death", Kubler-Ross' (1969) work indicated that the patient has certain reactions to deal with the inevitable death. So, she described particular stages that the patients usually go through. As applied to athletic retirement: (1) Isolation, and denial, when the athlete refuses to accept his/her career termination, (2) anger, when the athlete becomes disturbed with the perceived injustice and lack of control, (3) bargaining, when they try to delay the inevitable sport career termination, (4) depression, when the athlete experiences distressful reactions, and finally (5) acceptance of the inevitable sport career ending. At this final stage, social death is completely different with actual death because the athlete is still alive and recovery is still very possible.

But, although there is an undoubted difference between actual death and retirement from sport, Rosenberg (1982) and Lerch (1982) maintained that the concept of thanatology can be applicable to involuntary rather than to voluntary retirement.

2.1.2. Social gerontological theories

The concept of social gerontology tries to explain the connection between individual's life and activities, and their age. Therefore, this theory appears to be most applicable to occupational retirement where individuals are forced to retire due to advancing age. Although, Blinde and Greendorfer (1985) suggested four theoretical frameworks of social gerontology (Disengagement theory, Activity theory, Continuity theory, Social Breakdown theory) that might be applicable to sport retirement, Rosenberg (1981) proposed six social gerontological perspectives in his effort to understand the experiences and problems confronted by athletes facing career termination. These are: *Disengagement theory, Activity theory, Continuity theory, Subculture theory, Social Breakdown theory and Exchange theory.*

The first gerontological perspective is the *Disengagement theory* (Cummings, Dean, Newell & McCaffrey, 1960) where the individual and the

society reciprocally withdraw from each other with a reciprocal benefit. The society enables younger people to enter the workforce and for the elderly retired ones to spend their remaining years in leisure. In terms of athletic retirement, most of the athletes do not withdraw from their sport immediately after they decide to terminate their career but they are pushed out after hanging on for some time. So, because mutual disengagement is rarely the case in sports, this theory does not offer much to our attempt to understand the athletic retirement. On the other hand there is the *Activity or substitution theory* (Havighurst & Albrecht, 1953), where the individual needs to substitute the once active roles that have been lost in retirement, with new ones. It also suggests that role maintenance and high level of activity will positively influence the self-concept and life satisfaction. Nevertheless, the major criticism of activity theory is that many - if not most - older people during retirement decrease their variety of activities and are quite content with a less active schedule. Building on activity theory, *Subculture theory* (Rose, 1965) maintains that the individual can enjoy less activity but be well-adjusted during retirement. *Continuity theory* (Atchley, 1981) unlike activity theory, claims that the individual carries over to the next stage of his/her life all the previous roles, habits and activities. In addition, this theory suggests that substitution is not necessary for all lost roles. Nevertheless, it recommends that all the energy and time the individual has devoted to the lost roles can be redistributed to the remaining roles or towards new roles. *Social Breakdown theory* (Kuypers & Bengston, 1973) refers to the situation in which the individual is forced to withdraw due to the complete loss of a specific role. And finally, *exchange theory* (Dowd, 1975) explains how the individual reschedules his/her activities and social networks so the energy that remains maximizes return.

Moreover, these theoretical frameworks have received a lot of criticism, as they seem to be inappropriate for athletes (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998). On the one hand, regarding criticisms of the gerontological theories, sports careers are completely different from other careers because they frequently end at a much younger age than standard retirement age and often may

end unexpectedly. Additionally, Crook and Robertson (1991) also criticized social gerontological models and particularly the correlation between athletic retirement and retirement due to advancing age, and the inability of these models to explain variations in athlete responses to retirement. Clearly, the elite athlete when terminating his/her career is chronologically and biologically younger than the working retiree. On the other hand, the thanatological model has been criticized for its negative consideration of retirement and about its inability to be generalized to the majority of athletes. Although Baillie (1993) recommended that the thanatological models can be used to explain the sport career transition process, their clinical utility has received criticisms as they were developed with populations outside sports (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). As Taylor and Ogilvie (1994, p.4) reported, "The theoretical models that have been applied to retirement from sport do not indicate what factors lead to the traumatic responses or what enables individuals to progress through the respective stages to reach closure" (Grove, Lavallee, Gordon, & Harvey, 1998; Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000).

Recently, researchers became aware of the significant differences between the two processes and these chronological approaches have been heavily criticized. The most important criticism that the two perspectives have received is that they consider athletic retirement as an abrupt event where the individual experiences feelings of isolation instead of personal growth and development (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) indicated that the description of the athletic retirement as social death can be dramatic because it is a negative characterization of the process and since the thanatological model has been designed using populations beyond sport, this can be damaging in generalizing them to sport populations. In addition Lerch (1982) raised concerns about the generality of the theory of social death beyond the few cases existed until then. He based this concern on data collected from a large sample of former professional baseball players (Lerch, 1981). The findings of this study indicated that not even one of the participating athletes made reference to death of any type. On the other hand, social gerontological theory lacks empirical support and it is too narrow in its utility in application to sports

retirement (Baillie & Danish, 1992). Specifically, Lerch (1981) and Reynolds (1981) in their studies found that social gerontology theory is inadequate when applied to athletic retirement as the factors that are included in the theory are not associated with the adaptation to post-sport life.

Social gerontology and thanatology consider retirement as a singular event. In contrast to these chronological approaches, career termination should be considered as a transition process, which is embedded in life span development, instead of as a discrete event (Sinclair & Orlick, 1994). Thus, since neither of these perspectives is able to examine adequately the entire nature of sport career termination an alternative perspective is needed which can explain both positive and negative experiences.

2.2. Athletic retirement as a process

In contrast with the views that were described above, many researchers characterized retirement as a process, which involves development through life. Building on this perspective, a number of transition models have been designed to examine the interaction of the athlete in retirement and the environment including, Stambulova's (2003) Athletic Career Transition model, Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model of transitions faced by athletes, Sussman's (1972) analytical model for the sociological study of retirement and Schlossberg's (1981) model of human adaptation to transition.

2.2.1. Athletic Career Transition model

Stambulova (2003) designed the Athletic Career Transition model (figure 1) in order to arrange the athletic career into several stages, and then describe the changes in the athlete's social situation. This model considers the sport career transition as a process and not as a single event. As Stambulova (2003, p.99) stated "transition demands create developmental conflict between what the athlete is and what he/she wants or ought to be.

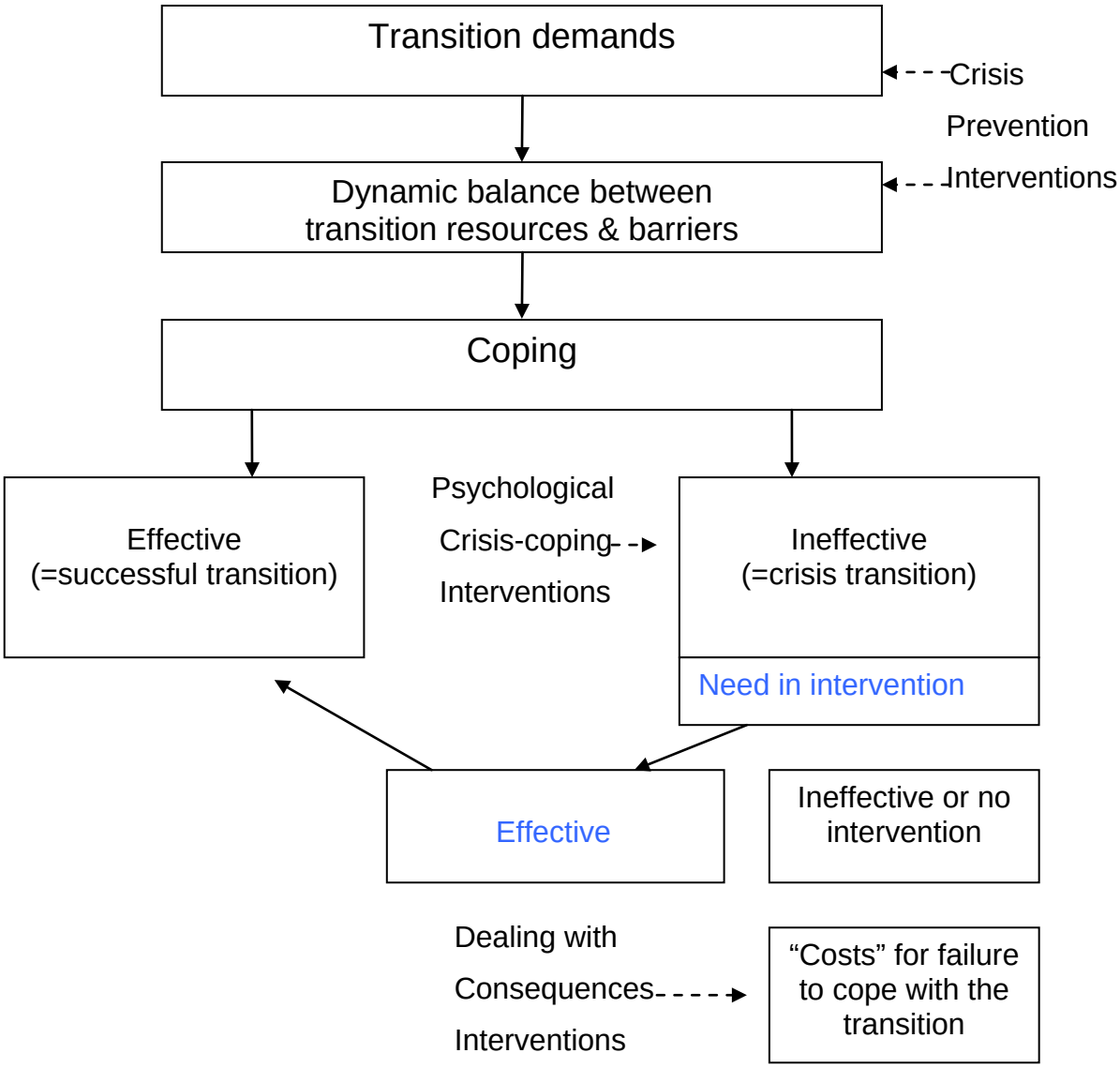


Figure 1. The Athletic Career Transition Model (cited in Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007)

This developmental conflict stimulates the athlete to mobilize resources and to find ways to cope". The interaction between these resources with the barriers affects the coping process during the transition. In the Athletic Career Transition model, the resources can exist either inside the athlete's environment or outside of this environment. Some of the resources are the athlete's skill, knowledge, personality traits, social support and motivation. Barriers can also be both internal and external. Among the barriers are a lack of necessary skill, lack of financial/social support and difficulties in combining sports and work or studies (Stambulova, 2003). The aim of this model is to assist the athletes to cope with transition demands.

2.2.2. The developmental model of transitions

Using research data on the career development of pupil athletes, student athletes, professional and elite athletes and of former Olympians, Wylleman and Lavallee (2003) presented a developmental model of transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual, psychosocial, and academic/vocational level (figure 2). This model does not explain the transition process; it only predicts and describes athlete's normative transitions and their order. "Normative transition is a predictable transition that is a part of a sequence of age-related biological, emotional, result oriented and social changes that every person goes through. A non-normative transition is a transition that does not generally follow any type of plan or schedule." (Cacija, 2007, p. 23). Normative transitions are, according to Wylleman, Theeboom and Lavallee (2004) often related to the socialization process. The strong connections between the transitions and individual face during their athletic career and the transitions occurring in other domains of the athlete's life, such as individual, psychosocial and academic/vocational levels, are reflected in this developmental model. The developmental model refers to the athlete as a normal human being with a normal career, an approach that help us understand the athlete's demands and transitions outside the sport as well as the athletes demands in a sport context. These transitions will usually occur in a simultaneous and interacting way (Jorlen, 2007). Wylleman and Lavalle's developmental

model emphasizes not only the interaction of the transitions that occur in the athletes sport life, but also that non-athletic transitions may influence the development of athlete's sport career.

Age	10	15	20	25	30	35
Athletic level	Initiation	Development		Mastery	Discontinuation	
Psychological level	Childhood	Adolescence		Adulthood		
Psychosocial level	Parents Siblings Peers	Peers Coach Parents		Partner Coach	Family (Coach)	
Academic Vocational level	Primary Education	Secondary Education		Higher education	Vocational training Professional occupation	

Figure 2. A developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

2.2.3. Sussman's Analytical Model for the Sociological Study of Retirement

The earliest application of Sussman's (1972) analytical model for the sociological study of retirement (figure 3) in the sport domain was by Hill and Lowe (1974) who stated that the retirement process is a multidimensional conceptualization and this model may be constructive in explaining

adjustment to athletic retirement. Sussman (1972) emphasized that the retirement process is influenced by several factors such as the individual's motives, values and goals, the situation surrounding someone's retirement (i.e., income), structural elements such as marital status and social class, social factors such as support of family and friends, and aspects like economic cycles, employer attitudes, etc. Hill and Lowe (1974) underlined that as in the work force environment, athletic retirement also has negative implications. Specifically, these implications consisted of factors like lower income after retirement, the need for entering into a new environment (for the retired athlete, the working environment), or the need for establishing new roles and new skills. In a few words, the retired athlete such as the retired older individual from the work sector faces a crisis which results usually from the fact that the two counterparts have not been prepared to begin a new career after their retirement. When studying the components of Sussman's analytic model, we observe how this is pertinent to the study of retirement from sport. The circumstances around athlete's retirement, such as the causes that forced or not the athlete to retire, his/her position in the society, the marital and professional status or the pre-retirement preparation; athlete's motives, goals, habits or needs and how he/she perceived the situation together with the linking systems, all these vary from individual to individual and may influence the adaptation process and the choice of a new career after sports. At this point, Sussman himself stated that his model could not be applicable to sports because athletes might be aware of the shortness of their athletic career and they could be prepared for their retirement. Also, this model does not examine in the case of retirement crisis, the intervention strategies that can be used in order for the athlete to experience a smoother and more sufficient adaptation process. Thus, it is essential to develop a clearer understanding of retirement from sport by designing a model that examines all the parameters (reasons for retirement, self and social identity, coping skills, social support systems, pre-retirement planning and intervention strategies) for a healthy sport career transition.

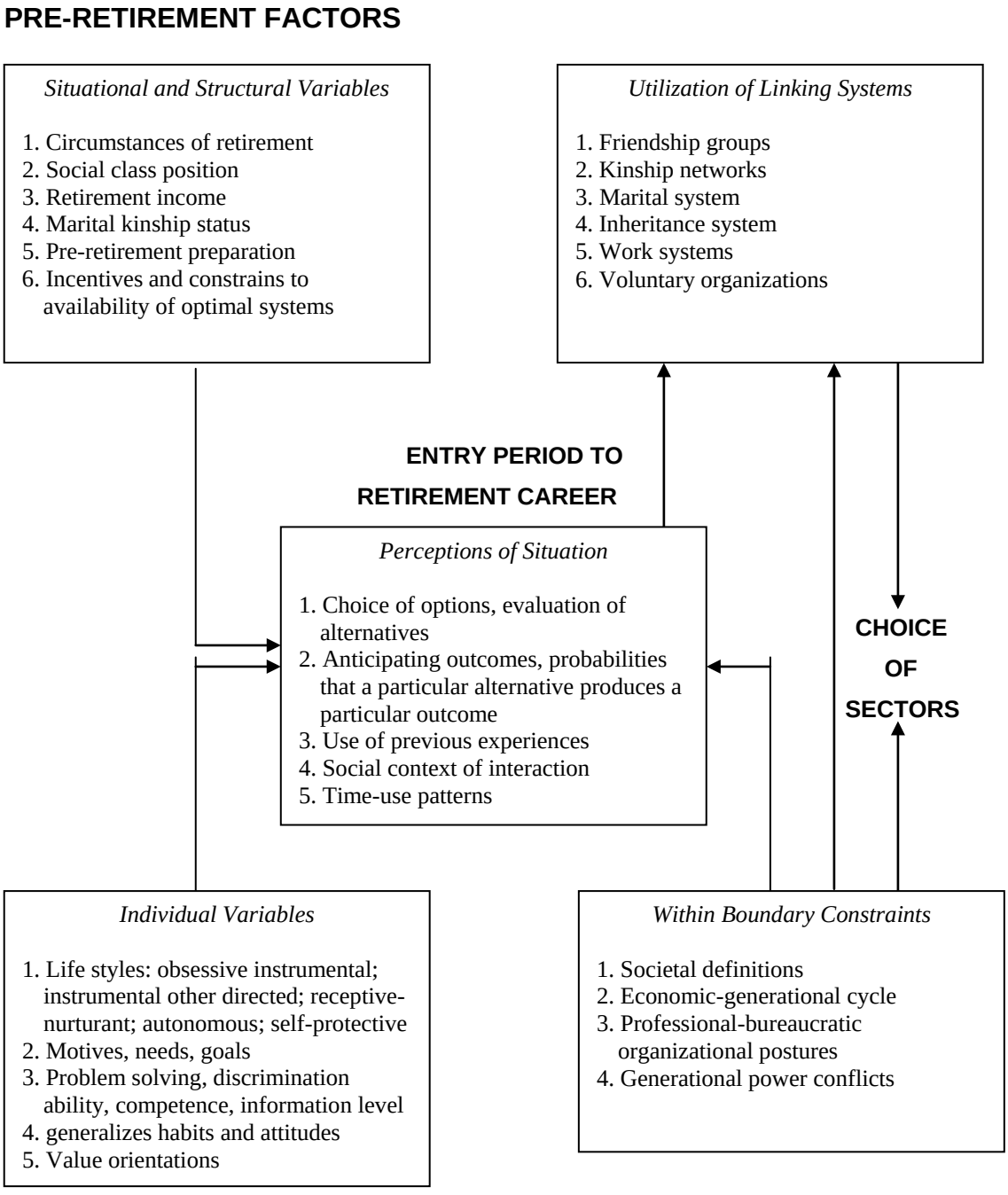


Figure 3. Sussman's (1972) Analytical Model for the Sociological Study of Retirement

2.2.4. Schlossberg's model of human adaptation to transition

In an attempt to understand better the issue of career termination, many scientists (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Parker, 1994; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994) have used Schlossberg's model (Sclossberg, 1981, 1984), which seemed to be the most applicable to sports when compared with other models (Hopson & Adams, 1977; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Sussman, 1972). Schlossberg (1981) stated, "transition can occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships" (p. 5).

According to Schlossberg's (1984) model the adjustment to retirement depends on three variables:

(a) the characteristics of the transition,

(b) the individual, and

(c) the environment.

The first variable examines the timing, the source, the duration of the transition, and any previous experiences with a similar nature to what the athlete may have had. The second factor includes gender, health condition, socioeconomic status, age, personality, personal values and goals, coping skills, self-esteem, confidence, and identity. This model could be used to examine the transition of specific groups of athletes such as women or amateur athletes. Sinclair and Orlick (1993) have supported this view by saying that every career transition has the potential to be a crisis, relief or combination of both, depending on the athlete's perception of the situation and the characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environments. In addition, Schlossberg's model suggests that for a successful adjustment, pre-retirement programmes could be very helpful. By planning in advance, retirement problems could be eliminated or completely avoided. Finally, the third and last factor includes social support. That includes internal support systems, relationships, family unit, network of friends, institutional supports and physical setting. The more supportive the environment, the easier the transition is to negotiate for both, the individual and the team. Remarkably, despite the extensive research that exists on

social support networks among injured athletes (e.g., Ford & Gordon, 1993, 1999) few empirical investigations have been conducted with retired athletes.

2.3. Athletic Career transition / termination research

As mentioned above, athletic retirement has been considered either a singular event or a process. By using the terms career termination and career transition, we refer to two different perspectives respectively. Sports career termination is thought as an abrupt event where the individual experiences feelings of isolation and immobility instead of personal growth and development. Conversely, sports career transition is considered as a process where the athlete is probably prepared to enter into a new way of life and faces his/her life after sports with optimism and with a need for personal development.

One of the first studies attempting to examine the phenomenon of athletic retirement was conducted by Mihovilovic (1968). According to the results of his study of 44 former Yugoslavian soccer players: a) athletes in an advancing age tried to postpone their retirement as long as possible, b) if an athlete had no other activities beyond the sport area, retirement appeared to be distressful and was characterized by increased smoking, drinking and neglect of exercise, c) the support they used to have from their friends during their competitive years no longer exist, and d) the majority of the athletes interviewed reported that if they were allowed to remain involved with their sport, they would have had an easier adjustment to retirement.

Some studies have focused on the reasons for career termination, on the factors related to adaptation, the available recourses and the quality of adaptation to athletic retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Different studies have offered a variety of perspectives on adjustment difficulties during retirement. For example research by Allison and Meyer (1988) and Werthner and Orlick (1986), has shown that even though the process of transition does not seem to be distressful, there are many athletes that experience adjustment problems when faced with the end of their sport career.

A study by Blinde and Greendorfer (1985) with former female and male intercollegiate athletes, discussed that alternative perspectives require investigation. It was suggested that the first issue that needed to be examined was the individual's ability to move successfully into new roles after sport. This notion could be very useful in explaining the quality of adaptation to retirement. Another issue was the "anticipatory socialization" process, which is based on an athlete's commitment to his/her sport and the wiliness to shuffle his/her priorities. Anticipatory socialization is the proactive response of preparing for retirement before it happens (Crook & Robertson, 1991). A third concept related to the previous issue was whether the cause of termination was voluntary or involuntary. If an athlete is not prepared to accept his/her new roles and he/she is forced to retire, he/she is more prone to experiencing adjustment difficulties during retirement. A fourth issue described that an athlete's response to career transition may be influenced by the absence of control in the process of leaving sport. Regarding this issue Coakley (1983) also stated that the existence of some social phenomena such as sexism, racism and the like may prevent an athlete's desire to move into new roles after sport.

Athletes who have developed their skills and knowledge during their sport career are more likely to make successful transitions into new roles in their post-sport life (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). Also, if an athlete considers and anticipates the need to move into alternative roles during his/her sport career, this means that he/she is prepared for the new life after sports and is more likely to experience a successful transition. Additionally, an athlete with alternative skills and who is also prepared for his/her post-sport life, could give up the sport role by his/her own will and is more likely to have a successful transition. Alternatively, an athlete with a specific background and without any skill development may face difficulties in finding alternative roles (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985).

An athlete at an elite level is very likely to be devoted to his sport, which has a positive impact on his performance but often has a negative effect on everything else beyond the sport area. For example, many empirical and theoretical studies have examined the adaptation to retirement

of professional athletes (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Cecic-Erpic, 1999; Kerr & Dacyshin, 2000; Koukouris, 1991, 1994; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Svoboda & Vanec, 1982; Werthner & Orlick, 1986;).

Allison and Meyer (1988) surveyed 28 female former tennis professionals and their subjective experiences of their competitive years and retirement. Results have shown that most athletes did not find their withdrawal from competitive sport traumatic but found their retirement as an opportunity to change their lives in a positive direction and felt satisfied of their adaptation process. In addition, Stier (2007) in his study with 8 Swedish ex-professional tennis players found that athletic retirement was a gradual, transitional process of psychological and social adaptation and pursue for self-identity. He concluded that retirement experience was challenging for the players, and not as dramatic as much scientific literature suggests. Supporting this view, Koukouris (1991), in his study of 113 former Greek athletes from athletics, rowing and volleyball stated that the majority of athletes reacted positively to their career termination and remained involved in their sport in their leisure time. He also suggested that a combination of internal and external factors from the sport environment influenced the adjustment process to athletic career termination. A few years later, another study from the same researcher (Koukouris, 1994) with 34 Greek male athletes from track and field, rowing, and volleyball, added that the majority athletes interviewed experienced their retirement as a rebirth and an opportunity for personal development. Interestingly, these feelings were experienced by athletes who ended their sporting career voluntarily and were prepared for their adaptation to the new life. On the other hand, the athletes who terminated their career unwillingly and did not have alternative skills or other social contacts experienced adjustment difficulties. Expanding his research, Koukouris (2004), in a study with 19 former male and female elite level gymnasts found that disengagement from gymnastics was a source of serious social, psychological and medical adjustment problems for former gymnasts. After the end of a competitive career, there was a serious reduction in social contact among coaches and former athletes. The way the

sport organizations and coaches behaved towards the gymnasts was negative after the end of the sporting career.

A similar approach was taken by Werthner and Orlick (1986) in a study of 28 Canadian elite athletes where they investigated the causes of retirement, the transition phase and the post-competitive life. Regarding the causes for sport career termination a) advancing age, b) no more enjoyment and fulfilment, c) more time with family and friends, d) problems with coaches and sport organizations, e) change in values, f) financial problems, g) achievement of goals, h) 1980 boycott (political event), were cited by the athletes through their interviews. The majority of athletes described that they have experienced not many adjustment difficulties and interestingly it was reported that they had found new challenges and sources of satisfaction in the sport environment. Nevertheless, they had a false sense of personal control and the coach and sport organization had been in control. From their survey, 7 factors that determined the nature of transition emerged: 1) a new focus, 2) a sense of accomplishment, 3) coaches, 4) injuries/health problems, 5) politics/sport association problems, 6) finances, and 7) the support of family and friends.

On the other hand, Svoboda and Vanek (1982) in a study of 163 male and female athletes described that each athlete experiences adjustment difficulties during the transition process. According to the findings of this study, only 17% of the athletes interviewed had not had any problems in adaptation to retirement. Support for this particular perspective and for Werthner and Orlick's study (1986) has been also viewed in Parker's (1994) research of 7 retired football players. Although 6 of the 7 participants reflected negative experiences, Parker stated that those specific feelings are not a phase of any unidimensional theory which faces this experience as an abrupt event such as the thanatological theory, since most of the players were prepared and were aware of the opportunities that existed after sport. In addition, one important finding in this study was that the relationship of these athletes with their coaches was e a critical factor in their transitional experience.

Other studies focused on the fact that the nature of adaptation to retirement could be influenced by the characteristics of career termination, for example athletes who retire out of their own volition may have easier and smoother adjustment (Cecic-Erpic, 1999; Schlossberg, 1984). When an athlete is forced to retire, he/she is more prone to have a difficult adjustment to retirement than the one who ended his/her sport career voluntarily. Nevertheless, Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000), according to their study of 7 former elite female gymnasts, added that individuals who retire voluntarily may also experience adjustment difficulties. In addition and in terms of the characteristics that influence the adaptation process, Blaesild and Stelter's (2003) case study with 3 male former professional Danish football players has shown that the quality of career transition out of professional football primarily depends on the following factors: cause of retirement, level of athletic identity, job and educational opportunities in the new life, quality of social support, internal and external social network and the ability to maintain a social status which fits the self-concept of the player.

Nevertheless, there are some factors which are involved in any particular response to retirement (Ogilvie & Howe, 1981). Factors proposed which could assist a successful adjustment, include (a) anticipatory socialization, (b) identity and self-esteem, (c) personal management skills, (d) social support systems, and (e) voluntary versus involuntary retirement. Of course there are several other factors which are also very important such as value conflicts, health, and financial status (Crook & Robertson, 1991). While career termination can be the most traumatic experience for an athlete, there is a complete lack of anticipatory socialization or preparation for life after sport. On the one hand, Botteril (1981) stated that athletes who do not have any other career alternatives except their involvement in their sport are most vulnerable to retirement trauma. Werthner and Orlick (1986) found that athletes who had the potential to get involved in an interesting activity during their retirement, experienced a healthy career transition. Undoubtedly, the full commitment that is required for a professional athlete to succeed in his/her sport leads to the compulsory neglect of other aspects of life. Thus, these athletes do not have many career options in their life

after sport and because of this lack of direction they are usually prone to experience negative feelings such as anger, frustration and loss of self-esteem. North and Lavallee (2004) in their study with 561 male and female athletes aiming to examine their short-term plans in terms of a balance between sports and other activities, and their long-term plans in regard to their activities after sports career termination, found that athletes' post-sport career planning focused exclusively on starting a professional career, taking a degree, having a family, and enjoying life in general (e.g., travelling). Orlick (1980) suggested that athletes should balance their lives while competing if they want to prepare themselves for a successful adjustment to retirement after their sport. An athlete's dependence on his/her sport could potentially lead to them experiencing an identity crisis and loss of self-esteem. Research by Hill and Lowe (1968) indicated that the retired athlete may experience an identity crisis or other similar psychological feelings and retirement in general has a negative impact on athlete's post-sport life. In addition, Ogilvie and Howe (1981) suggested that the closer an athlete is with his/her sport, the more traumatic the identity crisis will be during his/her adaptation to retirement after sport. Consistent with Ogilvie and Howe's view, Lavallee (2005) indicated that the degree to which an athlete is dedicated to his/her sport is an important developmental factor that influences adjustment to career termination. Also, Cecic-Erpic, Wylleman, and Zupancic (2004) have also emphasised that the duration of the transition is related to the degree to which an athlete continues to be identified with the athlete's role after career termination. Alfermann, Stambulova and Zemaityte (2004) in their study with 256 German, Lithuanian and Russian athletes found that high athletic identity contributed to less positive reactions to retirement and to more problems in the adaptation process, Also, planning of retirement contributed to significantly better cognitive, emotional, and behavioural adaptation. In addition, in a recent study with five former elite female athletes from artistic gymnastics, Lavallee and Robinson (2007) found that when the participants terminated their sporting career they did not know who they were, what to do with their lives after sport, experiencing feelings of loss and despair. Researchers

have shown that absolute commitment to a sport usually develops dependency rather than independency in athletes because they are often encouraged to be dependent on their coaches who make all the decisions related to their athlete's life outside the sport area. Lerch (1984) suggested that one of the difficulties that a retired athlete potentially encounters is the inability to deal with his/her new independence. Bailie (1992) supported this view in his study with elite and amateur athletes, where he described the meaning that sport involvement may have for an athlete, and indicated how the identity as an athlete may influence adjustment to retirement. He also stated that many athletes are not prepared enough for their retirement from competitive sport and may face serious difficulties in the adaptation process to a completely new life with significant changes in their new career and new identity. In addition, Lally (2007) in her longitudinal study with six student athletes found that the participants committed strongly to their athletic goals experienced a major identity crisis upon and after retirement, despite the fact that they attempted to diminish their athletic identities prior to retirement.

Another factor that may influence the adjustment to retirement process and may by a source of potential distressful reactions are the bodily changes as described by Stephan et al. (2007) in their study with sixty-nine French retired elite athletes. They found that difficulties experienced with the body were negatively related to self-esteem, physical personality, perceived physical condition, sports competence, and bodily attractiveness.

Due to the emotional and physical devotion to sport, athletes are not always able to develop many relationships outside the sporting area. Therefore, family and friends are an important factor affecting an athlete's adaptation to retirement. Interestingly, social support helps athletes to adjust to the transition process (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Meanwhile, the support that the athlete once had from his/her coach or his/her teammates while he/she was competing often disappears. Rosenberg (1982) and Lerch (1982) have used the thanatological concept of social death to explain this avoidance behaviour. Of course there are some cases of athletes who do not have the support they need from their families. Family members, who were used to the fame and the prestige that athlete's participation offered them, may not

support the athlete's decision to end his/her sport career. As a result the retired athlete starts feeling neglected and isolated. As mentioned before, despite the extensive research in the area of sport career termination, little research has been conducted with the social support that retired athletes receive during and after their athletic career.

One of the first empirical attempts to analyze retirement from sport, regarding social support, was the study of Mihovilovic (1974) who found that factors involved in the career termination process was the reasons for retirement, the social support networks and mechanisms for staying involved in sport. Additionally, a study by Reynolds (1981) with former professional football players was also one of the first surveys to emphasize the importance of social support as a significant coping resource among retired athletes. In recent years, other researchers (Alfermann, 1995; Cramer-Hamman, 1994; Kane, 1991; Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, & Delignieres, 2003;) have also outlined the importance of social support from coaches, family and friends. Stephan et al. (2003) in their study with French former elite athletes, emphasised the importance of social, emotional, financial support to retired athletes from significant others and related organisations. Kane's (1991) study of former professional male American athletes, in the midst of a career transition, verified how social support can suffer following retirement. Another significant survey regarding social support was a study of 23 male and female collegiate athletes in the United States (Cramer-Hamman, 1994). The results indicated that the best model for predicting successful adjustment to retirement included social support and career planning. The results of a study of 50 female track and field athletes by Alfermann (1995) indicated that the major causes for dropping out were related to motivational problems and lack of social support. Interestingly, athletes who experienced a negative transition often reported a loss of a support system when most of their friends - most of them were from the sport domain - actively continued with sport (Mihovilovic, 1968). These individuals believed that support from former athletes, family, and sport helped them to adjust to athletic retirement (Botterill, 1981). In addition to a lack of access to old support systems, they might not have the ability to create a new support system, which could

create feelings of being alone and isolated (McLaughlin, 1981). Blaesild and Stelter's (2003) study offers a great understanding regarding the concept of social support. In their study with three case studies with three former male professional Danish football players, they found that the internal and external social support was also very important for the quality of career transition. Beside their family and due to their high level of athletic identity, their network was composed of friends from their sport, who disappeared shortly after they left sports. One of them did not have a well-established internal network due to a divorce from his wife and many club transfers, but a little while after the involuntary transition he found a new girlfriend (his later wife) who helped him out of his depression. Another important and extremely informative study was conducted by Schmid and Seiler (2003) with German high performance athletes who found that family members, friends, a caring coach, or a professional counsellor who provide emotional, social and instrumental support, could be a predictor of a successful transition process.

2.4. Conceptual models

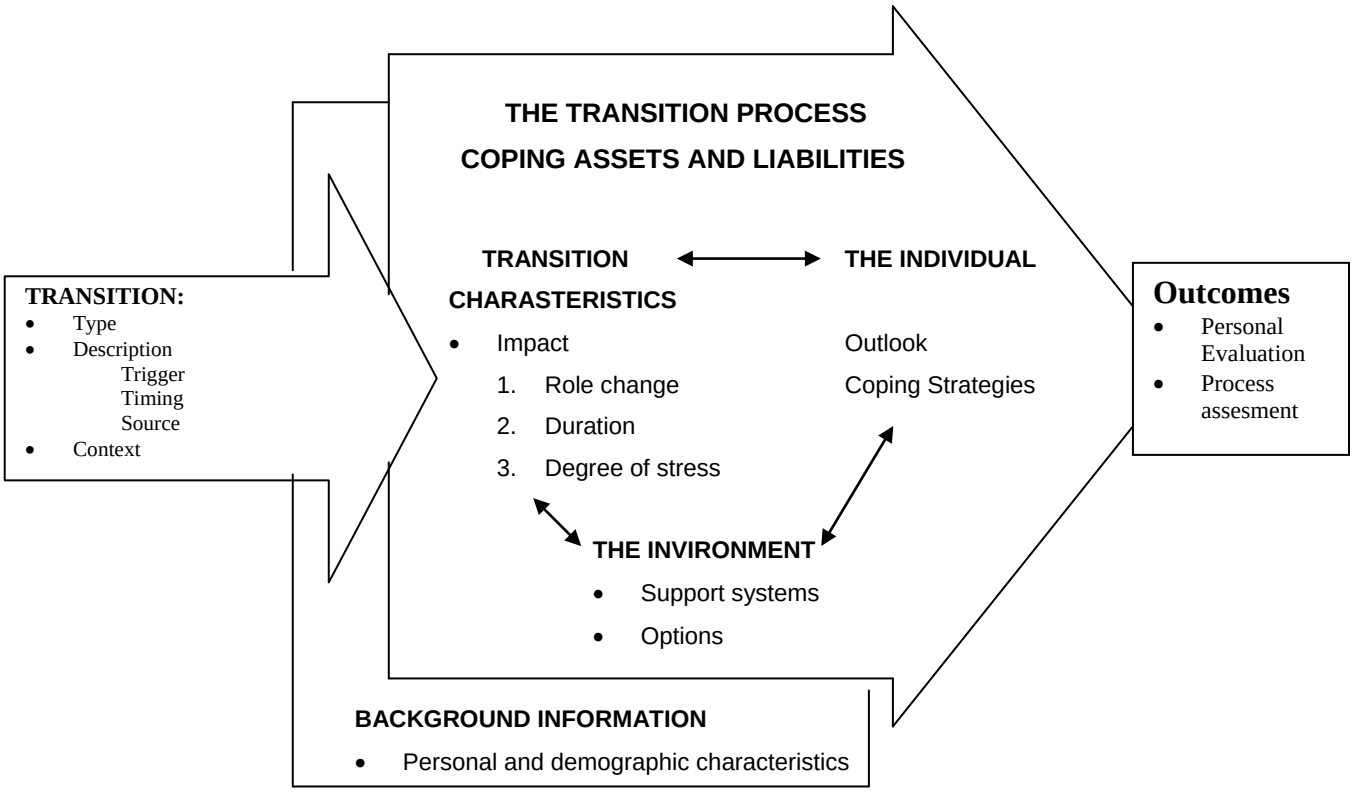
The models of social gerontology, thanatology and the transition models that have been applied to sport, have been very helpful in inspiring further research on career termination issues. However, each of these perspectives has limitations, which indicate the necessity for further conceptual development in the area. Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) put forward the following point of view that thanatological and social gerontological models have the limitation that they do not specify the factors that influence the quality of adaptation to retirement and also, the sport transition models do not indicate how the particular elements influence the adjustment to retirement from sport process. In addition, sport retirement theories have not offered any information about how to individualize approaches, because they have been generalized across a wide range of sports and athletes (Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997). Athletic retirement experience, differ from one athlete to another depending on gender, culture, or sport. Specifically, it would be better for the athletes and they would be more

interested in and motivated to participate to an intervention program before or after their retirement if we, as researchers, show more respect to their specific needs and design models that treat the athlete as a unique human being. This means that factors that exist in order to facilitate the adaptation process should be tested to every case separately. Causes for athletic retirement, coping strategies for better adaptation to post-sport life or any factors related to the transition process such as athlete's self or social identity, could be different in each case. Nevertheless, although generalizing in the athletic retirement process may not be effective for the athlete, when generalizing the results to other areas in life could be beneficial. After the athletic transition process, the individual is more aware of his/her skills and this experience could be a good preparation for life afterwards.

For all the above reasons and in order to investigate the process of transition within the context of sport, Sinclair and Orlick, (1994) modified Schlossberg's (1984) model and developed a conceptual model of the individual in transition by reassigning specific characteristics to alternate categories and establishing a more precise and accurate framework (Figure 4). This particular conceptual model views transition from elite sport as an individually perceived event rather than as an occurrence having the same impact on each individual. A very important variable in this specific model is perception. The focus is on how individuals move through a transition, rather than only assessing if they were relieved or traumatized by the transition (Sinclair & Orlick, 1994).

In Figure 5, a conceptual model adopted from Gordon (1995) is presented, in which the causal factors that initiate career transition, interacting factors that may differentiate responses to transition, and tertiary factors that might mediate the responses or outcomes associated with transition, as well as the potential sites for intervention such as counselling and career assistance program are illustrated.

Figure 4. A Modified Model of the Individual in Transition (Sinclair and Orlick, 1994)



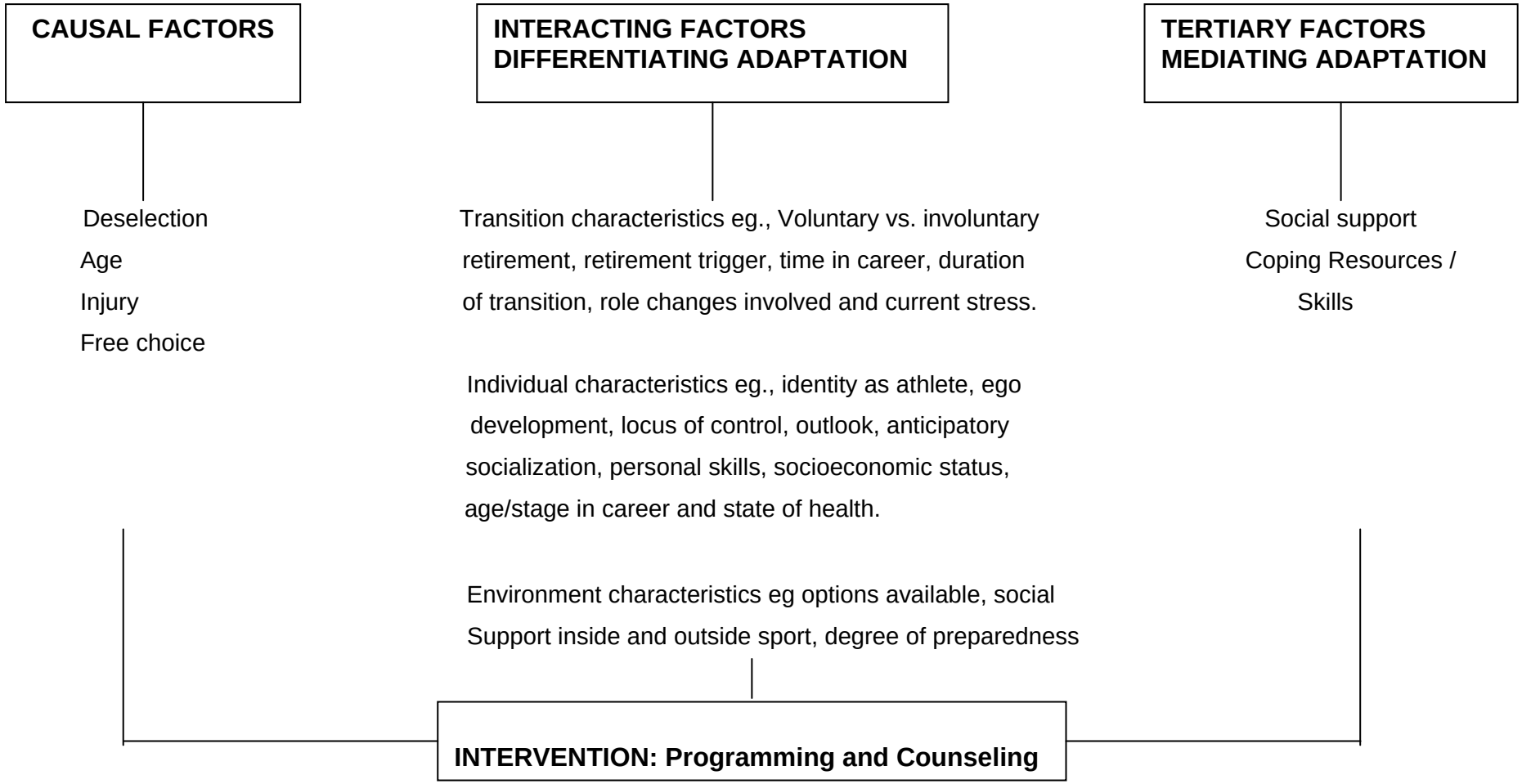


Figure 5. Conceptual Model of the Career Transition Process in Competitive Sport (Gordon, 1995)

Although Sinclair and Orlick's (1994) and Gordon's (1995) perspective provides a conceptual overview of sport career transition, Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) suggested that these models do not provide a multidimensional, flexible approach that is needed to study the process of transition in sport. In addition, the transition models that have been applied to the sport domain lack operational detail of the specific components related to the adjustment to life after sports (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

2.4.1. Taylor and Ogilvie's conceptual model of adaptation to transition

In order to emphasize some significant concerns of career termination and to go several steps further by emphasizing flexibility and multiple variables, Taylor and Ogilvie (1998) integrated theoretical and empirical considerations and prior theories and designed a conceptual model which was also based on their own applied work (Figure 6). The model proposes 5 developmental stages: 1) cause of career retirement, 2) developmental experiences, 3) coping resources, 4) quality of adaptation to retirement and 5) interventions for retirement difficulties. Particularly, it examines the entire process of sport career transition allowing for both negative and positive adjustments and focuses on the fact of how the quality of adaptation is influenced by the causes of retirement, developmental factors related to the transition process such as athlete's self and social identity, and the available recourses such as coping procedures and social support. The last factor, which is proposed, is the design of intervention programs in order to enhance the quality of athletic transition process.

This specific model was used in the present study as it was considered the most appropriate because it addresses all the psychosocial concerns – social, occupational and emotional factors – and their interaction from the beginning of the career transition process to its final consequences. In addition, it considers the individuality of experiences as an important element for a more effective response to the athletic transition process. Interestingly, this model could help practitioners and sport psychologists to better prepare individuals for their adaptation to post-sport life and to find a new career after sports.

The first and probably the main factor that influences the quality of the adaptation to career termination is the circumstances surrounding the transition process and specifically the reasons under which the athlete was forced or not to retire from the competitive sport. The reasons for retirement from sport "seem to play a crucial role for adjustment to post-career life" (Alfermann et al., 2004, p. 62). Lavallee and Wylleman (2000) and Taylor and Ogilvie (1998), concluded that the advancing age, being cut from the team, injury or voluntary retirement are the main causes the athletes report for ending their sporting career.

Age

Age is the primary cause for an athlete to end his/her sport career and also the factor that may result in many psychological and physiological implications during the retirement. Athletes, as they become older, may feel that they have accomplished most of their goals and consequently they will loose their motivation to compete. Research by Allison and Meyer, (1988) has shown that many professional elite athletes terminated their sport career due to their insufficient ability to perform due to their advanced age. Research findings by Mihovilovic (1968) on Yugoslavian professional soccer players and Svoboda and Vanec (1982) on Czechoslovakian national team athletes, indicated that age played a crucial role in athletic retirement.

Deselection

Deselection is a factor associated with the physiological implications of age and also athlete's greatest fear. The participation in competitive sport usually relies on the Darwinian philosophy of "survival of the fittest" (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982). This process tends to select only those athletes who are progressing and leaves behind those who are deselected. Undoubtedly, and according to the only study to date which examined the role of deselection by Mihovilovic (1968) with Yugoslavian professional football players, when an athlete expected to continue to participate in elite level sport and was unexpectedly cut, the athletic retirement process might be an especially difficult experience.

Injury

The appearance of a sudden or chronic injury may force an athlete to retire. This abrupt event may cause many psychological difficulties including fear, anxiety, identity crisis and loss of self-esteem. Allison and Meyer (1988) stated that according to their research, 14-32% of retired athletes ended their sport career due to an injury. In addition, Koukouris (2004) found that there were many gymnasts who terminated their careers after injuries that forced them to stay away from training at a crucial age. Athletes whose career ended due to an injury have been reported to experience psychological distress manifested in depression, substance abuse and suicidal ideation (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Reactions to athletic injury also included: grief reactions, identity loss, separation and loneliness, fear and anxiety, and loss of confidence and performance decrements (Person & Petitpas, 1990). Ogilvie and Taylor (1993) emphasizing the significance of this reason for ending a sporting career, stated: “The most significant factor related to injury to elite athletes that affects career termination is that athletes perform at such a high level that even a small reduction in physical capabilities may be sufficient to make them no longer competitive at that level”.

Injury, deselection and age are all involuntary conditions under which the decision to withdraw from active sport participation is sudden and out of athlete’s control.

Free choice

In some cases an athlete makes the decision to withdraw from active sport participation voluntarily. Free choice is the most neglected factor (Coakley, 1983) and also the most desirable in the research into why athletes terminate their careers. Research has shown that voluntary termination is one of the main causes among elite professional athletes (Mihovilovic, 1968; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Athletes decide to end their sport career due to personal, social and sport related reasons. Thus, they may need to spend more time with their family and friends, to establish a new career (Svoboda & Vanek, 1982, Torregrosa et al., 2004) or they may have achieved their goals while they were

competing and they may wish to find new interests in their lives (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). Nevertheless, Lavallee and Wylleman (2000) reported that while there is a voluntary ending from the competitive career, it should not be taken for granted that these athletes will have a healthy career transition and will not experience negative feelings or emotional distress.

An athlete during his/her retirement may experience various psychological, financial or social changes. Nevertheless, there are factors that can assist individuals to confront these difficulties and make the adaptation process easy and create an opportunity for development. These factors include, the developmental experiences that existed through the athlete's career until the end, the degree of the athletic identity, whether sport career transition process is under athlete's control or not, individual's social identity and its position to the society, and finally other tertiary factors such as marital status, years of competing or educational status

Developmental experiences

Athletes, during their competitive years and until the end of their sporting career, acquire a wide range of experiences whose nature will have a great influence on their adjustment to retirement. These developmental experiences will affect athlete's perception for his/her interpersonal skills that will determine his/her adaptation to life after sports (Taylor et al., 2006).

Self-identity

An important variable that influences the quality of adjustment to retirement is the development of self-identity beyond the sport limits. Recent research has shown that the degree to which an athlete's self-identity is immersed in sport is an important developmental factor that influences adjustment to career termination (Lavallee, 2005). An athlete who is completely dedicated to his/her sport and neglects other activities usually has a self-concept that is composed exclusively of his/her sport involvement. Lavallee and Robinson (2007), emphasizing the importance of the athletic identity, found through their research that athletes who dedicated their lives to their sports, felt helpless and

lost when they retired. Additionally, Baillie and Danish (1992) put forward the point of view that the athletes who had extensively developed athletic self-identity were less-prepared for their post-sport life. Ogilvie and Howe (1982) characterized the people who were heavily devoted to their sports as “unidimensional”, having spent all their efforts and strengths in order to develop a specific athletic self concept and neglecting other areas of their life.

Perceptions of control

This factor is completely related to the cause that has forced the athlete to retire. Career termination due to advancing age, deselection or injury, are causes definitely outside athlete’s control. This absence of control may influence their response to career transition and may lead them to experience psychological changes and loss of self-confidence. Empirical evidence by Koukouris (1991) supported the importance of control in sport career termination which has also impact to life after sports. His research with Greek elite athletes has shown that those who felt a locus of control during the transition from the sport career to normal life reported that they experienced also a decrease in the sense of personal control after their retirement from elite level sport participation. Taylor and Ogilvie (2001) concluded that the degree of perceived control that athletes have with respect to the end of their careers might have an impact on how they respond to career termination.

Social identity

Due to the fact that athletes are emotionally and physically devoted to their sport, they are not able to develop any kind of relationships outside the sporting environment. A study by Werthner and Orlick (1986), presented that athletes with extensive social identity out of the sport area such as family, friends or educational and occupational components, had a successful adjustment to retirement.

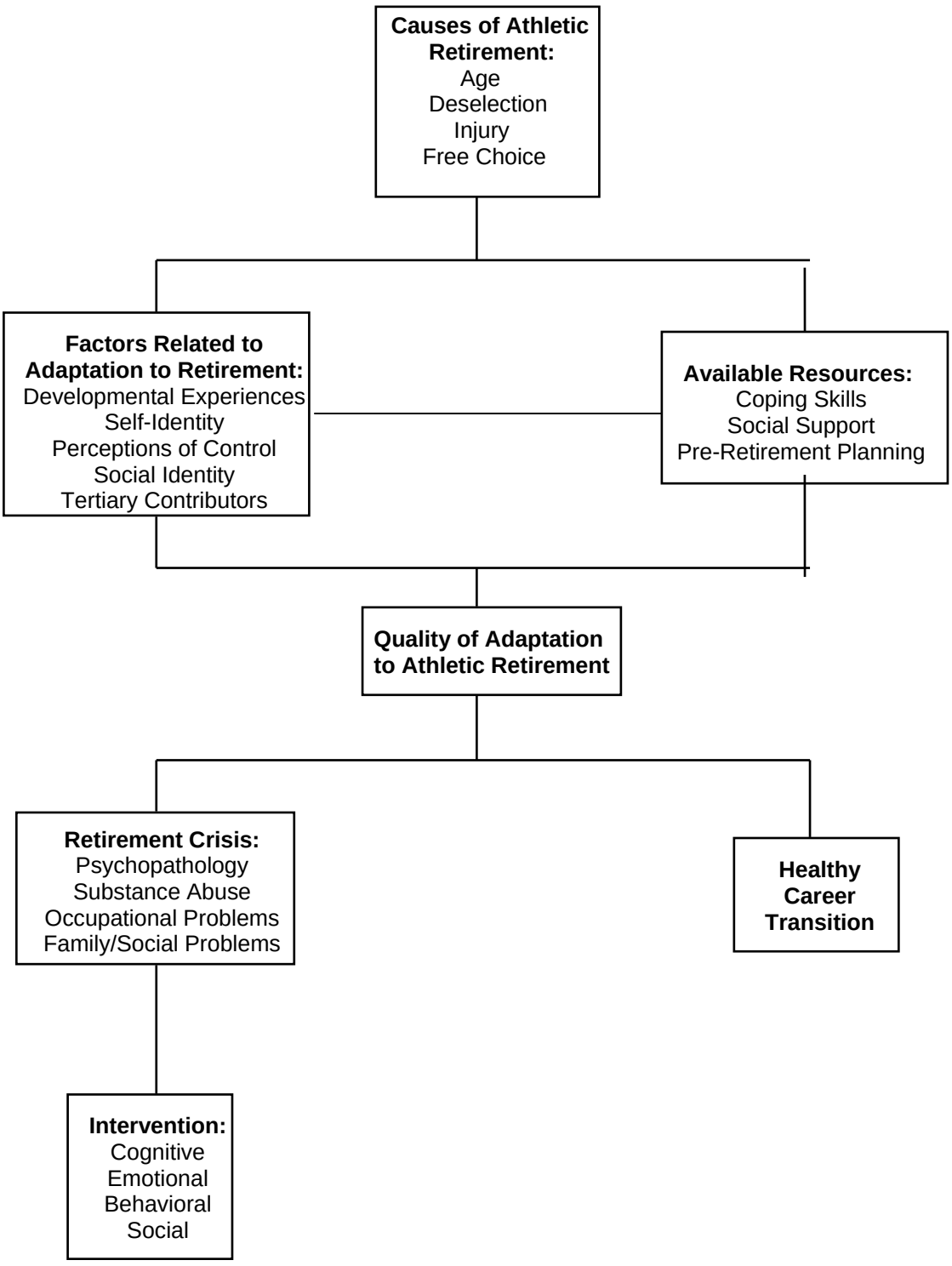


Figure 6. Conceptual Model of Adaptation to Retirement among Athletes (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998)

Tertiary contributors

Other variables that influence the quality of adaptation could be: socioeconomic status, minority status (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985), gender (Coakley, 1983), the health condition in that particular time (Hill & Lowe, 1974), marital status (Svoboda & Vanec, 1982), years of competing and education.

The factors described above consist of these elements that exist in the person itself. Elements that characterize individual's personality and character connected with sports. Nevertheless there are other resources that may influence very effectively an athlete's response to a successful adjustment to retirement which include all athlete's ability to cope and the strategies he/she uses to accomplish that, the availability of social support from coach or individual's personal environment and finally pre-retirement planning.

Coping skills

Sinclair and Orlick (1993) theorized that trying to find new interests to replace sport participation or staying in touch with their sport are some good techniques for facilitating the transition process. In addition, re-orientation of thinking, time management training, development of their skills, exercise and relaxation training could be very effective in order to alleviate the difficulties caused by retirement. Grove et al. (1997) in their study with 48 former-elite level athletes found that acceptance, positive reinterpretation, planning and active coping were the most frequently used coping strategies during the career transition process.

Social support

When the athletes' careers terminate, they have to consider the fact that they are no longer part of the team. Due to the exclusive devotion to their sport, the majority of their friends are found in the sports environment. Therefore, no support they used to receive previously exists during their retirement. Blinde and Greendorfer (1985) stated that athletes who do not have the opportunity to have alternative support, may experience feelings like isolation, loneliness or distress. Additionally, a study by Werthner and Orlick (1986) indicated that

athletes who received support from their friends and families, experienced an easier adjustment to retirement. Social support can come in many forms, including individual and group counselling that focuses on career transition issues, continuing education, career counselling, financial assistance, and job placement assistance (Levy & Gordon, 2001).

Pre-retirement planning

This significant technique has the broadest influence on the factors related to adaptation to career transition. By planning in advance individuals may realize the shortness of the athletic career and confront or even avoid all the retirement problems. Pre-retirement planning may include education, financial planning or social networking. However, despite the benefit that these activities could offer to the quality of the adjustment, usually athletes resist planning for their post-sport lives. Werthner and Orlick (1986) presented that a wide range of difficulties had been noticed due to athletes' resistance to pre-retirement planning. Ogilvie and Taylor (1993) noted that "these preparations may ease the difficulties associated with career termination by broadening self and social identities and by enhancing the athletes' perceptions of control" (p.47).
As suggested by Lavallee, Nesti, Barkoles, Cockeril, and Edge (2000), some countries have started to develop counselling programs in order to assist athletes for their post-sport planning and help them cope with the transition to life after sports.

According to this conceptual model, the presence or absence of available resources could influence the quality of adaptation to career termination which can be either a retirement crisis resulting to psychopathological problems, substance abuse, occupational / financial problems, family/social problems or else a healthy career termination.

Retirement crisis

Some researchers developed the view that career termination may cause distress that manifests itself in a wide variety of dysfunctional ways. Anecdotal accounts of athletes with psychological difficulties included financial problems

and substance abuse (Newman, 1991), alcoholism and acute depression (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982). In addition, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) stated that 1/3 of a sample of elite-amateur athletes experienced a wide range of social, personal and financial problems. Unfortunately, neither specified the nature of the emotional difficulties experienced by athletes. One study found that athletes with strong athletic identities were most vulnerable to zeteophobia (Grove et al., 1997). In a summary of 11 empirical studies of career termination, Grove, Lavallee, Gordon and Harvey (1998) indicated that on average, 19% of the athletes studied, experienced considerable emotional distress in response to their retirement process.

Healthy career termination

According to a group of researchers' view, termination from sport does not necessarily cause distress on the part of athletes (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Coakley, 1983; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). In fact, substantial research has found little evidence of distress due to career termination among scholastic and collegiate athletes. Greendorfer and Blinde (1985), in support of their position, indicated that the majority of the respondents looked forward to life after college and 55% were very or extremely satisfied when their athletic career ended. Additionally, Curtis and Ennis (1988) found few indications of distress among junior elite Canadian hockey players and nonathletes. Also, Allison and Meyer (1988) stated that rather than the social death concept suggested by Rosenberg (1982) and Lerch (1984), retirement from sports may be considered as social rebirth (Coakley, 1983).

Prevention and Intervention strategies for sports career transition

The existence of this last step depends on the quality of the transition. The experience of a distressful career transition may affect athletes cognitively, emotionally, behaviourally and socially. In that part of the model, the sport psychologist could give major support. However, the participation of sport psychologists at the athletic elite level is extremely limited and thus, rarely gives the opportunity to the individuals to discuss the problems related to career transition. Sinclair and Orlick (1993) claimed that sport psychologists or

sport organizations in general have a positive impact on career transition of elite athletes by staying in contact with them or continuing financial support for a short time or finally providing them the opportunity to stay involved in their sport. Stress management, emotional expression, and cognitive restructuring have been included among other therapeutic strategies for athletes experiencing distress after sports career termination (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

The sport career termination process can be best defined and understood as a complex phenomenon and an interaction of different stressors confronted by athletes. These stressors, whether they are physical, occupational or social, they can influence and cause a distress on athletes facing sport retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001). Nevertheless, crises due to sport career termination appear to be present most often to elite and professional athletes than collegiate or amateur athletes and, undoubtedly, the appropriate intervention or better a prevention program could assist them adapt smoothly to the new life after sports. The design of a prevention program is an obligation of the people surrounding the athlete including the coach, the parents, the administrators, the sport psychologist and who else is involved (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). The kind of assistance these people can offer to the athlete varies between stages during the athlete's life. In addition, Ogilvie and colleagues (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993) emphasized the benefits of using a "primary prevention model" aiming to avoid problems prior to their occurrence. According to them, in adopting a "primary prevention model", long term personal and social development is more important than short term athletic success allowing sports participation to be the vehicle through which athletes obtain general life skills that enable them to grow personally and socially and function in diverse situations.

Grove et al. (1998) examined intervention strategies for facilitating athletes in transition and concluded that athletes need to have a working-through process in the form of the construction of a narrative about the athletic retirement experience, termed account making. This story consists of memories, descriptions, emotions, expectations and plans for the future and enables athletes to better understand this experience, encourages them to

adopt a new identity, and develop a personal growth to their post-athletic career. The account-making model of coping involves seven steps:

1. Traumatic event: shock and feeling overwhelmed and numb in response to the realization that their sports career is over.
2. Outcry: produces strong emotional reactions such as panic and despair.
3. Denial: focuses on escapism, avoidance and isolation.
4. Intrusion: account making continues, with an emphasis on thought processes associated with career termination in the form of distraction and obsessive review.
5. Working-through: more intensive account making and initial attempts at sharing experiences with others.
6. Completion: finishing the narrative, letting go of the negative emotions related to the retirement experience, adoption of coping skills, improved mental and physical health, and a greater sense of control.
7. Identity change: closure occurs, identity evolves into a healthy post-athletic form, and a solid foundation is put down for life after sports (Grove et al., 1998 – cited inTaylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Nevertheless, little empirical research has been conducted examining the process of prevention and intervention for athletic retirement difficulties. The most frequent suggestions provided to retired athletes with regards to their network were to treat the retiring athletes with respect and to offer them any kind of support during their athletic retirement (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). The purpose of the current study, therefore, is to examine, using qualitative methodology, the perceptions, subjective experiences and feelings of Greek female former elite track and field athletes, the reasons for ending their careers, the transition to life after sports, their post-competitive life and the support they may have received for a successful adjustment to their new life after sports.

2.5. An overview of the concepts of Social support and Personal Relationships on Athletic Retirement

In general psychology, Thoits (1986) conceptualized social support as "coping assistance, or the active participation of significant others in an individual's stress management efforts" (p.417). Socially supporting relationships act as a coping resource and help with an individual's emotional adjustment (Gottlieb, 1983). Fundamentally, social support facilitates the coping process by providing additional resources such as advice, information, and material services that could increase an individual's coping resources. Social support has been defined as "social interactions or relationships that provide individuals with actual assistance or with a feeling of attachment to a person or group that is perceived as loving or caring" (Hobfoll & Stokes, 1988, p. 499). Sarason, Levine, Basham, and Sarason (1983) put forward the point of view that social support has two basic elements: a) others to whom someone can turn in times of need, and the degree of satisfaction with the quantity of support available and b) that a recipient's general satisfaction is an accumulated response to a number of different types of social support. Bearing in mind that social support is better conceived as multidimensional, according to Cobb (1976) and House (1981) support recipient's and support provider's behaviours represent three general dimensions of social support: a) tangible support, such as assisting someone in completing a task, b) informational support, such as telling an individual she or he is part of a network of communication and mutual obligation, and c) emotional support, such as providing a person with comfort. According to Rosenfeld and Richman (1997) the eight dimensions of social support (listening support, emotional support, emotional challenge support, reality confirmation support, task appreciation support, task challenge support, tangible assistance support, and personal assistance support) provide a support typology for the development of a social support practice model (Figure 11) that defines and explains the interaction between individuals and groups as social support is given and received in the environmental context. The model asserts that there are four elements

operational in the acquisition of social support: (a) the recipient of support, (b) the provider of social support, (c) the interaction between provider and recipient, and (d) the outcomes of the exchange process. Each of these elements plays an important role as individuals and groups attempt to interact with their environments to access the amounts and diversity of support needed for physical and emotional well-being.

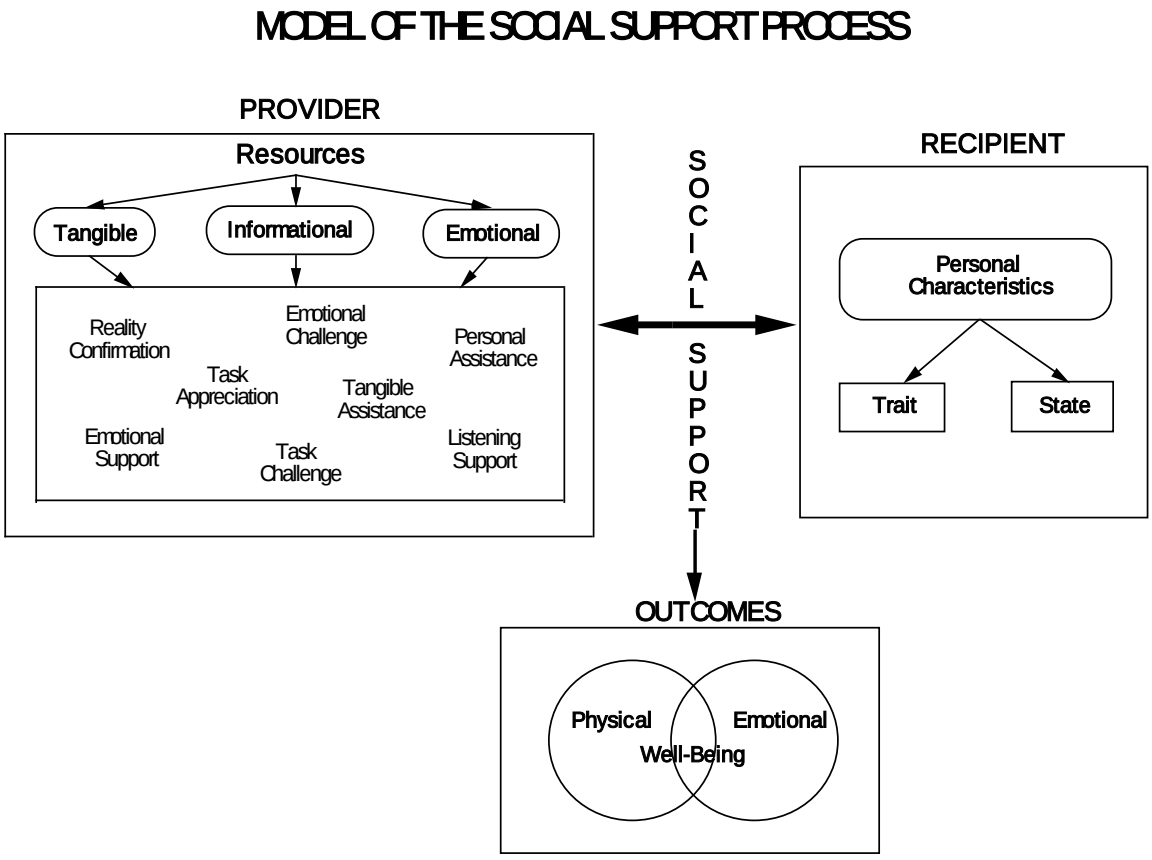


Figure 7. A model of the social support process (Rosenfeld & Richman 1997)

Recipients are perceived to be proactive components of the process of social support. They have personal characteristics that influence the way they interact with other individuals and how they access the support they need. Among the transactions between the recipient and the provider, the support recipient transmits a need for a specific type of support to the providers who have to recognize the type of support requested and be able to offer that kind

of help (Albrecht & Adelman, 1984). The recipient has to be capable to recognize the helpful behaviours of the potential providers in meeting the expressed needs. This eight – dimensional model of social support which was developed from a conceptualization of support in relation to burnout (Pines, Aronson, & Kafry, 1981), is generating increased attention in sport, in particular in relation to sport injuries (Hardy, Burke, & Crace, 1999).

However, in sport psychology, social support does not have a clear definition and as Veiel and Baumann (1992) stated: "if asked, almost every researcher in the field will present a more or less precise definition of support, but, more than likely, it will be different from that of his or her colleagues" (p.3). Studies assessing social support have used various terms to describe the construct including network size, quantity and quality of relationships, social resources, availability and satisfaction of support. Both formal and informal support networks have been seen as a main component of an individual's 'social capital', a valuable resource that contributes to better health chances (Cattell, 2001). However, an important theoretical distinction in the support literature has been between an individual's perception of support and the actual (received or enacted) support that the person receives following a stressful event (Barrera, 1986; Dunkel-Schetter & Bennett, 1990).

Family and friends are expected to be an important variable that affects athlete's adaptation to retirement because due to the devotion to sport, emotional and physical, athletes are not able to develop any kind of relationships outside the sport area. Interestingly, Schmid and Seiler (2003) and Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, and Delignieres, (2003) found that family members, friends, a caring coach, or a professional counsellor who provide emotional, social and instrumental support, could be a predictor of a successful transition process. Meanwhile, the support that the athlete once had from his/her coach or his/her teammates while he/she was competing often disappears (Crook & Robertson, 1991). Werthner and Orlick (1986) stated that emotional support from family and friends helped athletes make the transition out of sport smoothly. This study confirms Werthner's and Orlick's work who found that the coach-athlete relationship has a profound effect on the transition process. Most of those former athletes, who left because of conflict or difficulties with the

coach, had more difficult adjustment to retirement. In addition, the findings in their study and in the present study, show that the support the retired athletes once received from their coaches, family and friends while they were competing, no longer existed when they decided to terminate their career. It has been found that the people who took care of them while they were training offered them little in the way of support (emotional, financial, and instrumental) once they retired.

Perceived and received support, are involved in the functional element of social support (Cohen & Syme, 1985). Perceived support is the perception of availability of support (what I think I get) and received support is the actual receipt of support (what I really get). As Lakey and Cohen (2000) stated, both these functional elements of support should aid stress buffering. In the domain of sports, this could mean that an athlete could be helped by the perception that significant others are available to provide support when needed and by the actual receipt of support. So, perceived support could also be involved in the main effect model (which is characterized by the structural elements of social support, such as the network size or the frequency of contacts) which means that if an active athlete perceives that his network could be available to help and support when needed (e.g., during athletic retirement), this could possibly lead to the adoption of behavioral patterns influencing successful coping

Within the social support literature, several studies demonstrated that perceptions of support available from a spouse were better predictors of adjustment than reported receipt of support (Wethinghton & Kessler, 1986). Researchers have cautioned, that although perceived support seems more critical for healthy adjustment, actual supportive behaviours are also important to examine as these different elements are interconnected (Pierce, Sarason, Sarason, Joseph, & Henderson, 1996). For example, athlete's perception that support is available if needed might lead to benign appraisal of the stressful event (e.g., athletic retirement) or better coping. The receipt of support might lead to a reduction in the impact of the stressor due to a direct transfer of recourses (e.g., giving financial help) or more effective coping behaviours. These coping behaviours could also influence subsequent reappraisal of the

stressor. Thus, this interconnection of received and perceived support is important in influencing outcomes (e.g., the adjustment to life after sports).

In the domain of sports, the presence of responsive, resource-rich support relationships can provide individuals with emotional, material, and informational support needed to ease the impact of anticipated or unanticipated transitions (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). In order to gain insight into the significance of relationships in the athletic setting, Wylleman (1995) reviewed the empirical findings related to coach-athlete relationship, involvement in sport and social network perspective and situated them within the context of the development of the stages of an athletic career (initiation, development, perfection, discontinuation). Athletes need to be supported by their social/personal environment - coaches, friends, fellow athletes, partners and families - during and after their athletic career. Negative attitudes expressed by significant others in the athlete's life about seeking help for psychological or social problems, whether related to transition or not, can become barriers to the athlete seeking out, asking for, or receiving help from others. Harvey, Orbuch, Chwalisz and Garwood, (1991) stated that "… if these confidants (family, partners, friends) react to the account in a helpful manner (i.e., with empathy, compassion, understanding, and timely feedback), then the individual is encouraged to acknowledge the stressor and deal with it rationally and constructively. If the confidants do not react in a helpful manner (e.g., by denying the pain, being judgmental, and /or not offering feedback), then the individual is much less likely to acknowledge the reality of the situation, and psychological distress will persist and grow" (cited in Grove, Lavallee, Gordon & Harvey, 1998, p. 55). Rees and Hardy (2000) in a recent study on the importance of social support perceived by high-level sports performers concluded that there was a need to recognize "… that important others can play a crucial role in the life of the performer, and that the consequences of performers being isolated from support are damaging." (p. 344).

Social support has been linked with group cohesion (Westre & Weiss, 1991), coping with competitive stress (Crocker, 1992), performance (Rees, Ingledew, & Hardy, 1999), burn-out (Gould, Tuffey, Udry, & Loehr, 1996) and recovery from injury (Hardy, Richman, & Rosenfeld, 1991). Hardy and Crace

(1993) stated that social support is an effective psychological technique that can be used to motivate injured athletes during rehabilitation. Some authors have argued that the nature of sport makes it unlikely that athletes will seek emotional support themselves (Petitpas et al. 1992). The author stated that the athletic system reinforces individuals who can tough it out, so many athletes do not disclose their fears or vulnerabilities. He emphasized that emotional support is often a major lack for such people.

Strategies to enhance social support or minimize relationship distress appear to have the potential to positively impact the athlete in terms of sport performance and personal adjustment after sports. As sport psychology has become somewhat more aware of the relationship of social support or recourses to mood (Golding & Ungerleider, 1991), to adjustment to retirement (Baillie & Danish, 1992), or to the life stress-injury relationship, the importance of personal/social relationships in sport psychology has increased. Significant others and social support are included in some form in most models of sport stress and adjustment, including burnout and sports injury (Hardy, Burke, & Crace, 1999). Rees (2006) reported that “the existence of a caring and supportive network, including family, friends, teammates, coaches, managers, fitness trainers, physiotherapists, and psychologists, should have a positive effect on an athlete’s cognitions, emotions, and behaviours” (cited in Jowett & Lavallee, 2007 p.224). Although, it should also be considered that the athlete should also be helped by the perception that significant others (coach, teammates, family, partner) are available to provide help and support during a potential stressful period and by the actual receipt of help and support. The quality and type of social support an athlete perceives or receives could presumably affect things as the level of performance, resistance to dropping out, ability to cope with and recover from injury or successful adaptation to life after sports. The availability or quality of support, the source of support and finally the type of support usually influences support outcomes. Such information may be obtained either by report of the individual who provides the supportive behaviour, or by report of the social support recipient. In general psychology, Cutrona and Russel (1990) proposed an ‘optimal matching’ theory to explain social support effects. This model holds that there are different types

of social support in terms of their functional content. This means that there is a need to match specific types of social support with stressors and understand which types of support protect people from the harmful effects of specific stressors (e.g., athletic retirement). On the other hand, combinations that produce non-significant interactions will assist understanding when support is not useful. For example, if our research were to find that athletes facing retirement achieve more distress reduction from encouragement from their partners rather than financial assistance, this knowledge would be extremely useful. In Cutrona and Russel's optimal matching model of stress and social support, the controllability of the stressful event or situation was of prime importance in determining the type of social support that would be beneficial to the stressed individual. Emotional support relates to being there for comfort and security leading to a person feeling loved and cared for, esteem support relates to bolstering a person's sense of competence or self-esteem, informational support relates to providing advice or guidance, and tangible support relates to providing instrumental assistance (Cutrona & Russel, 1990).

Although the quality of support should depend upon its functional effectiveness (perceived/received support) and how specific types of support are matched to specific stressors, there is also a need to consider the providers of support. Significant others not always provide their support well or not everyone is available in providing support in a potential stressful period or not everyone can provide all types of support (Rosenfeld & Richman, 1997). Botteril (1990), included spouses and friends in his consultation program with a professional hockey team, indicating that "these significant others are usually the most important support people in the lives of professional hockey players" (p. 232). May and Veach (1987) indicated that interpersonal issues such as relationships with girlfriends, boyfriends, spouses, and, parents were frequent focuses in their work with United States Alpine ski team.

An athlete when terminating his/her sport career suddenly or not, and while his/her athletic status is over, makes a great effort to establish a new life and identity out of the elite sport. During this effort, social support from significant others is critical, allowing the athletes to learn new skills and find ways to obtain advice, assistance and information to ease transition and

adjustment (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Stephan et al. (2003) in their study emphasized the importance of financial, emotional and social support as a coping resource to retired athletes from significant others and related organizations. Basically, these types of support make the transition to life after sports easier. As is the case when dealing with other sources of stress, in sports career termination process, having support during the transitional period can be the key to a successful career change. After making the transition out of sport, former athletes are supposed to have lost contact with almost all individuals who were significant to them during their active sport career (e.g., coach, teammates). The athlete's social network generally consists of coaches, parents, partners and friends. While the role of parents has generally been situated during the initiation stage (e.g., Kirk, O'Connor, Carlson, Burke, Davis, & Glover, 1997), research has shown that athletes perceive parental involvement to remain salient throughout the athletic life span of their children. On the part of coaches, research reveals that the quality and content of the coach-athlete relationship changes during the different athletic stages. This evolution in the way in which coaches interact with their athletes throughout the athletic career was confirmed in a study by Serpa and Damasio (2001) on 332 thirteen to thirty year-old trampoline athletes: while the coach was perceived by athletes to remain friendly toward them, his or her dominating role was perceived to diminish during the latter stages of the athlete's sport career. Coach-related factors, which have been shown to contribute to career termination among athletes, included a conflicting or problematic athlete-coach relationship, and psychological abuse by the coach (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). Thus, a very close person such as the parent or the spouse, who encourages these people to share their feelings, providing a safe and supportive environment for the disclosure of emotions, can be a great source of support.

Despite the underlined importance of social support, no research has been conducted to examine the supportive transactions before and after athletic retirement. Social support during this stressful event has been examined in studies and models just as a mediating factor helping athletes to cope with this event.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Aims

The main goal of this qualitative study is to explore how Greek female athletes from track and field athletics perceive the sport transition process, what means for them leaving competitive sports and specifically to investigate the circumstances surrounding athletic retirement in order to give a better understanding about this complex process. Using Taylor and Ogilvie's (1998) conceptual model of adaptation to career transition as a guide, we attempted to investigate what exactly happens in the field of track and field athletics in Greece, why elite female athletes leave sports, what is happening in their life during the competitive years regarding their personal relationships and what is happening after they retire. Does the quality of their adaptation depend on the nature of these relationships and how the quality is affected by them? The main components of this model should be taken into consideration in order to explore in detail the complexity of sports career transition. As described above, these components are the causes for retirement, the degree of the athletic identity, the support systems around athlete, the pre-retirement planning, the quality of adaptation and the intervention strategies. Greek athletes were chosen to be studied in this research since a mix in countries also has mixed results. This view is consistent with Alfermann, Stambulova, and Zemaityte's (2004) study with 256 German, Lithuanian, and Russian athletes where they found that sport career transition is experienced differently among nations. Greek female elite athletes were chosen to be interviewed in this study as no research existed in the literature with exclusively this group of athletes, although Greek male athletes have been already studied (Koukouris, 1994). In addition, female athletes were chosen because, according to the literature, they may experience the process of career transition differently from male athletes since they terminate their career for different reasons than men and the quality of adaptation may also vary. Alfermann (2000) supported this view by saying that women are more apt to leave the sporting domain prematurely, at an earlier

age and for different reasons than males do. She concluded that there is not much research in this area. Research that has been conducted by the same researcher a few years earlier (Alfermann et al. 1985; Alfermann, 1995,) has shown that female athletes begin sports at a younger age, family obligations are usually the reasons for retirement, they quit sports also at a younger age than men, and finally less often are offered a job in the sporting domain than male athletes. Normally, women experience an easier adjustment to retirement than men because they have other and equally important interests in life after sports such as family or a birth of a child. Consequently, the present study would offer a better understanding regarding this particular group of athletes.

Reviewing the literature, there are models which describe the athletic transition as a singular event with distressful consequences (e.g. thanatological models, gerontological models). On the other hand, there are models which even though they describe athletic retirement as a process, they do not explain how the quality of adaptation to life after sports is influenced by specific variables (e.g., athletic identity, social support systems) or what are the consequences (e.g. retirement, crisis, healthy career termination) of this complex process. The conceptual model of adaptation to career transition (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1998), is multidimensional, offers flexibility, it considers the individuality of experiences as an important element for a more effective response to the athletic transition process and finally examines the entire process of career transition, from the competitive years until the life after sports. Lavallee and Wylleman (2000) suggest that the conceptual model of adaptation to career transition is helpful in understanding the transition process that high-level athletes experience.

Interestingly, the findings of this study could help practitioners and sport psychologists to design intervention models, assist them to better prepare individuals for their adaptation to post-sport life and to find a new career after sports. It could also help athletes, and specifically female Greek track and field athletes, improve their transitional experiences, assist them to find new directions in life and finally guide them for a healthy adaptation to life after sports.

3.2. Design

Two key issues guide the selection of a research methodology: the subject under investigation and the kind of understanding and emphasis being sought by the researcher (Lawler, 1998).

Qualitative studies are tools used in understanding and describing the world of human experience. “Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people’s “lived experience”, are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on events, processes, and structures of their lives: their perceptions, assumptions and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10).

The main reason that leads a researcher to use qualitative methods instead of quantitative is the nature of the research problem such as research that attempts to explore an individual’s experiences with a specific phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Comparing qualitative research with quantitative research, qualitative research is flexible and can help generate new theories, while quantitative research is more focused and aims to test specific hypotheses. Participating subjects can discuss issues that are important to them and probably offer a new theory to the phenomenon under study, rather than responding to closed questions as in quantitative research. Qualitative research explores topics in more depth and detail than quantitative techniques. It is less expensive, because not many participants need to be recruited as in quantitative research or use extensive methods and offers flexibility as far as locations and timing, as you do not need to interview a large number of people at once. Qualitative research is text-based, has un-structured or semi-structured response options, it is more subjective (describes a problem from the scope of those experiencing it), its validation depends on the researcher’s capability, and finally can be less generalized. On the other hand, quantitative research methods is number-based, has fixed response options, it is more objective (provides results according to a computer program), its validation depends on the measurement device or instrument used, and finally it is more generalizable.

(http://www.orau.gov/cdcynergy/demo/Content/activeinformation/tools/toolscontent/qualitativemethods.htm#resources)

Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena as they occur naturally. To be precise, it aims to assist us understand the world in which we live and why things are the way they are. It investigates the why and how of decision making, not just what, where, and when. Qualitative data even though it is time consuming compared with quantitative research, it is richer, and less able to be generalized. Critics of qualitative research have questioned the generalizability of the qualitative results. Maxwell, (1996) stated that qualitative studies often have the advantage that due to personal communication there is no obvious reason not to believe that the results apply more generally. In addition, the generalizability of qualitative studies usually is based not on explicit sampling of some defined population to which the results can be extended, but on the development of a theory that can be extended to other cases (Yin, 1994). However, the present study supports the general view that qualitative data is more able to be individualized than generalized.

The key issue of argument in the enduring debate between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies is the aspect of the bodily nature of the research context. In other words, the face-to-face aspect is the soul of the qualitative research. The closeness between the interviewer and the interviewee produces sensitive data and reflects the mutual interest. The interaction generated when two people meet is considered to be the critical element for narrowing the gap between the researcher and the researched. Bodily presence indicates between the two people, commitment, openness, and the opportunity of valid research outcomes.

Methods of qualitative research include case studies, grounded theory, life history, or general narrative enquiry and participant observer research. Detailed data is captured through open-ended questions using techniques such as interviews (individual, focus groups), observation, and documents (Patton, 2002). Data collection in qualitative methodology, although is time consuming, the benefits of using this approach includes richness of data and deeper investigation into the phenomena under study (Patton, 1990).

Bearing these in mind, individual semi-structured interviews and in-depth life history interviews were employed to 18 and 2 athletes respectively, following procedures of how to do an interview recommended by Patton (1990). The in-depth interviews allowed me to: (a) spend a relatively long period of time with the participants, (b) directly encounter the participants, (c) focus on the participants' viewpoints without being bounded by a specific perspective, and (d) address the participants' understandings of their worlds through their words and stories (Minichiello et al., 1999). This method for gathering data was considered suitable for several reasons. Compared to other methods of data collection, individual interviews offer a greater degree of flexibility. The interviewer can explain the purpose of the interview and encourage potential respondents to co-operate. They can also clarify questions, correct misunderstandings, offer prompts, probe responses and follow up on new ideas in a way that is just not possible with other methods (Maxwell, 1996). Also, this method for data collection was the most appropriate than others as the subject matter was very sensitive in terms of responding personal issues concerning participant's personal life.

Individual interviews are the most widely-used data collection strategy in qualitative research (Nunkoosing 2005; Sandelowski, 2002). Researchers typically choose individual interviews to collect detailed accounts of participants' thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge pertaining to a given phenomenon (Loiselle et al., 2007). This approach assumes that if questions are formulated correctly, participants' expressions of their experiences will reflect their reality (Macdonald 2006; Sandelowski 2002).

On the other hand, most people like telling stories and with a little encouragement will provide narrative accounts of their experiences in research interviews (Elliott, 2005). Telling stories aid people to think about, and understand, their personal or individual thinking, actions and reactions (Bruner, 1986, 1990). Stories connect us with others, and with our own histories, through time, place, character and advice on how we might live our lives (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Stories bring our past together with our present and offer vision of possible futures. Thus, because people give meaning to their lives through the stories they tell (Bruner, 1986), it seems appropriate as we

study human experience, to use a methodology that connects with how people interpret meanings from life experiences. In order to succeed in eliciting narratives from these 2 participants, Chase (1995a) stated that we should ask simple questions that clearly relate to participant's life experiences. In addition, it is better that the questions are not too focused on the interests of the researcher and have to be broad enough to allow respondents to provide the detailed narrative accounts that researchers are hoping to elicit. This consideration implies that in-depth interviews that attend to individual's narratives would produce data that are more accurate, truthful or trustworthy than structured interviews that ask respondents a standardized set of questions. People tell stories about their life experiences. Although a range of qualitative research methodologies are available to draw meaning from peoples' experiences, a perceived strength of narrative inquiry is its emphasis on actively engaging participants in a process of reflection, construction of narrative accounts, and in meaning-making with the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In addition, researchers (in a relationship with participants) using narrative research are able to draw and construct meaning from the interpretive research texts, as told by participants. Specifically, in sport psychology narrative analysis also suggested by Jowett (2008) who, commenting on why she chose to use a narrative analysis, said, ''a focus on the participants' narrative is likely to provide in-depth subjective data and reveal individual differences by seeking to interpret the meaning of the narratives and its importance for personal functioning'' (pp. 27–28). Narrative inquiry provides the dynamic and interactive process needed to explore the experiences of athletes and to understand these experiences from the perspective of those involved in athlete's retirement from sports.

Schank (1990) classifies narrative stories into five basic categories:

1. Official stories: These are stories we learn from official sources such as school, or the government.
2. Invented (adapted) stories: These are stories created by people.
3. Firsthand stories: They are the type of stories we talk about most. They represent our own personal experiences.

4. Secondhand stories: They are simply the firsthand stories of others that we have heard and remembered.
5. Culturally common stories: they are the stories we get from our environment.
In the present study, firsthand stories will be analyzed due to the fact that we explore athletes' personal experiences and also they are the type of stories we talk about most.

3.3. Participants

All of the participants showed their enthusiastic interest in participating in this study and welcomed the opportunity to talk about their experiences before, during and after their athletic retirement and expressed pleasure that someone after all these years was interested in their life and well-being since leaving the sport area. Participants for this study consisted of twenty Greek female former elite athletes with international competitive experience. The ex-athletes performed in track and field athletics and achieved major success at national and international level (including Hellenic, Balkan, and European Championships). This was a minimum criterion for inclusion in this study. Specifically, the criteria were established so as to study the track and field athlete retirement process in individuals having reached the higher level of their sport. I believed that it was important to interview participants with the highest level achieved because the demands for those athletes are often greater than for athletes competing in lower levels. The time interval between the occurrence of the retirement and the investigation was as long as to assume that this period of time was sufficient for the participants to review their sport careers and career transition process combining with their experience in reintegration into a very different environment and career life. The time interval was also enough for the former athletes to have evaluated the effects of sport participation and sport careers transition processes on their current job and life development. There were no criteria as to the length of time retired or time in their sport. At the time of the interviews the eighteen respondents were between 30-52 years of age (M = 41.88, SD = 5.12). They began participating in competitive sport at the mean age of 15.22 years (SD = 4.20) and competed at the highest level for 10.72 years (SD = 4.62). The mean age at which the

respondents withdrew from competitive track and field athletics was 26.5 years of age (*SD* = 5.20). The two participants who described their life history were 35 and 38 years of age (*SD* = 2.12), began participating at the high level sport at the mean age of 12 years (*SD* = 1.41), competed at the highest level for 9.5 years (*SD* = 2.12) and finally, the mean age at which the ex-athletes left their sport was 30 years (*SD* = 2.82).

3.4. Instrument and procedure

Individual semi structured interviews

A semi-structured interview schedule of 68 (this number included prompts and follow up questions) open-ended questions was developed to elicit qualitative information about each participant's experience from their own perspective and to generate data relevant to career termination issues.

Specifically, the formulation of the specific questions was guided by the conceptual model of adaptation to career transition put forward by Taylor and Ogilvie (1998). In semi-structured interviews, the open-ended nature of the questions provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail. If the person that is being interviewed cannot respond to a specific question or provides only a brief answer, the interviewer can use prompts to encourage and help the interviewee to think further the question.

The interview schedule was organized into six parts: 1) general demographic information (e.g., age, marital status, occupational status), 2) sport demographic information (e.g., sport specialization, highest achievement, profile of relationships with the social network including coach, family, partner, and friends), 3) sports career termination (with an emphasis on the role of athlete's social network), 4) transitional period (e.g., feelings, social support), 5) post-athletic career and 6) reflections on sports career and recommendations for athletes in transition and significant others. (See Appendix A. for details of the interview questions). However, it must be pointed out that the sports career termination part included most of the questions formed as it was consisted part of the main aims of the present study.

18 female former elite athletes from several parts of Greece were contacted by phone and asked to participate in the study. All of the participants agreed to participate. An introductory letter was mailed subsequently to each of the eighteen retired athletes, explaining in detail the purpose, the significance, and the voluntary nature of the study. Also, they were assured that confidentiality and anonymity issues would be respected and that they could terminate the interview at any time. Then a convenient time and location was arranged for the interview. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face. With permission of the respondents, a tape recorder was used to record the interviews in order to ensure accuracy and to provide extensive data; interviews lasted from 40 to 60 minutes. In addition, participants were made aware that a copy of their responses would be available for them in case they want to check the accuracy or request the removal of their data. At the time of the interview, they were also told that they could expand their answers, giving as much detail as they could.

The names, postal addresses and telephones of all national team athletes who had formally retired from International competition, were provided by the “Woman and Sport” Subcommittee of the Greek Olympic Committee.

University’s Ethical Advisory Committee approval was sought and given.

Life histories

Two female former elite athletes from Athens who had retired from professional track and field athletics were contacted by phone, they were informed of the nature of the study and encouraged to become fully engaged in this research (Moustakas, 1994). A letter explaining the purpose of the study was mailed requesting their confidential participation in this research study. They both agreed to participate. A comfortable environment, was provided in which the participants would be more inclined to respond honestly and comprehensively (Moustakas, 1994). As “experts” on the phenomenon of sports career termination, they were encouraged to join with me as truthful seekers of knowledge and understanding (Moustakas, 1994) of the sport-career transition experience with the understanding that their experiences, insights, and recommendations would be the foundation of an intervention

program designed to help future elite female athletes from track and field athletics cope with their sport-career transition. Participants were asked to seat comfortably at their working environments and to be informal and spontaneous in telling the story of their lives that included: “how did you begin participating in elite sport; what life was like when you were competing; how was your personal and social relationships (partner, family, coach) when you were elite athlete; how did you decide terminating your career; during sports career termination; what life was like after athletic retirement; how was your social and personal relationships after athletic retirement; what life is like right now; and what you think life will be like in the future.”

Doing narrative research, one should take into consideration whether to rely on a single interview or whether to conduct more than one interview with each participant (Elliott, 2005). Seidman (1998) suggested that three interviews should be conducted with each respondent whereof the first one should focus on the life history of the narrator, who should be asked to talk about his/her past life leading up to the topic of interest. The second interview should focus on the interviewee’s present experiences and in the third one the respondent should express his/her personal reflections of those experiences. Seidman stated that conducting three interviews helps with establishing the validity of the results, as the researcher is able to check that the participant is consistent across these three interviews. In addition, in Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000) study on the fear of crime in a British city, the use of two interviews helped the researchers to build up a trusting relationship with the participants and to show them that they were interested in hearing their experiences.

Thus, four interviews were completed with the two participants which included one interview and a follow up discussion with each individual following the initial interview. The first interview was about making introductions, clarifying the purpose of the study, outlining what the interviews would be about, answering any questions the person might had, and starting to build up a picture of their background and their life now. Also during the first interview each participant was asked to provide an account of her life in her own words. Probes and prompts were given to provide or clarify meaning, and to gain more depth. The aim was to leave as much as possible of the talking to the informant. The

second interview placed more emphasis on the evaluative aspects of narrative (Kohli, 1981). As well as filling out the details of their life story, participants were also encouraged to explore their feelings as athletes, to talk about their relationships (coach, parents, friends, partner), to reflect on their experience of their athletic retirement, and to evaluate their current life in comparison with their life when they were competing.

Temporal ordering implies causality to events in a narrative, what happens next is dependent on what happens now (Labov, 1982). Without this causal progression, a series of clauses relating events cannot be considered a narrative. Labov further analyzed the narrative structure to define five other features of the narrative: a) orientation, in which time, place and person are identified, b) abstract, in which the story is summarized, c) complicating action, in which the story is told but also other stories may be begun, and finally the narrative is concluded by d) an evaluation, in which the point of the story is underlined and, e) a coda, which brings narrator and listener back to the present. They, together, define the scope of the narrative, showing where it begins and where it ends.

Thus, in order for a temporal order to be followed in the present in-depth life history interviews as suggested by Labov (1982), the present narrative structure fell into the following categories: (1) orientation, (2) abstract, (3) complicating action, (4) evaluation, (5) coda. The “Orientation” category was identified through the questions ‘who were the persons involved in the athlete’s narrative?’, ‘When did the events take place?’, ‘What were the events?’ The “abstract” category was identified by asking the question ‘What was the narrative about?’. The answer served as a brief summary of the whole narrative. The answers to these questions identified the time, place and people involved in the event. The “complicating action” was elicited through the question ‘Then what happened?’, until the narrative to be concluded. The “evaluation” category provided the emotional side of the narrative and gave information about how the athlete felt about the situation she experienced. Finally the “coda” category indicates closure. The athlete provided her expressions and observations about the event of sports career termination connecting the past to the present.

The interviews were tape-recorded with the informant's consent and later transcribed. The length of the four life history interviews lasted between 70 and 90 minutes.

The names, postal addresses and telephones of the two national team athletes who had formally retired from International competition were provided by the researcher.

3.5. Data analysis

Individual semi-structured interviews

Data collection and analysis occurred as close together as possible. The content analysis of the data began immediately after conducting and transcribing the first interview. The analysis followed procedures for content analysis similar to these used in other research studies that have employed qualitative research designs (e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Scanlan et al, 1991), and was based on the techniques recommended by Weber (1990). Doing simultaneously the data collection and analysis increased researcher's familiarity with the data and allowed for making probes in relevant themes in the following interviews. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by the author on a total of 234 pages (1 ½ spacing, #12 font) of transcribed data. Then, the audiotape was listened and the transcript was reread in order for the researcher to become familiar with each interview.

Content analysis was used to identify from the transcripts the extracts of data that are informative in some way and to sort out important messages hidden in the mass of each interview. Content analysis has been defined as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Weber, 1990). It has also been defined as: "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). These definitions show that qualitative content analysis allows researchers to interpret social reality in a subjective but scientific manner. Content analysis is a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of a text. This content can be

words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs. Additionally, content analysis procedures were used in order to classify the textual information, reducing it to more relevant and controllable information units (Weber, 1990). There are two ways of conducting content analysis: inductively and deductively. With inductive analysis, new themes and categories emerge from the interviewee quotes, while deductive analysis uses a pre-existing set of categories (usually based on existing theory and research) to organize the quotes (Patton, 2002). Inductive content analysis is used in cases where there are no previous studies dealing with the phenomenon or when it is fragmented. A deductive approach is useful if the general aim was to test a previous theory in a different situation or to compare categories at different time periods (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

Similar to Sparkes' (1998) study, firstly the transcripts were read several times in order the researcher to familiarise herself with, and understand, the participants' information. Second, ideas and themes were tried to be identified. Analytical memos were written (Minichiello et al., 1999) consisting of the preliminary ideas about how those themes, extracted from the interviews, are connected to Taylor and Ogilvie's model (1998). The analysis of the present study departed from raw data themes and proceeded by a deductive category and development (e.g., first-order and second-order themes), which gradually became an inductive category application (e.g., general content categories), always having as an orientation the main components of Taylor's and Ogilvie's conceptual model for sports career termination. The process was considered complete when no additional meaningful groupings coalesced. The combination of inductive and deductive content analysis is advanced by qualitative methodologists (Patton, 2002), as the most pragmatic way of conducting content analysis since no researcher formulates a study without some initial hypotheses stemming from previous research and relevant theory. The list of codes was grouped into general dimensions. Some part of the participants' information was not categorized due to irrelevance to the purpose (irrelevant according to the main components of Taylor and Ogilvie's conceptual model). Afterwards, as Weber (1990) stated that in an interview the most frequently appearing words (or statements) reflect the greatest concerns,

frequency analysis (amount of content) in terms of percentages completed the deductive-inductive content analysis.

Life histories

The analysis of the data began immediately after conducting and transcribing both interviews. As in content analysis, after transcription, narratives were coded according to categories deemed theoretically important, having as an orientation Taylor and Ogilvie's (1998) conceptual model of adaptation to athletic retirement. A content analysis was conducted to identify themes and categories that were evident in the data. In this analysis the process that was followed was detailed by Lieblich et al. (1998, p. 12) where "the original story is dissected, and sections or single words belonging to a defined category are collected from the entire story." The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim on a total of 31 pages (1½, #12 font) of transcribed data.

Narrative analysis deals only with verbal material, usually stories or accounts of personal experiences and, thus, can provide us with a deeper level of understanding into athletes' lives before and after sports retirement. In addition, it provides a way to keep experience and meaning unified, and thus allows for greater understanding of athletes' lives. A narrative links past events, or stories, together to explain how a final outcome might come about (adaptation to sports career termination), or how meaning is given to certain aspects of athletes' lives. Providing insight and understanding to the researcher about the people being studied is one purpose of narrative analysis.

In narrative inquiry there are several common characteristics that fit many studies. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), stories report personal experiences in narrative inquiry (what the individual experiences) as well as social experiences (the individual interacting with others). They, also, state that experience should be viewed as continuous where one experience leads to another. The stories constitute the data and the researcher gathers it through interviews or informal conversations. A story in narrative research is a first-person oral telling or retelling of events related to personal experiences of an individual. Often these stories have a beginning, middle and an end (Chatman,

1978). In a more general sense, a story might include elements like, time, place, plot, and scene (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In this process, researchers review the story and identify themes and categories that emerge from that story. In addition, the researcher writes a chronology of events describing the individuals past, present, and future experiences lodged within specific settings. Cortazzi (1993) suggested that it is the chronology of narrative research within an emphasis on sequence that sets this method apart from other methods of research.

3.6. Trustworthiness

Individual semi-structured interviews

Establishing trustworthiness to a research study implies when the findings of that specific study reflect as closely as possible the meanings as described by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Padgett (1998) described that trustworthiness in qualitative methodology is not something that just naturally occurs, but instead is the result of 'rigorous scholarship' that includes the use of defined procedures. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria to evaluate a research work and establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Risks when establishing trustworthiness can include problems such as reactivity and biases on the part of the researcher and the participant (Padgett, 1998). In order to manage these threats to trustworthiness, qualitative researchers must engage in a variety of strategies in order to describe the research findings in a way that authentically represents the meanings as described by the participants (Creswell, 2003; Horsburgh, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Padgett, 1998). The strategies include prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, negative case analysis, audit trail and reflexivity (Creswell, 2003; Hors-burgh, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Padgett, 1998) which help improve the credibility of research results. Transferability refers to the potentiality or the extent to which the hypothesis of a research study can be transferred and applied to another context. Dependability, according to Bradley (1993), refers to "the coherence of the internal process and the way the researcher accounts for changing conditions in phenomena", and lastly, confirmability, refers to "the

extent to which the characteristics of the data, as posited by the researcher, can be confirmed by others who read or review the research results" (p. 437). To enhance the trustworthiness of this specific study, various techniques were used. First of all, selecting the most appropriate method for data collection and the amount of data are important in establishing credibility. The amount of data necessary to answer a research question in a credible way differs depending on the complexity of the phenomena under study. In the present study, the number of athletes (20) was considered a large enough sample size to provide for validity. Then, all participants were informed about the nature of the study, the aims and the procedure before the time of the interview. They were assured for the full anonymity and that their answers would only be used scientifically. Names, sport specialization, or other information relevant to personal issues to the respondent were all removed from the documents. Secondly, all the interviews were arranged to a quiet place with no disturbance and people around, thus the participants could express their views as fully and freely as they possibly could. Finally, some of the respondents were asked to read the representation of their interviews through the transcriptions and check of their accuracy. All of them confirmed that the transcriptions were accurate. This member checking process, together with the rapport and the good relationships established during the face-to-face interactions enhanced the level of trustworthiness of this research (Creswell, 1998; Michichiello et al., 1999).

Life histories

While there is the potential for researcher bias in all investigations, it is critical that researchers work to ensure their interpretations are truly embedded within the stories of participants, as reported to them and that the 'thick description' needed to fully understand the research phenomena is produced (Neuman, 2000; Patton, 1990). Neuman (2000) described 'thick description' as "the numerous layers of meanings, values, interpretive schemes, and rules of living, used by people in their daily lives" (p.73).

A number of principles identified by Wolcott (1994) were used to guide this research. These included: letting participants take the lead in the interview discussions, where possible talking little and listening a lot and ensuring

accurate recording of discussions. Also, verisimilitude is critical to ensuring trustworthiness of the research and to deliver credible and dependable research results (Denzin, 1997). The processes drew on aspects of the narrative inquiry methodology and a range of verification procedures used in qualitative research methodologies including participant validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) through storying and restorying which enabled participants to develop their views further. Also they were able to verify the interpretations with a review of the interpretive texts. In addition, the use of more than one interview with each participant built trust and understanding among athletes and the researcher.

These processes and principles helped to solidly embed this research in the stories of participants and to provide the attention to detail needed to produce quality and rigor in this research (Higgs & Adams, 1997).

3.7. Pilot study

The study was piloted on a female athlete of international standard in the sport of triathlon. The purpose of this pilot interview was to try out the interview guide, to determine the total interview time and to clarify further on topics not covered in the questions. A few changes in the interview schedule were made following the pilot work. Following the interview, the participant was asked to comment on the content and style of questions. She was also asked to reflect on the interviewer's style and the congeniality of the atmosphere created during the interview. This process generated feedback regarding the style and body language of the interviewer as well as feedback regarding the content of the interview. It is possible that the use of videotaping might have made the participant hesitate answering freely the questions made. However, this did not appear to prevent her from being candid in her responses to the questions asked.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

4.1. Individual semi-structured interviews

The results obtained represent the collated responses from all 18 former elite athletes. In total, 1293 raw data units emerged from the transcripts reflecting different components of Taylor's and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model of adaptation to career transition (causes for retirement, available resources, factors related to adaptation to retirement and quality of adaptation). These clustered into a total of 42 1st order sub-themes, which grouped into 12 2nd order sub-themes, and four general categories that followed the main components of our model. A more detailed description of the construction and configuration of the inductive-deductive content analysis dimensions, using representative quotations from the transcripts to highlight examples of themes, is discussed below. Answers to questions that did not lend themselves to deductive-inductive content analysis, are also detailed below.

4.1.1. Reasons for sports career termination

From the data, in a total of 147 raw data units, three main reasons emerged from the main question, 'How did you decide to terminate your athletic career?' and the probe, 'For what reason(s) did you terminate your competitive sport career?'. There were three 2nd order sub-themes that the component 'reasons for career termination' was represented. These were 'sport related issues', 'personal related issues', and 'drug abuse'. Of these, 'sport related issues' was the theme that characterized by the most raw data units. These are shown in detail (with total number of raw data units and frequency percentage corresponding to them in brackets) in Figure 8. Sport related issues and especially psychological burnout was the most frequently mentioned reason for sports career termination. The following quote depicts a good example of this cause:

> "When I was 23 years old I decided to stop training because I was feeling really tired. And I mean psychologically tired and not physically. I

> didn't have any other problems and I know that physically I could have given more, but since the way I was feeling could not help me at all, I decided to terminate my career. I was completely negative, I was tired. You know, I was not only competing in one event but in many events. You understand now that even if you have a sport specialization you are competing in many other sports and since there is nothing to get from it, eventually you start feeling exhausted. You can not do it any more".

In addition, many athletes terminated their sport career due to problems with their coach or the sport organization. This specific relationship, reflecting the cause for retirement, is represented by the quote:

> "He was never satisfied. He always wanted something more. I remember one time when he said to me – prior to a race – 'little girl, if you don't win I'll kill you'. I was really afraid. After the race I didn't know what to do because I didn't win. I felt that I was dying. After that and other similar incidents, I decided to end my career as an athlete."

A different participant gave an example of how the problems with her coach combined with her low performance forced her to retire:

> "I couldn't continue any more, he was pressuring me…. As a coach he was good, but regarding the psychological support he was death. We had never discussed our problems…. Also, my performance that period was very low and I did not have any other choice. I stopped training!"

Other reasons that were included to sport related issues with no particular significance were age, injury, and lack of motivation.

The second most significant category was personal issues, most of them unrelated to sport. Remarkably, the main cause emerged from athletes' responses was the need to make a family or pregnancy reasons. This is a reason for retirement that exists only to female athletes and according to their responses having a baby has been a very successful coping strategy for a better adaptation to post-sport life. Some of these feelings are expressed in the quote: "I was reaching an age that I had to start thinking about having a baby. So, I decided to get marry and to be a mother. I chose the family from being an athlete". Two other reasons that emerged from the responses were first of all the fact that two of them confronted personal problems like family issues and another one had the desire to do something else outside sport as she felt that

her sporting career could not offer her any more pleasure. This feeling is expressed by the quote:

> "I couldn't do anything else. I stayed at that level for 4 years and I couldn't see any more development. I got bored! Therefore, I decided to stop and do something more constructive for me that period. I continued my studies at the University".

Other reasons for retirement according to athletes' responses were firstly their financial situation which was in that level that couldn't allow them to continue their sport (2/18), and lastly the fact that one of the eighteen athletes found more satisfaction in other areas outside the sport environment.

The third causal factor for retirement was drug abuse. It must be pointed out that this response came from the most recent retired athletes and they said that they would continue competing, as they hadn't had any other problems (e.g., injuries or personal problems). A good example for how this reason forced an athlete to retire can be seen in the quote:

> "If you want to play in high standards and we are talking for Olympic medals, there is no way back. If you use the simple methods, vitamins and healthy diet, you will not be able to achieve anything. This was unlike to my beliefs. Therefore, I had to make this decision. I had to terminate my athletic career".

The following narrative quote also depicts this specific reason for retirement as described by the elite athlete:

> "Unfortunately, in a very important for my sporting career international meeting, I used a small amount of drugs in order to feel better and stronger. I took a high position but in a test after the game I was found positive. So, I was eliminated and due to the shame I felt afterwards, I decided to stop my athletic career"

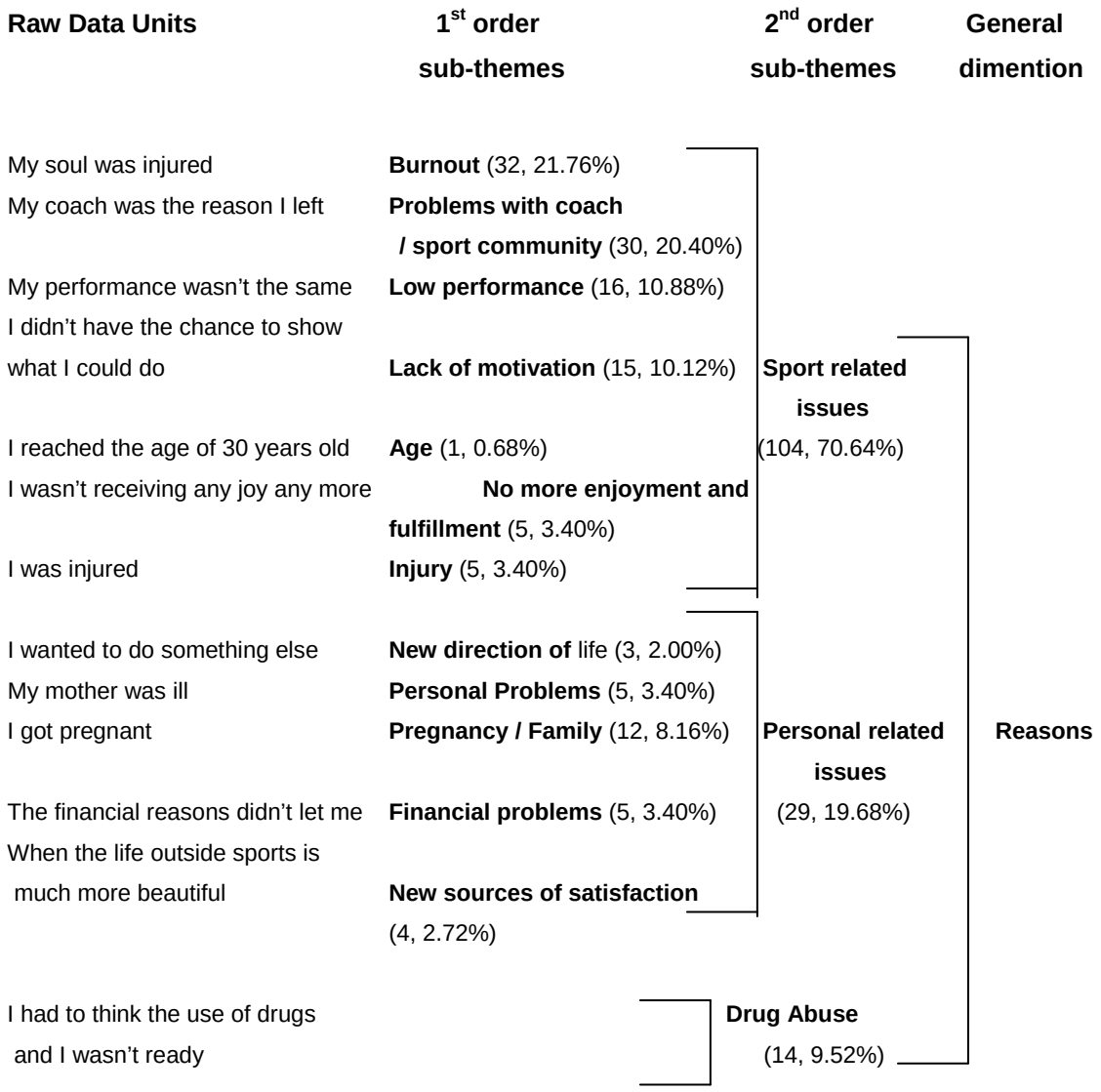


Figure 8. Reasons for sports career termination

4.1.2. Factors related to adaptation to sports career termination

This dimension includes the self-characteristics of each former athlete while she was training and consisted of a total of 167 raw data units which emerged from the questions 'How did your role change since you were an athlete?' 'What did this sporting success mean to you?' 'How did your athletic success in general influence your competitive sport career?' How your current life is connected with sports?' 'Is your life as satisfying as your sport or even more? Can you explain?' 'To review your competitive sport career, how will you

evaluate it?' 'How did your competitive athletic career influence your social life in general?'

There were two 2nd order sub-themes that the dimension 'factors related to adaptation' represented. These were 'identity' and 'perceptions of control'. Of these, 'identity' was the theme that characterized the most raw data units and it was comprised two 1st order sub-themes. These were 'self identity' and 'social identity'. The 2nd order sub-theme 'perceptions of control' also comprised two 1st order sub-themes. These were 'presence of control' and 'absence of control'. These are shown in detail (with total number of raw data units and frequency percentage corresponding to them in brackets) in Figure 9. Self-identity is actually the athletic identity which is the level the participants perceive themselves as athletes during their competitive years. Social identity is their ability to develop specific relationships outside the sport area and the factor perceptions of control is related to the reasons for retirement and how the athlete made that decision to terminate his/her career.

In a total of 116 raw data themes, the participants described their high athletic identities and their devotion to their sport while they were competing in an elite level. A good example of this characteristic can be seen in the quote "Being an athlete, for me, it was a way of living. I couldn't imagine myself doing something else. I was really enjoying what I was doing and I felt very satisfied and happy". In result, they weren't able enough to build a social identity and became incapable to develop other relationships beyond the sport limits. The theme of social identity came from raw data such as the following: "The more success I had, the more antisocial I was becoming. I had been characterized as an inadaptable person". It was also represented by the narrative quote:

> "I was completely devoted to my sport. I was training two times a day, so, I did not have time for anything else beyond sports. Later I realized that I had no *life* outside the sport area"

The 2nd order sub-theme related to 'factors related to adaptation' was 'perceptions of control'. Most of the participants noted that their retirement was unexpected and outside of their control. This absence of control concerning athletes' decision to retire is reflected by the following quote: "I had to stop my sporting career due to an injury. The doctors told me that I couldn't participate any more!"

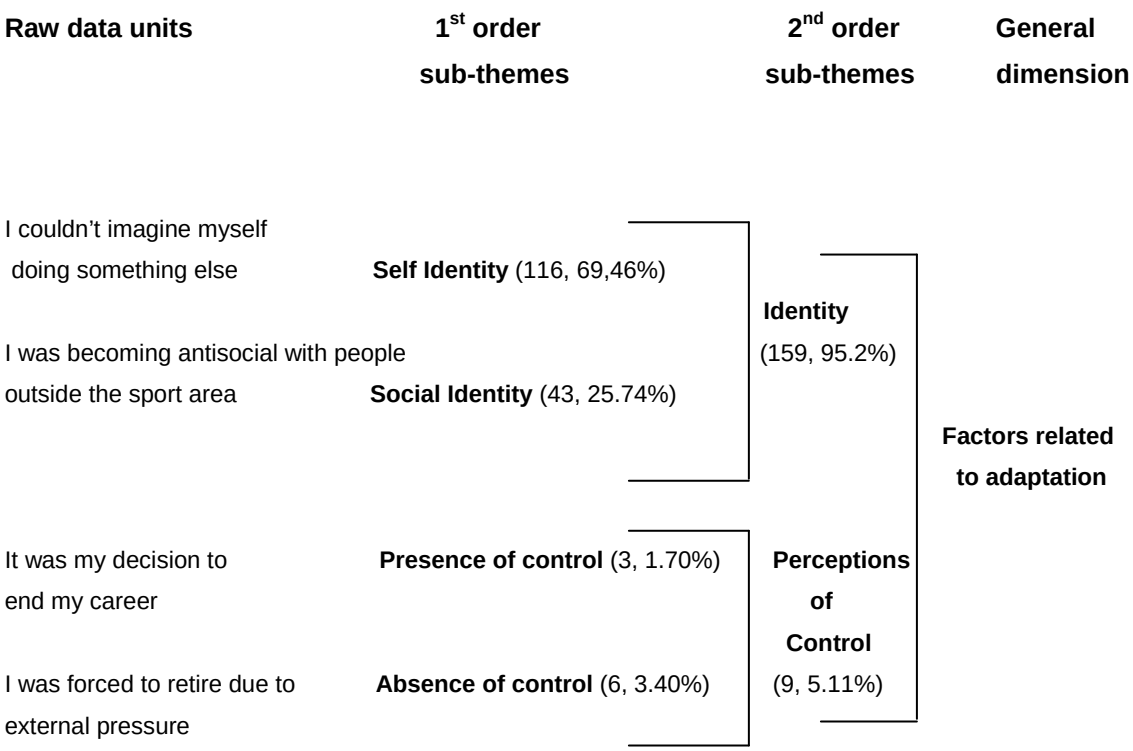


Figure 9. Factors related to adaptation to sports career termination

4.1.3. Available resources

The 'available resources' dimension consisted of a total of 793 raw data units. There were three 2nd order sub-themes that this dimension represented. These were 'social support', 'coping skills', and 'mental preparation'. Of these, 'social support' was the theme that characterized the most 1st order sub-themes. It was divided into two parts: a) social support before career termination, b) social support after career termination and these two were each divided into positive and negative social support. This 2nd order sub-theme encapsulated a total of 663 raw data themes and emerged from the following main questions: (before career termination) 'During your sporting career how did your coach support you, encourage you, motivate you?' and 'How did your family (partner, friends) support your passion for sport?', (after career

termination) ‘What was your relationship with your coach (family, partner, friends) like that period of time?’, and the probes ‘Did you discuss your decision with your coach (family, partner, friends)?’ and ‘What was the support like from your coach (family, partner, friends) to your decision?’. It is important to note that regarding the support received before and after career termination, the participants focused on their coaches’ emotional and instrumental support, on their parents’ and partners’ emotional and financial support, on their friends’ emotional support and finally on the Sport Organization’s instrumental and financial support. Regarding the themes ‘coping skills’ and ‘mental preparation’, the results were arisen from the conversation between the athlete and the researcher. Thus, there was no need for specific questions to be asked in order to explore their experiences on these matters. The 1st and 2nd order sub-themes are shown in detail (with total number of raw data units and frequency percentage corresponding to them in brackets) in Figure 10.

As described above, these specific relationships among athletes and their environment, reflecting the social support process, are divided into two periods: before and after athletic retirement. Regarding positive coaches’ support during the competitive years, athletes reported positive supportive behaviours. The athletes’ answers were very clear and are represented by the quotes: “My coach had been very supportive. He was like a second father to me”, “My coach was very helpful to me. He was standing by me not only as a coach but also as a friend”; “My coach was giving me courage and motives to go on”; “When I asked for my coach’s support and participation to a decision I had to make, he had never said no”.

Similar to these findings concerning athletes’ support systems, athletes mentioned their close environment’s positive behaviour while they were competing. According to athletes’ experiences, parents’ help had been a catalytic factor for them to continue training: “I had my financial problems solved from my father and that was very important to me as I could devote to my sport without worrying for my future”; “My family still loved and encouraged me beyond the successes or failures I had had”; “My family was very proud of me”. Athletes’ answers regarding their partners’ and friends’ support during their competitive years, were equally remarkable. Their answers are represented by the following quote: “My partner not only accepted the fact that I

had had little spare time, but also encouraged me to do more"; "I think I was one of the few athletes that received so much help from her partner"; "My friends were very proud of me".

On the other hand, there were individuals who were not receiving the support they would desire during the time they were active athletes. Remarkably, athletes reported their coaches' strict behaviour towards them and the lack of encouragement: "My coach was very oppressive. He wasn't even allowing me to talk to boys at school"; "My coach was never pleased. He was always asking for something more"; "I could say that my coach didn't encourage me at all". In addition, athletes described their parents' and partners' lack of support during their competitive years: "I would like my family to have been more supportive"; "They had to protect me when I needed it. If they had protected me I would have continued training". "My partner was very competitive, so I couldn't receive any support from him"; "If my partner was more supportive, I would probably continue training".

The most interesting part of the interview was the time when the former athletes were describing their environment's support during their transition process to life after sports. Answers that included positive statements about coaches' supportive behaviors are reflected to the following quotes: "I and my coach had had a very strong relationship and we still have"; "My coach had asked me to be his assistant. That was a great help to me"; "My coach had been staying in touch with me for many years after I stopped"; "He was willing to help me, if I needed it'. In addition, former athletes reported their family's, partners' and friends' psychological, financial, occupational assistance: "My family supported me financially after I stopped"; "I received great help from my parents. Psychological and financial help"; "My father helped me to find a job after I stopped". "I and my partner had been having very long discussions about my career termination and that helped me a lot"; "I was feeling very secure psychologically and financially. I had my husband to help me whenever I needed to"; "My partner helped me to adjust better in life after sports". "My friends helped me by asking me very often to go out with them and forget my problems".

Anyone would expect that there were no athletes or at least few athletes who would report that they were not received help from their close environment

during the time they were trying to adapt to the life after sports. Nevertheless, usually athletes do not receive the support they desire after they terminate their athletic career. Quotes that represent coaches', family's, friends' lack of support towards athletes are mentioned below: "I couldn't say that my coach stayed in touch with me after I stopped"; "He didn't help me at all. I asked for his help but he said that he wasn't being able to help me"; "We stopped having contact immediately after I terminated my career"; "We didn't have the contact we used to have when I was an athlete". "My father wasn't speaking to me for many years"; "Nobody helped me financially. Not even my parents". "Unfortunately you are all alone in that. There aren't any friends". It is remarkable the fact that there were not any quotes about partners' lack of support. All the former female athletes who were in a relationship, engaged or married received a great amount of help from their partners after they left from the sporting domain and no one reported dissatisfaction.

The 2nd order sub-theme related to 'available resources' was 'coping skills' and comprised seven 1st order sub-themes. It consisted of a total of 117 raw data themes and emerged from the main question, 'How was the period between terminating and trying to adjust to the new way of life?' Staying in touch with the sport environment was the most frequently coping strategy for a better adjustment to retirement. A good example of a way a participant used this coping strategy can be seen in the quote: "I continued going to the stadium, just to watch my teammates' training". A different participant gave an example of how her decision to be a coach afterwards helped her to have a successful adjustment to retirement:

> "I was still in the same environment and doing almost the same things. I had my own athletes and I was living through them. That helped me, so the negative feelings to be dramatically reduced and the positive feelings to prevail".

An interesting coping strategy used by the participants, was the 'another focus of interest' and particularly the arrival of a baby. One example of this 1st order theme was: "I was dedicated to my child's bring up. I didn't have time to worry. Motherhood helped me to forget and to find a new interest. This interest was my baby". The rest 1st order sub-themes that the 2nd order sub-theme 'coping

skills' was related to, were 'Motivation in her post-athletic career', 'Exercise', 'Keeping busy', 'Re-orientation of thinking', and 'Change of environment'.

Finally, 'mental preparation' also emerged as a theme to describe athlete's preparation for their retirement process. Only 3 of the 18 athletes were prepared mentally for their retirement. This theme came from raw data such as the following: "I was thinking of terminating my career, long ago before I finally stop".

The 2nd order sub-themes discussed above relate to the available recourses that offered to the athletes or used by the athletes before and after their sports career termination, for a better adaptation to post-sport life.

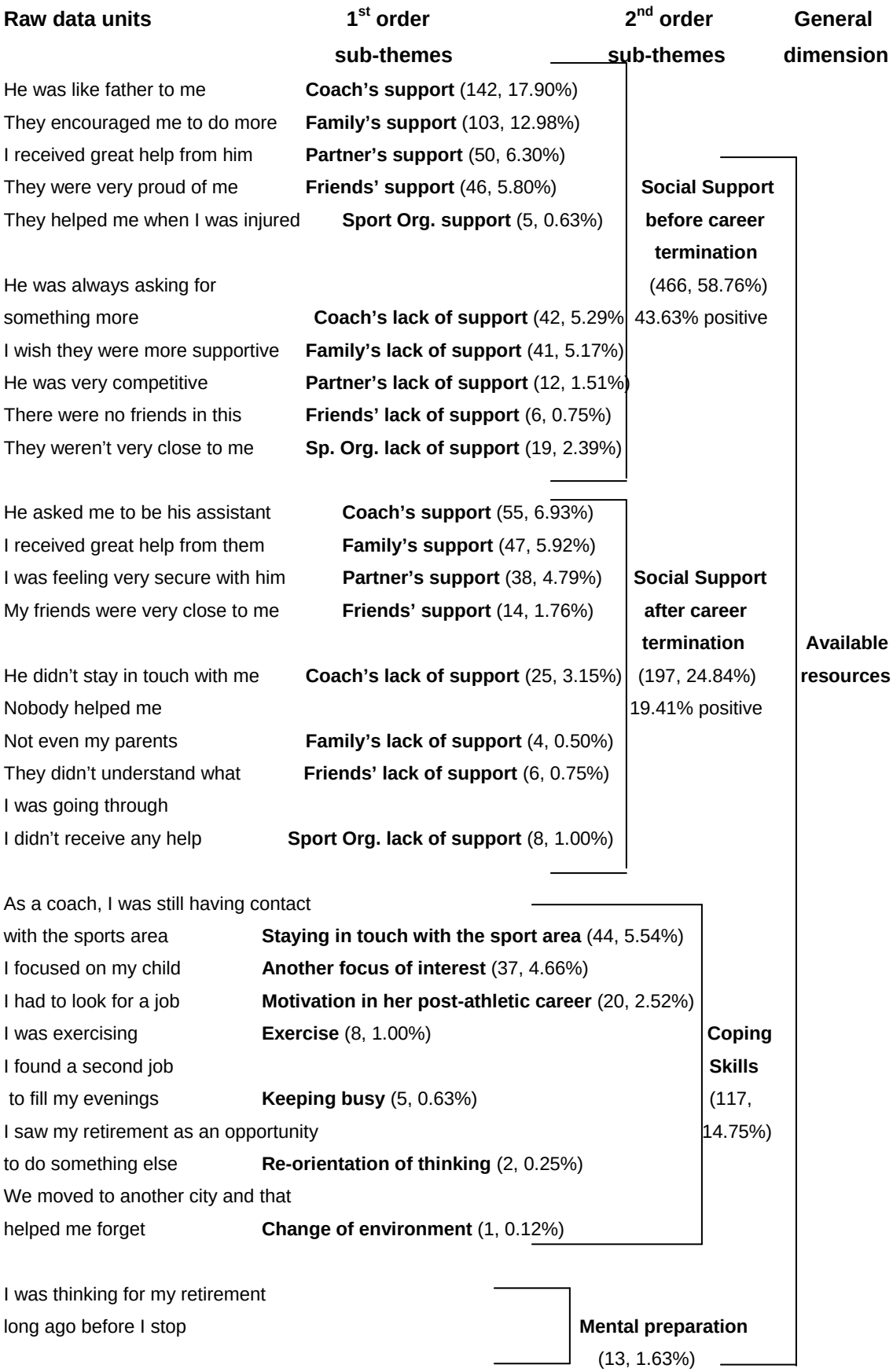


Figure 10. Available resources

4.1.4. Quality of adaptation to life after sports

The quality of adaptation dimension consisted of a total of 186 raw data units and emerged from the main question, 'What emotions did you experience during the transitional period?'. There were three 2nd order sub-themes that the dimension 'quality of adaptation' represented. These were 'adjustment difficulties', 'financial / occupational problems' and 'healthy career termination'. The 1st and 2nd order sub-themes are shown in detail (with total number of raw data units and frequency percentage corresponding to them in brackets) in Figure 11. The 'adjustment difficulties' 2nd order sub-theme was the only which was broken down into further sub-themes. The former emerged from the two 1st order sub-themes 'distressful reactions' and 'identity crisis'. The 'distressful reactions' 1st order sub-theme was evidenced by the quotes:

> "For almost a month I had been having a terrible headache due to my sadness, that I couldn't touch my pillow. My family took me to a doctor but I had nothing. My psychology was the reason'. 'I didn't want to watch games on the television for a very long period of time'. 'I felt like someone ripped my heart out. I was feeling really bad, a complete emptiness".

It is interesting to note that, two of the respondents started crying since they remembered their very difficult transition in the post-sport life. Another participant gave an example of how she experienced her identity crisis after sports career termination: "I felt like I wasn't any more an important person compared to what I have been when I was an athlete".

Of the other 2nd order sub-themes, the following comment represents 'financial / occupational problems':

> "During my sport career I didn't have to worry about anything. But, when I stopped I had to find a job which had been very hard for me. Everyone was asking for experience and the only thing I knew was to run. I didn't know for anything else. I managed to find a job two years later".

Finally, 'healthy career termination' in a total of only 52 raw data units and 27.95% frequency also emerged as a theme to describe athlete's quality of adaptation to career termination:

"I didn't have any negative feelings and I was adapted to my new life immediately as I didn't loose contact with the sport environment and I had also had my children to focus on".

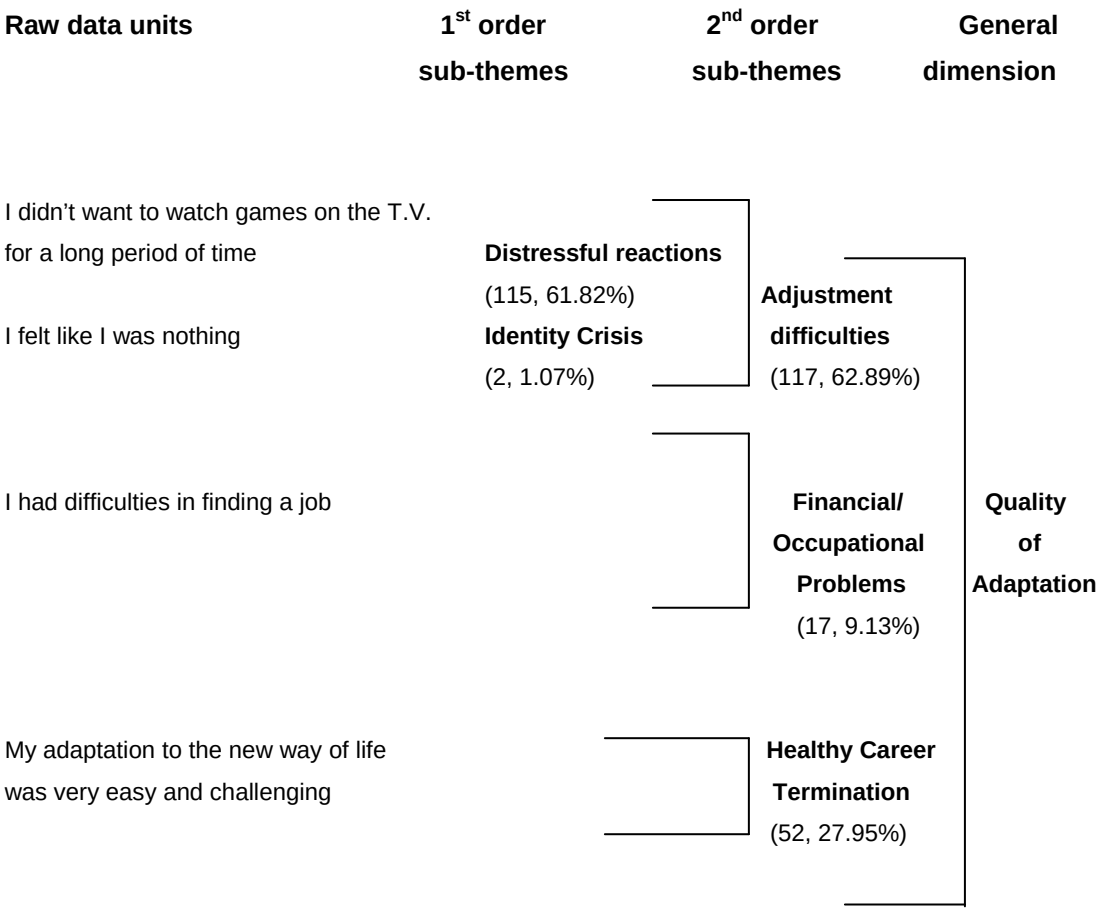


Figure 11. Quality of adaptation to life after sports

4.2. Life Histories

The two life-history interviews were also analyzed using content analysis procedures. In total, 192 raw data units emerged from the transcribed participants' answers. Specifically, 17 1st order sub-themes were created and included these 185 raw data units which were grouped into 9 2nd order sub-themes and four general categories followed the main components of Taylor and Ogilvie's conceptual model of adaptation to sport career termination.

4.2.1. Reasons for sports career termination

Analysing the transcripts very carefully, two main reasons emerged from the main question, 'how did you decide terminating your sporting career'? A total of 26 raw data units were identified in these two 2nd order sub-themes where the main component of Taylor and Ogilvie's conceptual model 'causes for sports career termination' was represented. These 2nd order sub-themes were 'sport related issues' and 'drug abuse'. These are shown in detail in figure 12. Sport related issues and specifically 'problems with the sport community' (19 raw data units) was the reason that included the most quotes according to athletes' stories and is represented by the following quote:

> "I have been a champion for six years and I was expecting at least from the people around me (sporting people) some respect for the victories I was bringing to the team. Nevertheless, they were treating me awfully because I wasn't doing what they were asking me to do. They wanted to control my sporting and my personal life. So, after a two years period of pressures and bad behaviours the decision to terminate my career was inevitable."

The second causal factor for retirement from sports was drug abuse (7 raw data units). The following quote depicts a good example of this cause:

> "I was at the pick of my sporting career. Unfortunately, at the final race of my career I was found from the experts, positive in some specific drugs that increase the performance. My coach said that they were vegetal and not illegal. But, at the end I realized that he misled me because he wanted me to take these drugs. The result was me to stop competing

and he to stop train other athletes. We both left from the sporting environment ashamed and really sad."

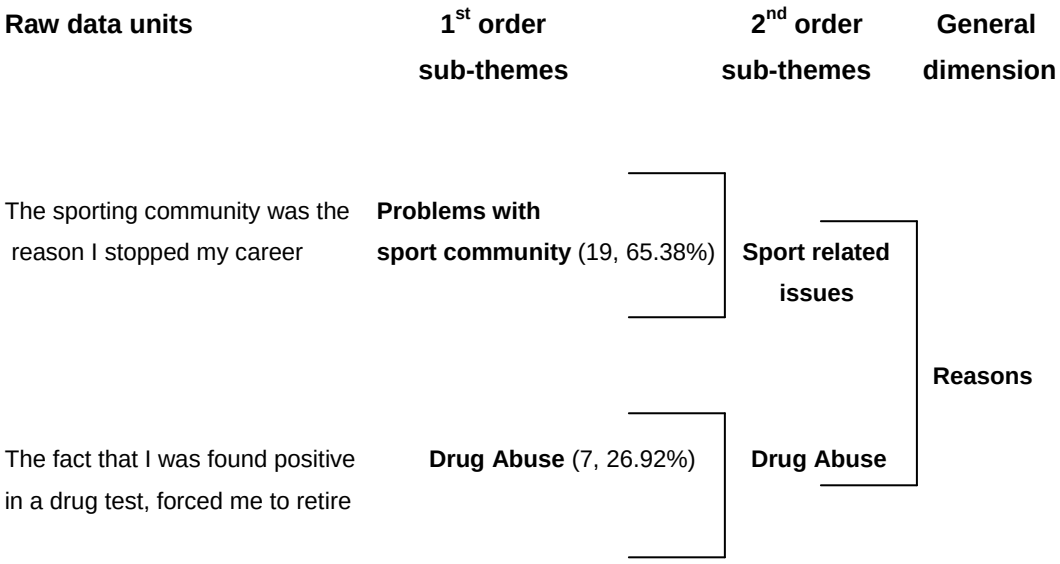


Figure 12. Reasons for sports career termination (Life Histories)

4.2.2. Factors related to adaptation to athletic retirement

The "factors related to adaptation to sports career termination" dimension consisted of a total of 23 raw data units emerged from the main questions 'tell me about your life when you were competing and how your sporting success influenced your competitive and social life', 'tell me about your life now and how your role as an athlete changed after athletic retirement' and finally 'how your decision to end your sporting career influenced your life in general'.

This dimension of Taylor and Ogilvie's conceptual model is represented by two 2nd order sub-themes, 'identity' and 'perceptions of control' where identity was divided into the 2 1st order sub-themes 'self identity' and 'social identity' and consisted in total of 22 raw data units. These are shown in detail in Figure 13.

In a total of 15 raw data units, the 'self identity' dimension was described according to participants' stories. The 'self identity' or in other words the athletic identity is the factor that influence if not most but in a great degree, the athlete's sport and personal life. A good example can be seen in the quote:

> 'My life was fully connected to my sport. I was an athlete and nothing else. I was so happy that I couldn't imagine myself after many years where the sport would be over and me being something else. I couldn't and I didn't want to put myself in that situation'.

The sporting success of these two athletes influenced their life so much that they weren't capable to have other social relationships outside their sport. The characteristic of 'social identity' in a total of 7 raw data units is represented by the following quote: 'I had to exercise 2 and sometimes 3 times a day. So, I did not have time to socialize. As a result I couldn't develop any friendships'.

The 'perception of control' characteristic consisted of one 1st order theme 'absence of control' in 7 raw data units. 'I couldn't imagine that I would terminate my sporting career so suddenly. I was so young and I had so much to give. But, the circumstances forced me to do what I finally did'.

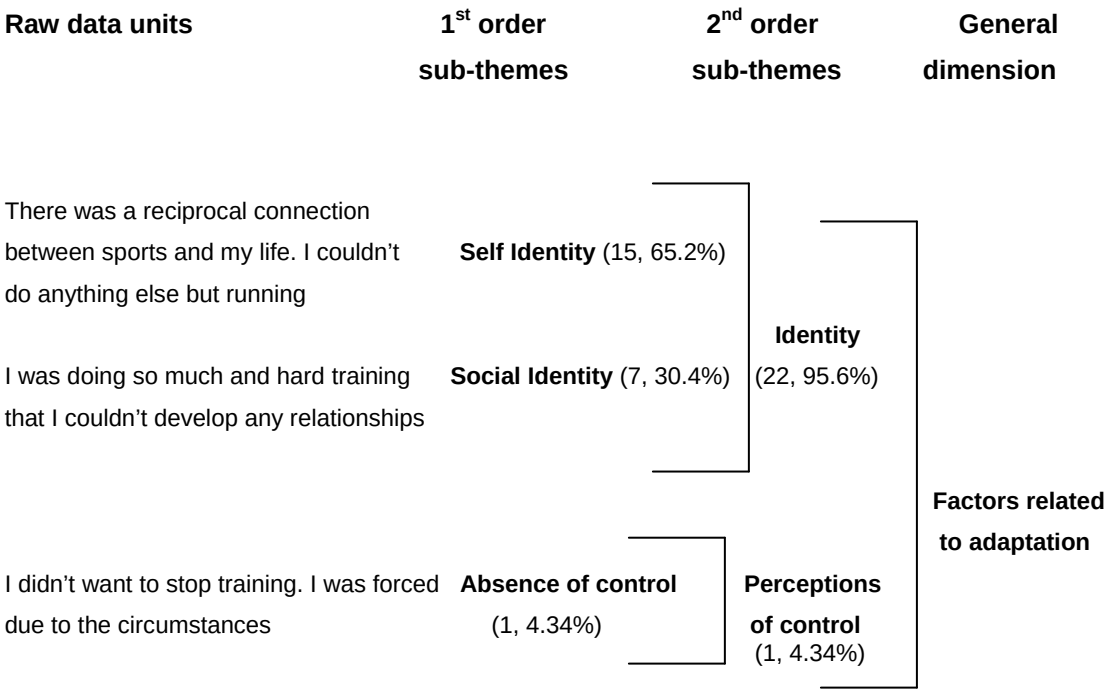


Figure 13. Factors related to adaptation to athletic retirement (Life Histories)

4.2.3. Available recourses

From the data in a total of 132 raw data units, three main categories emerged from the main questions: ‘tell me about your personal and social relationships (partner, family, coach) when you were elite athlete’ and the probe ‘tell me about the supportive nature of these relationships’, then ‘what life was like after athletic retirement’, and ‘tell me about your personal and social relationships after athletic retirement’ and the probe ‘tell me about the supportive nature of these relationships at that period of time’. There are three 2nd order sub-themes that the ‘available recourses’ dimension is represented. These are the ‘social support before athletic retirement’ (58 raw data units and four 1st order sub-themes), ‘social support after athletic retirement’ (17 raw data units and two first order sub-themes) and ‘coping skills’ (57 raw data units and five 1st order sub-themes). These are shown in detail in Figure 14.

In this research, social support also played a crucial and very important role during athletes’ competition years and later when they retire. The whole life period was divided into two parts in order to compare how the same people reacted before and after athlete’s retirement from sports. Social support before career termination was marked positively only from family’s and partner’s support and negatively from coaches’ and friends’ support. In a total of 58 raw data units this theme is represented by the quotes: ‘I was very relaxed and focused only to my sport as I had my family to take care of everything else’, ‘My father hadn’t missed not even one training. He was very supportive’, ‘My boyfriend was very patient despite the fact that we couldn’t meet whenever we wanted to’, ‘My coach didn’t care about me. He cared only for himself. He wanted to go higher as a coach and the only thing he wanted from was to win. He didn’t care at all for my personal needs’, ‘My friends were my family and my boyfriend. The few friends I had outside the sporting area were incapable to understand my life as they had no relationship with sports’.

Similarly, after sports career termination, the same thing also happened. The athletes received support from their partners as before they stop and no support at all from their coaches. Good examples of these themes according to athletes’ stories are: ‘My boyfriend knew what I was going through and he was always willing to seat and listen to me and he always had something nice to

say. He was the best! That's why I decided to marry him (laugh!)', 'During the very serious accusations when they found me positive in drugs, he did not defend me at all. He did not say that he was the one who gave me those things. After that we lost contact at all'.

The other 2nd order sub-theme related to 'available recourses' dimension was 'coping skills'. It comprised five 1st order sub-themes and consisted of a total of 57 raw data units. 'Another focus of interest', motivation to her post-athletic career', 'exercise' and 're-orientation of thinking' were used as coping recourses from both participants. In addition, one of the two athletes also changed environment in order to feel better and try to get over that painful situation. The following narrative quotes depict good examples to describe these specific themes:

> 'My home was next to the stadium. I was obliged every time I had to go out to the balcony, to watch people with sporting outfits or to hear loud voices coming from there. I couldn't do it any more. I had to go and live with my parents for a while and then to come back and search for a new place to live. So I did it!'

and,

> 'The only thing I knew how to do it, was to run. When I stopped, it was a great opportunity to go and learn something new. So I started guitar lessons which I always wanted but I didn't had the time. This helped me not only educationally but also to forget the difficult situation I was going through'.

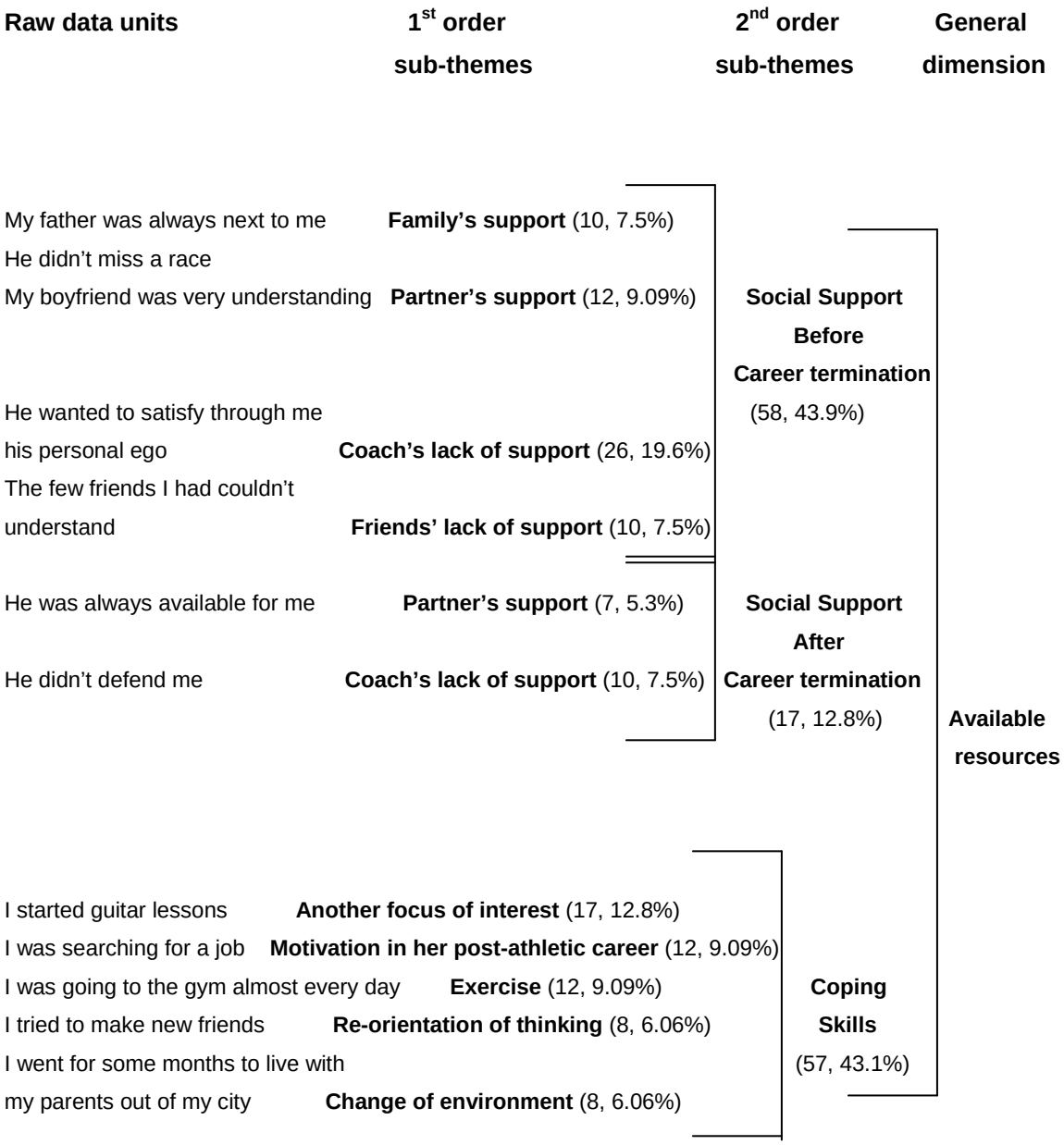


Figure 14. Available resources (Life Histories)

4.2.4. Quality of adaptation to post-sport life

Every athlete experiences athletic retirement in a different way. In this research the two athletes have had serious problems when they terminated their sporting career. Specifically, the 'quality of adaptation to life after sports' dimension consisted of two 2nd order sub-themes, in a total of 22 raw data themes. These were 'adaptation problems' and 'financial difficulties'. The 1st and 2nd order sub-themes are shown in detail in Figure 15. The 2nd order sub-theme 'adaptation problems' included the 'distressful reactions' theme in a total of 15 raw data units. This theme came from raw data such as the following:

> 'When I stopped, the first two months my life was full. I was so happy that I could do the things I couldn't do all the previous years. But after that period I started to miss my sport and the environment I used to have as my second home. As a result, I experienced a very heavy depression and I asked for an expert's opinion. He advised me to participate to some seminars and so I did. I started to feel well again after 1,5 years when I decided to start exercising and find a job. I remember that period and I feel so sad…'

The participants also described their difficulty to find a job as they were inexperienced and also had limited knowledge to anything beyond sports. The first participant found a job 2 years later and the other decided to start a business on her own 3 years later. They were both supported financially by their parents as they had no income for all these years. The 2nd order sub-theme 'financial difficulties' consisted of 22 raw data units and the following quote is a good example of this specific theme:

> 'My financial situation until the time I started to work was indescribable. There were times that I didn't have money to take the bus or to meet a friend and have a coffee. I used to have so much money when I was competing that I couldn't imagine myself being "poor". Fortunately I had my parents to support me but I felt very bad as I was too old to ask for money. After 3 years the problem finally solved as I started my own business.'

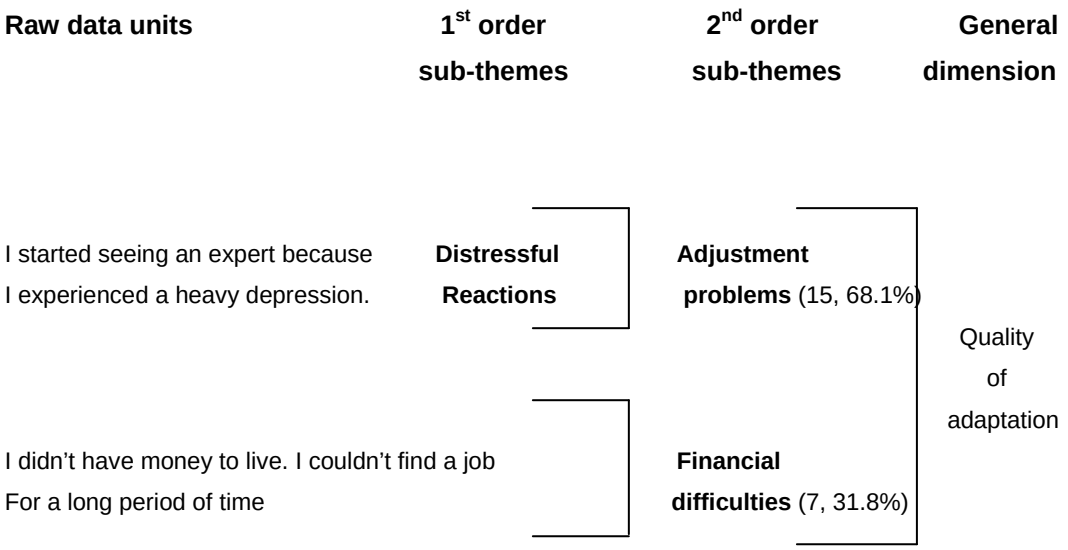


Figure 15. Quality of Adaptation to post-sport life (Life Histories)

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The aims of this study were to uncover the reasons for sports career termination, to investigate what coping strategies athletes used for their adjustment to retirement, to explore how the social networks before and after athlete's career termination influence the quality of adaptation and finally to provide recommendations to athletes, coaches and significant others for a successful adjustment to retirement. The emergent themes from the analyses were somewhat different to those detailed in the literature. It is important to note that this research included two kinds of studies having the same purpose. Semi-structured interviews and life histories. First of all the eighteen semi-structured interviews were preceded (before the Olympic Games in Athens on 2004) and the two life history interviews were conducted few years later (after the Olympic Games). Thus, it is interesting to see how the findings of the life histories are connected with the findings of the first study of semi-structured interviews.

This study looked at Greek female elite athletes from track and field athletics; therefore these findings cannot be generalized to another group of athletes. Initially, Blaesild and Stelter's (2003) study has shown that the quality of career transition out of professional sport primarily depends on the cause of retirement, the level of athletic identity, the quality of social support and the internal and external social network. Most of the studies that exist in the literature have shown that athletes usually terminate their athletic career due to advancing age or to an injury. However, in contrast to the expectations of Kolt and Kirkby (1996), injuries were evaluated as the least important factor for ending a sport career. In addition, Johns et al. (1990) observed that injuries are not the main reason for sports career termination. The results of the present study are consistent with these studies mentioned above, where there are other reasons than an injury that lead athletes out of the sporting area. Instead, lack of motivation to continue competing at the elite level, problems with the coach or family reasons, have been the main reasons Greek female former elite athletes ended their sport career. In addition, as it is not unusual for track and

field female athletes to devote at least 6 hours a day to training, ending the sport career is the result of physical and mental exhaustion that athletes often suffer during the competitive years.

A new reason for retirement from sports has arisen from our research study. Some of the athletes who had no improvement on their performance for a long period of time, they felt they had to take drugs in order to be capable of competitors' achievements. But as many felt that this method of improvement did not correlate to their character, they made the decision to end their sport career. According to participants' statements, the phenomenon of drug abuse is a recent one and it appears to be on the increase. On the other hand, it is interesting that few years later this fact obtained different dimensions. Meanwhile, the Olympic Games were held in Athens on 2004 and after this event the situation in Greece were changed for athletics and other sports. Nowadays, most athletes are professionals and gain more money than before. So, the dependence from a sport is much stronger and finally the transition to the life after sports much more painful. Few years before, to be a successful athlete required hard work and lots of sacrifices. But in recent years, drug abuse is a very common situation. The competition is so big that athletes who want to be on the first places use unorthodox methods in order to achieve their goals. Unfortunately, here in Greece, before the Olympic Games in Beijing we were hearing on the news almost every day about athletes who were found positive on drugs. Specifically, the entire team of weight lifting was found positive and was eliminated from the Greek team to Beijing. In the present study with the two life histories, according to an athlete's story, the use of drugs and a test after a game which found her positive was the reason that forced her to retire even though she wasn't too old to continue competing.

Regarding the second component, the level of athletic identity, researchers have found evidence to suggest that individuals with strong athletic identities risk experiencing difficulties after sport career termination (e.g., Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Cecic-Erpic, 1998; Cecic Erpic et al. 2004; Gordon, 1995; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). According to these studies, a strong athletic identity influences the occurrence of difficulties in different aspects of sport career termination and adaptation to post-sport life.

Due to their early commitment to sport, athletes experience difficulties adapting to social roles unrelated to sport. In addition, Grove, Lavallee and Gordon (1997), Lavallee (2005), and Lally (2007) put forward the point of view that athletic identity at the time of retirement is also positively correlated with the degree of emotional and social adjustment required, as well as the amount of time required to adjust emotionally and socially to post-sport life. The findings of the present study are in agreement with the previous studies as the most of the participants had a strong athletic identity when their social identity was very low. Additionally, the participants reported that they were fully committed to their sport trying to build a very strong athletic identity, and they had completely neglected their social existence. Consequently, terminating their career has been more likely unexpected and outside their control than voluntary and under control. Moreover, when these athletes finally ended their sport career, it was very difficult for them to realize that they were no longer athletes. So, by staying in touch with their sport environment and having something concrete and challenging to turn to (e.g., having a baby) as their sport career came to an end, helped them redirect all the energy that had been channelled into a sport career and in many cases helped ease the transition to a new life. However, it is important to emphasize that staying in touch with the sport environment or the use of other available coping strategies, could not exclusively guarantee an easy transition (Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

The nature of each athlete's transition often depends very much on the interaction of a number of factors, such as his/her personal relationships and the degree of support he/she receives during the competitive years and during the transition process. "Relationships in sport are relevant and even critical throughout an athlete's career: from developing talent, to maintaining it, coping with competition stress, injuries or career transitions. Social support is always expected, needed, requested, and, fortunately, usually provided. A network of relationships is always presumed" (Vanden Auweele & Rzewnicki, 2000, p. 224). Most discussions of social relationships and social support emphasize the supportive nature of relationships. For example, some theorists (e.g., Cobb, 1976) suggest that the presence of social relationships is itself supportive. Relationships are important because we expect that certain relational partners

will engage in appropriate support acts either spontaneously or when called upon during stressful events. Over the past three decades, social support has become a major topic for social psychological investigation (Sarason, Sarason, & Gurung, 1997).

Seven athletes in the first study of semi-structured interviews mentioned that they had felt all alone when they ended their sport careers and they wished they had had some support. As well, it is interesting to note that several of the participants who indicated that they had not been very close to either their coaches or their family and friends, had experienced a quite difficult transitional period. Regarding this matter, Koukouris (2004) found that after the end of a competitive career, there is a serious reduction in social contact among coaches and former athletes. The way the sport organizations and coaches behave towards the gymnasts is negative after the end of the sporting career. It is significant that there were no athletes who mentioned that they did not receive any kind of support from their partners once they retired. Similarly, on the second study of the life histories, we had almost the same reports about athletes' relationships before and after sports career termination. The only and most significant difference is that in both periods athletes did not receive any support from their coaches but a great amount of support from their partners. In recent years, to build a relationship is extremely difficult. Someone would expect that the coach-athlete relationship would be always the strongest feeling in athletes sporting life. Nevertheless, when everything has to do with money and to become a champion means to gain lots of money, the relationships not exist. For them, the personal profits from a big sporting success are much more important than a strong and stable relationship. In this study the two athletes' relationship with their coach is completely inadequate. The only support they received before and after their athletic retirement was from their partners and their family. Studying social support in marriage, spouses appear to play a critical role in the provision of support among married couples (Beach, Martin, Blum, & Roman, 1993) and in many situations, support provided by a spouse or an intimate partner appears to be very important (Brown & Harris, 1978). Specifically, support among spouses has been described as a primary element of close relationships (e.g., Kelley et al., 1983). Similarly, Weiss (1980, p.201)

defined social support as “skills, which provide companionship, comforting and understanding” and he maintained that the quality of a marriage is determined in part by the level of support that spouses provide to each other. Several investigators have stressed the need to better understand support processes within close relationships particularly marital relationships (e.g., Carels & Baucom, 1999). However, the social support and the marital literature have until recently been quite separate, despite the fact that spouses are typically the most important support providers for married persons. Specific types of supportive activities from spouses can increase the recipient’s sense of social connection, self-worth and competence and they can also help the recipient reframe the experience to make it less stressful. Supportive actions from spouses can also distract the recipient from worries associated with the stressful experience, facilitate physical relaxation, and reinforce other coping strategies. Most research on the relations between spousal support and distress has assessed both support and distress from the support recipient’s perspective (perceived support). In general, receiving supportive behaviours, such as expressions of concern, from one’s spouse is related to lower levels of distress (Druley & Townsend, 1998). Studies that compare support from different sources suggest that supportive behaviours from one’s spouse are more strongly related to lower levels of distress following stressful events than are supportive behaviours from other sources (Coyne & Anderson, 1999). Despite the fact that researchers have focused a great deal of attention on the effects of social support on personal relationships, little attention has been paid to the factors that may account for these effects. Surprisingly, little is known about the way social support operates (Throits, 1986). In other words, there is a lack of understanding the role that our relationships with others play in times of stress. Throits (1986) convincingly illustrated this deficit by pointing out that, if a practitioner were to decide to put into practice the findings linking social support to adjustment, he or she would have difficulty knowing what to advice support personnel to actually do. First of all, when facing a stressful event, those in ongoing close relationships must decide the extent to which they involve their partner in their problems. Similarly, partners of persons facing stressful events must be sensitive to issues of dominance and control. Doing too much for their

partner may be interpreted as domineering or “taking over”, whereas doing too little may be perceived as lack of concern or interest. A support person could be encouraged to perform a range of different roles. For example, it could be suggested that a support person act primarily as a confidant, as an adviser, as a source of practical assistance, or as some combination of these roles. Reciprocity in the exchange of assistance is also important (Antonucci & Jackson, 1990). In Gottlied’s study (1985), members of a couple are affected by stressors that impact upon their partner, and by their partner’s success in coping with stress. According to the study of Manne and Zautra (1989) on the relations among spousal support, coping and adjustment of women with rheumatoid arthritis, spousal support had effects on women’s adjustment to the illness only through its effects on their coping responses.

It is interesting to note that despite the extensive research that exists on athletic retirement in general no research has been conducted to investigate emotions, cognitions and behaviours in athlete-partner relationship and how this relationship affects athlete’s adjustment to life after sports.

Ogilvie and Howe (1981) in explaining a family’s behaviour towards the retired athlete stated that their support (family) might also be affected by retirement. Family members who have enjoyed participation in and identification with the fame and prestige associated with the athlete may not support the athlete’s decision to retire. Forced to deal with their own sense of loss, family members are often unable to feel the retired athlete’s need for support and understanding. Nevertheless, it would seem that (according to athletes’ statements in the present study) emotional, financial and instrumental support from coaches, families or friends would have helped them in coping with factors like financial or personal problems, and thus might have helped make the movement to a new career and new interests smoother and less painful. Recommendations by the participants suggest that support from coaches, families, partners and friends would facilitate the athletic retirement process.

According to this research, such components as causes of retirement, athletic identity, coping strategies and social support could predict the quality of adaptation to career termination. With unexpected and involuntary cause for

retirement, strong athletic identity, inadequate coping skills and lack of social support after retirement, it is more likely the athlete to experience difficulties in the adaptation process. In fact, most of the participants experienced either adjustment difficulties or financial / occupational problems. Nevertheless, there is a strong difference on the quality of adaptation between the study of the semi-structured interview questions and the life histories. In the first study the participants had adjustment difficulties but very soon found something to help them recover. On the other hand, on the second study the trauma was so big and the transition was so painful that one of the two athletes had to visit an expert to help her deal with that situation. The period that was needed for both participants for a successful adaptation, psychologically and financially was more than 2 years. Nowadays, the life has become very demanding and can not be compared with how the people lived 15 or 20 years before. That period, an athlete was gaining enough money just to help him/her live and have little to spend for his/her personal needs. The time period the two athletes were doing sports and finally terminated their career (about 15 years later than the athletes from the first study) was completely different as the amounts of money were much bigger and enough to make the athletes feel more secure but also more sad when they finally lost these advantages due to their retirement from sports. They were used of having an easy life financially and the sudden disruption made them feel insecure and lost. That's why these two athletes experienced the transition to life after sports with financial difficulties and depression.

While, this study enriches our understanding of retirement experiences, especially with respect to elite female track and field athletes, some questions still remain. For instance, in what ways do female athletes differ from male athletes? Do they terminate their careers for different reasons? Eagly (1987) stated that in society, there are differences in gender role expectations towards males and females. Female athletes have fewer work opportunities beyond the playing field (Hall, 2001). Thus, the definitions of successful career transitions must take this discrepancy into consideration. In addition, men in general are expected to be powerful and earn family's income when women are expected to be more sensitive, hold the family together and care for the household duties. Thus, it would be reasonable to assume that female athletes leave the

sporting domain earlier and for different reasons than male athletes do (Alfermann, 2000). Consequently, differences that can be found can be explained most by gender-role expectations. Alfermann (1995), found that female athletes not only enter the domain of sports at a younger age than males do, but they also leave it at a younger age, more often mentioning as reason for retirement family obligations, less often expect professional opportunities from their sporting career (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985) and finally less often find a job in the sport system after they retire than male athletes do. More evidence in this area is scarce. Interestingly, the findings of the present study are in some point consistent with Alfermann's view in terms of the reasons of retirement. One of the main reasons that have arisen from the present research was family reasons. On the other hand, and probably because track and field female athletes have more masculine traits than women from other sports, other causes were found also for athletic retirement.

In summary, the major factors that seemed to determine, for the majority of athletes, the quality of adaptation to career termination have been outlined. In most of the cases no single factor guaranteed an easy adjustment or condemned an athlete to a difficult transition. However, the ease or difficulty of the transition phase was very much dependent upon a complex interaction of all these factors and each of the twenty retired athletes reacted to them in their own individual way.

Taylor and Ogilvie's conceptual model describes the entire course of athletic retirement, from the time the athlete is competing, until the time he/she terminates his/her career. Greek female elite athletes from track and field athletics were studied, their experiences and feelings during a potential stressful period of the athletic retirement were explored, using this conceptual model as a guide. Additionally, this study is consistent with Crook and Robinson's (1991) view that the quality of their adaptation to post-sport life is influenced by the interaction of the factors that exist in the person itself –his/her personality characteristics (such as athletic identity, developmental experiences, social identity) - with the factors that exist in the environment (social support systems, coping strategies, pre-retirement planning). This study also supports Werthner's and Orlick's (1986) assumption that no single factor

will determine the amount of emotional crisis, or the ultimate success or failure of the athlete's retirement from sport and transition into a post-sport life. According to the findings of the present study, an athlete with strong athletic identity and positive supportive behaviours is more likely to have an easy adaptation to life after sports. If the 'available recourses' component of the conceptual model is positive, the apparent results will also be positive. In conclusion, this study with Greek female elite athletes has shown that athletes with a supportive environment before and after sports, athletes with adequate coping skills, and athletes who planned their retirement in advance, experienced a successful adjustment to retirement. Nevertheless, most of the participants (forteen out of twenty) experienced difficult career transitions because none of them reported the use of any coping skills, or had positive experiences in terms of the availability of social support, and none of them had any pre-retirement planning.

5.1. Recommendations

Results from the main question ‘what would you suggest to athletes, coaches and significant others for a successful adjustment to retirement from sports?’ are presented in Table 1. According to their opinion and their experience, the majority of the participants interviewed gave the same recommendations to athletes, their coaches and their families, partners and friends.

Athletes should:	Coaches should:	Families, partners and friends should:
➢ Realize the shortness of their athletic career	➢ Stay in touch with their retired athletes	➢ Be willing to help (financially or psychologically)
➢ Find new interests	➢ Discuss with them whenever they need to	➢ Stay close
➢ Keep the friends they used to have	➢ Give them guidance	➢ Respect their decisions
➢ Stay in touch with the sport environment	➢ Help them prepare a pre-retirement planning	➢ Not change their attitude
➢ Stay in touch with their coaches and teammates	➢ Encourage them to find new interests	➢ Help them to find new interests
➢ Do a pre-retirement planning	➢ Support them psychologically	➢ Help them to find a job
➢ Express their feelings to a close person	➢ Help them to find a job	➢ Love them

Table 1: Recommendations to athletes, coaches and significant others for a successful adjustment to retirement.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study offers more understanding to the domain of athletic retirement by examining the subjective retirement experiences and feelings of Greek elite female athletes from track and field athletics, a group of athletes not previously studied, by using qualitative methodology.

Interestingly, as mentioned in the discussion section, most of the findings of the present study support the findings of the most of the studies that exist in the literature. Themes such as pre-retirement planning, social support, self-identity and social identity, perceptions of control and adequate coping skills were all supported as important issues and substantiated theme/issues in prior models as well as the general conclusion of this study. The results from this study indicated that one factor mentioned earlier in the discussion that primarily helped or hindered athletes' is the availability of social support from athlete's social environment. Only six of the twenty respondents found their adjustment process to be easy, requiring minimal adjustments. The remaining fourteen former athletes described their retirement experiences as difficult and painful, marked by feelings of loss, anger and despair. According to the significance of social support as it was evidenced in the present study, perhaps if athletes had received guidance and support from their environment, they would have felt psychologically more confident to cope in the world outside sport. This might help ease the adjustment to retirement from sports and the adaptation to post-sport life. However, it is difficult to generalize regarding this point without further research into this concept.

This research study had several limitations that may have undue influence on data analysis and findings, and ultimately the conclusions.

The first limitation is that these findings are only representative of the twenty participants who are retired from track and field athletics residing in Greece. Thus, because participation in this study was limited to former elite female athletes living in Greece, these findings cannot be assumed to reflect

the sport-career transition experiences of professional athletes from other sports or other nations.

Another limitation of this study is that the findings may have been affected by the fact that the participants had been retired long time ago when the interviews were conducted and they were asked to recall past experiences. So, the interpretation of the findings should be handled with caution. The fact that this study is written by one author only can lead to bias. The author is aware of the fact that the answers are being interpreted in a subjective way. The study has been read by the project supervisor in order to prevent this. Bias can never totally by excluded though, since many of the questions, especially the follow up questions, are given in a subjective way as the author interprets the answers.

Greek female elite athletes were chosen to be studied for this research project. Other theorists and sport psychology researchers would regard the choice of that group of athletes to be studied as a limitation of this study. But, as described above, the fact that this group of athletes was chosen could be delimitation for that group. Different issues would alter the retirement experience for males, for athletes from other nation, or for those who retire from team sports. Nevertheless, the focus should be on specific athletes from specific sports. Thus, the researchers who desire to offer more understanding to the domain of sports career transition should take this matter into consideration.

This exploration of the sport-career transition experiences of former elite female Greek athletes from track and field athletics has yielded greater awareness and appreciation for some of the specific challenges that this group of athletes faced during this developmental stage, and how these experiences affected their adaptation to life after sports. It has also highlighted the need to continue research efforts in this particular area of inquiry. There is the potential to extend this research in several meaningful directions, such as seeking answers to additional questions concerning the sport-career transition experiences of former elite female Greek athletes, or to gain deeper insight into issues mentioned in these interviews and believed to be important but beyond the scope of this study. In describing interpersonal relationships before and

after athletic retirement, and specifically athlete-partner relationship, we should take into account two perspectives: first of all, we should investigate how athletes' interpersonal relationships and support interactions with their partners evolve, before, throughout, and after their athletic career. In line with this perspective, is the need to study the development of this relationship: how it is initiated and how it is maintained. Secondly, future research study needs to take an in-depth perspective by providing data on the quality of the athlete-partner relationship. Assessing athletes' perceptions of the interpersonal supportive behaviors, as well as they actually occur, can provide more insight into athletes' satisfaction with the characteristics of that relationship. This perspective also involves gaining insight into the partners' interpersonal perceptions of their relationship with the athlete.

The most important factor that has arisen from this study for the athletic transition process is social support. Whilst there is an increasing interest in the beneficial role social support may play in sport, there is a need to look at the specific support transactions, which aspects of social support help and how, and the function of personal relationships as exists in general psychology literature. A practical direction could be to develop intervention programs in terms of the sports career transition experience associated with social support. This program could consist of strategies to enhance athlete's social relationships or minimize relationship distress throughout their career. It was evidenced from these interviews that the quality of adaptation to life after sports was influenced by partner's support. But, because this study was focused only to athletes' views and experiences about the transition process and how the relationship with their partners affected their adaptation to life after sports, understanding of partners' views was not present. Thus, there is a need to explore partners' views and experiences related to athletic transition in order to gain better understanding about this important matter.

A future study should aim to gain insight into the experiences of athletes and their partners before, during and after athletic retirement. It should aim to delve deeply and draw meaning from athletes' and their partners' experiences, as lived and told by participants. A future study could be an effort to enhance understanding of both potential determinants of perceptions of support

availability and of supportive behaviours in the context of the athlete-partner relationship before, during and after sports career termination. The use of this type of close, dyadic relationship as a focus of study allows us to understand the role of social support in personal relationships during a potential difficult period. Athletes experiencing athletic retirement have emphasized the importance of support from their partners: “Getting married sure made retirement easier for me” (Baillie, 1992, p. 157). Jowett and Meek (2000) referring to the coach - athlete relationship stated that this dyad is interdependent and that its main goal is to produce a combined outcome of an improved and high performance. Due to the interpersonal nature of this relationship between the coach and the athlete, the quality of this relationship would have a great impact on the possible consequences for both the athlete and the coach, for example performance, self-worth, motivation and enjoyment. A series of qualitative and quantitative studies were conducted giving rise to the constructs of “Closeness” (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989), which refers to feelings and perceptions that appear to be a function of interpersonal factors such as liking, trust, and respect (Jowett, 2002), “Commitment” (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993), which appears to reflect openness of thoughts between coach and athlete, and is defined as an intention to maintain and optimize relations (Jowett et al., 2005), and “Complementarity” (Kiesler, 1997), which is built from the traditional meaning of the term “to complement”, to reflect the relational aspects of emotions, cognitions and behaviours respectively (Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000). Each of these three constructs has been widely used by researchers in order to examine dyadic relationships (e.g., marital and romantic) and understand the nature and dynamics of these relationships. Successful relationships in general are likely to include positive interpersonal qualities such as trust, respect, commitment, and understanding. Both partner-athlete and coach-athlete relationship can be characterized by mutual trust and understanding. Thus, extending this theory to athletic retirement and athlete - partner relationship could certainly help to extend knowledge of interpersonal relations within this domain.

In a future study the association between ‘quality of the relationship’, ‘social support’ and ‘outcomes’ (adaptation to life after sports) could be

examined. Are these three factors interconnected? This means that can the quality of the relationship (e.g., how close and committed are to each other or how secure are with that relationship) predict the perceptions and receipts of support and how it is influenced by these dimensions of support, which could conclude to emotions and behaviours connected to adjustment to life after sports? Thus, (1) how do relationship qualities (e.g. attachment, closeness, commitment) are influenced by the perceptions of support from that dyad? (1a) how does this interaction change during the three phases of transition experienced by the dyad (before, during, and after athletic retirement) (2) does relationship quality predict supportive behaviours in interactions between the relationship partners? (2a) how does this interaction change during the three phases of transition experienced by the dyad? (Before, during, and after athletic retirement) and finally, in terms of the situational context of the event, (3) how do the reasons of retirement (planned or unexpected / voluntary or involuntary transition) and the athletic identity influences the quality of adaptation to life after sports and (4) how do these same variables affect the quality of the dyadic relationship and the support interactions between the couple?

The present data revealed that sport career transition preparation, social support, self-identity and social identity, perceptions of control and adequate coping skills have positive impact on sport career transition outcomes on Greek elite female athletes. A practical direction could be to develop intervention programs in terms of the sports career transition experience associated with social support. This program could consist of strategies to enhance athlete's social relationships or minimize relationship distress throughout their career. Furthermore, it is important that we continue to contribute to the scientific area by conducting more research, developing theoretical models, publishing articles, and creating programs that address the issue of sport-career transition

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APPENDICES

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PART I. GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- What is your age?
- What is your level of education?
- What is your current professional position?
- What is your marital status?
- Have you got any children?
- If yes, how many?

PART II. SPORT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

SPORT

- At what age and how did you start your main sport specialization?
- What is the sport in which you achieved the highest sport accomplishments?
- What is your highest sport achievement?
- What do you remember from that day?
- How old were you when you achieved your biggest success in sport?
- How did your athletic success in general influence your competitive sport career?
- In what ways did this success affect your life out of competitive sport?
- What did this sporting success mean to you?
- What did this sporting success mean to your coach?
- What did this sporting success mean to your family?
- What did this sporting success mean to your partner/husband?
- What did this sporting success mean to your friends?

SOCIAL RELATIONS

COACH

1. During your sporting career, what role did your coach play in your success?
2. a) How many coaches did you have during your athletic career?
   b) Which coach did he/she has most influence on you? (In what ways?)
   c) How long did you train with this coach?
   d) Did you achieve your highest achievement with this coach?
   e) How did this coach compare with other coaches you had?
   f) How did this coach support you, encourage you, motivate you?

FAMILY

3. During your sporting career, what role did your family play in your success?
4. a) How did your family support your passion for sport?
   b) Would you have liked your family to be more or less supportive?
   c) Can you explain your answer?

PARTNER/HUSBAND

5. During your sporting career, what role did your partner play in your success?
6. a) How did your husband/partner support your passion for sport?
   b) Would you have liked your husband/partner to be more or less supportive?
   c) Can you explain your answer?

FRIENDS

7. During your sporting career, what role did your friends play in your success?
8. Did you have any mentors, teachers, who supported you?
   Who? How?
9. In what ways did the sports federation support or hinder your efforts for high-level performance?
10. How did your competitive athletic career influence your social life in general?

PART III. HOW DID YOUR SPORTS CAREER TERMINATION HAPPEN?

11. How did you decide to terminate your athletic career?
12. For what reason(s) did you terminate your competitive sport career?
13. How old did you decide to terminate your athletic career?
14. When you were deciding to terminate your career, what was your performance like?

15. How was your financial situation at that period?
16. What feelings did you experience when you decided to terminate your career?

COACH

17. During that period, what was your relationship with your coach like?
18. Did you discuss your decision with your coach?
19. What was the support like from your coach to your decision?

FAMILY

20. During that period, what was your relationship with your family like?
21. Did you discuss your decision with your family?
22. What was the support like from your family to your decision?

PARTNER/HUSBAND

23. During that period, what was your relationship with your partner/husband like?
24. Did you discuss your decision with your husband/partner?
25. What was the support like from your husband/partner to your decision?

FRIENDS

26. During that period, what was your relationship with your friends like?
27. Did you discuss your decision with your friends?
28. What was the support like from your friends to your decision?
29. What kind of help did you receive for ending your competitive sport career? From where? (coach, sport association, family, friends, sport psychologist)
30. How do you think could an athlete prepare for terminating his/her athletic career?

PART IV. TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

31. How was the period between terminating and trying to adjust to the new way of life?
32. How long was the time period between your sport career termination and your feeling of adjustment to the life after sport?
33. What emotions did you experience during that period?
34. How your financial conditions change after sports career ended?
35. Did your coach stay in touch with you during that period?
36. How did he/she help you during that period?

37. Did you keep in touch with your coach?
38. How did your family help you during that period?
39. How did your husband/partner help you during that period?
40. How did your friends help you during that period?
41. Were you able to support financially yourself?
42. Did your family assist you financially?
43. Were there any specific people who played a significant role in supporting you financially?

PART VI. REFLECTIONS ON SPORTS CARRER

45. Did you move to another place, city, town following your decision to terminate your sports career?
46. How did your role change since you were an athlete?
47. Did you have a job opportunity right after your career being terminated? If yes, from where did you get that opportunity?
48. Were you unemployed after your sports career ended? For how long?
49. During your career termination, did you find easily a job? Did you get any help? Was the job satisfying?
50. Are you currently enough satisfied with your job?
51. How successful do you think you are in your professional career?

52. Have you ever felt you wanted to get back to sport?
53. What did you miss just after your sports career termination?
54. Are there any things that you still miss?
55. How did your sport career benefit your life in general?
56. How your current life is connected with sports?
57. What is your opinion about your life now?
58. Is it as satisfying as your sport or even more? Can you explain?
59. To review your competitive sport career, how will you evaluate it?
60. How is your relationship now with your former teammates?
61. Do you think that female athletes receive equal support with male athletes during the transitional period?
62. Is the nature of the transition process different for different kinds of athletes in different sports?
63. What would you suggest to athletes for a successful adjustment to retirement from sports?
64. What would you suggest to coaches about the support they must provide to athletes who are in the transition period?
65. What would you suggest to athletes' families about the support they must provide to them during the transitional period?
66. What would you suggest to athletes' partners about the support they must provide to them during the transitional period?
67. What would you suggest to athletes' friends about the support they must provide to them during the transitional period?
68. What would you suggest to the Government about the support they must provide
to these athletes?

ΠΛΑΝΟ ΣΥΝΕΝΤΕΥΞΗΣ

ΜΕΡΟΣ Ι. ΓΕΝΙΚΕΣ ΔΗΜΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΕΣ ΠΛΗΡΟΦΟΡΙΕΣ

- Ποιά είναι η ηλικία σου;
- Ποιό είναι το επίπεδο μόρφωσής σου;
- Με τί ασχολείσαι;
- Ποιά είναι η οικογενειακή σου κατάσταση;
- Έχεις παιδιά;
- Αν ναι, πόσα;

ΜΕΡΟΣ ΙΙ. ΑΘΛΗΤΙΚΕΣ ΔΗΜΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΕΣ ΠΛΗΡΟΦΟΡΙΕΣ

ΑΘΛΗΤΙΣΜΟΣ

- Πώς και σε ποια ηλικία ξεκίνησες να ειδικεύεσαι στο βασικό σου άθλημα;
- Ποιό είναι το άθλημα στο οποίο πέτυχες την υψηλότερή σου διάκριση;
- Ποιά είναι η υψηλότερη σου διάκριση;
- Τί θυμάσαι απο εκείνη τη μέρα;
- Σε ποιά ηλικία πέτυχες την υψηλότερή σου διάκριση;
- Πώς γενικά οι επιτυχίες σου στον αθλητισμό επηρέασαν την αθλητική σου καριέρα;
- Τί επιρροή είχαν γενικά οι επιτυχίες σου, στη ζωή σου εκτός αθλητικού χώρου;
- 10. Τί σήμαιναν για σένα αυτές οι επιτυχίες;
- Τί σήμαιναν οι επιτυχίες σου για τον/την προπονητή/τρια σου;
- Τί σήμαιναν οι επιτυχίες σου για την οικογένειά σου;
- Τί σήμαιναν οι επιτυχίες σου για τον σύντροφο/σύζυγό σου;
- Τί σήμαιναν οι επιτυχίες σου για τους φίλους σου;

ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΕΣ ΣΧΕΣΕΙΣ

ΠΡΟΠΟΝΗΤΗΣ/ΤΡΙΑ

1. Κατά τη διάρκεια της αθλητικής σου καριέρας, ποιός ήταν ο ρόλος του/της προπονητή/τριάς σου στην επιτυχία σου;
2. α) Πόσους προπονητές άλλαξες κατα τη διάρκεια της καριέρας σου;

   β) Ποιός/α προπονητής/τρια απ'όλους είχε τη μεγαλύτερη επιρροή πάνω σου (με ποιούς τρόπους);

   γ) Για πόσο χρονικό διάστημα έκανες προπόνηση μ'αυτόν/την τον/την προπονητή/τρια;

   δ) Την υψηλότερη σου διάκριση, την πέτυχες μ'αυτόν/την τον/την προπονητή/τρια;

   ε) Κάνε μου μια σύγκριση αυτού/της προπονητή/τριας με άλλους που είχες

   στ) Με ποιούς τρόπους αυτός/τη ο/η προπονητής/τρια σε υποστήριζε, ενθάρρυνε, σου έδινε κίνητρα για να συνεχίσεις;

ΟΙΚΟΓΕΝΕΙΑ

3. Κατά τη διάρκεια της αθλητικής σου καριέρας, ποιός ήταν ο ρόλος της οικογένειάς σου στην επιτυχία σου;
4. α) Η οικογένειά σου, με ποιούς τρόπους υποστήριζε το πάθος σου για τον αθλητισμό;

   β) Θα προτιμούσες η υποστήριξή τους, να ήταν μεγαλύτερη ή μικρότερη;

   γ) Εξήγησέ μου την απάντησή σου

ΣΥΝΤΡΟΦΟΣ/ΣΥΖΥΓΟΣ

5. Κατά τη διάρκεια της αθλητικής σου καριέρας, ποιός ήταν ο ρόλος του συντρόφου/συζύγου σου στην επιτυχία σου;
6. α) Με ποιούς τρόπους υποστήριζε το πάθος σου για τον αθλητισμό;

   β) Θα προτιμούσες η υποστήριξή του, να ήταν μεγαλύτερη ή μικρότερη;

   γ) Εξήγησέ μου την απάντησή σου

ΦΙΛΟΙ

7. Κατά τη διάρκεια της αθλητικής σου καριέρας, ποιός ήταν ο ρόλος των φίλων σου στην επιτυχία σου;
8. Είχες άλλους ανθρώπους δίπλα σου που σε υποστήριζαν; Ποιούς; Πώς;
9. Με ποιούς τρόπους η Αθλητική Ομοσπονδία υποστήριζε ή αποθάρρυνε τις προσπάθειες σου για υψηλότερες επιδόσεις;
10. Πώς γενικά η αθλητική σου καριέρα επηρρέασε την κοινωνική σου ζωή;

ΜΕΡΟΣ ΙΙΙ. ΠΩΣ ΣΥΝΕΒΗ ΤΟ ΤΕΛΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΘΛΗΤΙΚΗΣ ΣΟΥ ΚΑΡΙΕΡΑΣ;

11. Πώς αποφάσισες να σταμάτησεις τον αθλητισμό;
12. Για ποιούς λόγους σταμάτησες τον αθλητισμό;
13. Σε ποιά ηλικία ήσουν όταν αποφάσισες να σταματήσεις τον αθλητισμό;
14. Όταν αποφάσιζες να σταματήσεις, σε ποιό επίπεδο ήταν η αθλητική σου απόδοση;
15. Πώς ήταν η οικονομική σου κατάσταση εκείνη τη περίοδο;
16. Μίλησέ μου για τα συναισθήματά σου, όσον αφορά την απόφασή σου να σταματήσεις τον αθλητισμό

ΠΡΟΠΟΝΗΤΗΣ/ΤΡΙΑ

17. Εκείνη τη περίοδο, πώς ήταν η σχέση σου με τον/την προπονητή/τριά σου;
18. Συζήτησες την απόφασή σου να σταματήσεις, με τον/την προπονητή/τριά σου;
19. Ποιά ήταν η υποστήριξη του/της προπονητή/τριάς σου στην απόφασή σου;

ΟΙΚΟΓΕΝΕΙΑ

20. Εκείνη τη περίοδο, πώς ήταν η σχέση σου με την οικογένειά σου;
21. Συζήτησες την απόφασή σου να σταματήσεις, με την οικογένειά σου;
22. Ποιά ήταν η υποστήριξη της οικογένειάς σου στην απόφασή σου;

ΣΥΝΤΡΟΦΟΣ/ΣΥΖΥΓΟΣ

23. Εκείνη τη περίοδο, πώς ήταν η σχέση σου με τον σύντροφό/σύζυγό σου;
24. Συζήτησες την απόφασή σου να σταματήσεις, μαζί του;
25. Ποιά ήταν η υποστήριξη του συντρόφου/συζύγου σου στην απόφασή σου;

ΦΙΛΟΙ

26. Εκείνη τη περίοδο, πώς ήταν η σχέση σου με τους φίλους σου;
27. Συζήτησες την απόφασή σου με τους φίλους σου;
28. Ποιά ήταν η υποστήριξη των φίλων σου στην απόφασή σου;
29. Τί είδους βοήθεια έλαβες όσον αφορά την προετοιμασία σου για το τέλος της καριέρας σου; Απο πού;
30. Πώς πιστεύεις πρέπει ένας αθλητής να προετοιμάζεται για το τέλος της αθλητικής του καριέρας;

ΜΕΡΟΣ IV. ΜΕΤΑΒΑΤΙΚΗ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΟΣ

31. Πώς ήταν η περίοδος προσαρμογής στο καινούριο τρόπο ζωής σου;
32. Μετά από πόσο καιρό από τότε που σταμάτησες τον αθλητισμό, αισθάνθηκες ότι τελικά προσαρμόστηκες στο καινούριο τρόπο ζωής σου;
33. Ποιά ήταν τα συναισθήματα σου εκείνη τη περίοδο της προσαρμογής σου;
34. Σε ποιό βαθμό άλλαξε η οικονομική σου κατάσταση αμέσως μετά μόλις σταμάτησες τον αθλητισμό;
35. Ήσουν ικανή να στηρίξεις τον εαυτό σου οικονομικά;
36. Είχες βοήθεια στον οικονομικό τομέα από την οικογένειά σου;
37. Τι άλλη βοήθεια σου παρείχε η οικογένειά σου εκείνη τη περίοδο;
38. Ο/Η προπονητής/τριά σου, κράτησε επαφή μαζι σου εκείνη τη περίοδο;
39. Πώς σε βοήθησε εκείνη τη συγκεκριμένη περίοδο;
40. Εσύ, κράτησες επαφή με τον/την προπονητή/τριά σου;
41. Πώς σε βοήθησε ο σύντροφός/σύζυγός σου εκείνη τη περίοδο;
42. Πώς σε βοήθησαν οι φίλοι σου εκείνη τη περίοδο;
43. Υπήρξαν κάποιοι άνθρωποι οι οποίοι έπαιξαν σημαντικό ρόλο, όσον αφορά την οικονομική σου υποστήριξη;
44. Υπήρξαν κάποιοι άνθρωποι οι οποίοι έπαιξαν σημαντικό ρόλο, όσον αφορά την συναισθηματική σου υποστήριξη;

ΜΕΡΟΣ V. ΜΕΤΑ-ΑΘΛΗΤΙΚΗ ΚΑΡΙΕΡΑ

45. Αφού αποφάσισες να σταματήσεις τον αθλητισμό, συνέχισες να ζεις στο ίδιο μέρος (π.χ. Αθήνα, Θεσσαλονίκη) ή μετακόμισες κάπου αλλού;
46. Πώς ο ρόλος σου άλλαξε αφού σταμάτησες τον αθλητισμό;(Δηλαδή από αθλήτρια μητέρα ή από αθλήτρια επιτυχημένη επαγγελματίας ή οτιδήποτε άλλο)
47. Είχες ευκαιρίες για δουλειά αμέσως μετά μόλις σταμάτησες τον αθλητισμό; Αν ναι, από πού σου δόθηκαν αυτές οι ευκαιρίες;
48. Εκείνη τη περίοδο, υπήρξες καθόλου άνεργη; Για πόσο διάστημα;
49. Αν όχι, βρήκες εύκολα δουλειά; Είχες κάποια βοήθεια; Ήταν αρκετά ικανοποιητική για σένα;
50. Τώρα, είσαι ευχαριστημένη με το επάγγελμα που ασκείς;
51. Πόσο επιτυχημένη πιστεύεις ότι είσαι στην επαγγελματική σου καριέρα;

ΜΕΡΟΣ VI. ΕΠΙΔΡΑΣΕΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΘΛΗΤΙΚΗΣ ΚΑΡΙΕΡΑΣ

52. Αισθάνθηκες ποτέ ότι ήθελες να επιστρέψεις στον αθλητισμό;
53. Τί σου έλειψε περισσότερο, μόλις σταμάτησες τον αθλητισμό;
54. Υπάρχουν κάποια πράγματα που ακόμη σου λείπουν;
55. Πώς ο αθλητισμός ωφέλησε γενικά τη ζωή σου;
56. Πώς συνδέεται η τωρινή σου ζωή με τον αθλητισμό;
57. Ποιά είναι η άποψή σου για τη ζωή σου τώρα;
58. Είναι ικανοποιητική όπως τότε που υπήρχε ο αθλητισμός στη ζωή σου ή ακόμη περισσότερο; Μπορείς να μου εξηγήσεις την απάντηση σου;
59. Αν έκανες ανασκόπηση της αθλητικής σου καριέρας, πώς θα την εκτιμούσες;
60. Πώς είναι η σχέση σου τώρα με τους παλιούς σου συναθλητές;
61. Πιστεύεις ότι οι γυναίκες αθλήτριες έχουν την ίδια μεταχείριση/ υποστήριξη με τους άντρες αθλητές κατά τη διάρκεια της μεταβατικής περιόδου;
62. Η μετάβαση από τον αθλητισμό στη κανονική ζωή, είναι ίδια για όλους τους αθλητές και σε όλα τα αθλήματα ή διαφέρει σε κάποιους τομείς;
63. Ποιές είναι οι προτάσεις σου προς τους αθλητές, για μια επιτυχημένη προσαρμογή μετά τον αθλητισμό;
64. Ποιές είναι οι προτάσεις σου προς τους προπονητές, για την υποστήριξη που πρέπει να παρέχουν στους αθλητές που βρίσκονται στο μεταβατικό στάδιο;
65. Ποιές είναι οι προτάσεις σου προς τις οικογένειες των αθλητών, για την υποστήριξη που πρέπει να τους παρέχουν κατά τη διάρκεια της μεταβατικής περιόδου;
66. Ποιές είναι οι προτάσεις σου προς τους/τις συντρόφους των αθλητών, για την υποστήριξη που πρέπει να τους παρέχουν κατά τη διάρκεια της μεταβατικής περιόδου;
67. Ποιές είναι οι προτάσεις σου προς τους φίλους των αθλητών, για την υποστήριξη που πρέπει να τους παρέχουν κατά τη διάρκεια της μεταβατικής περιόδου;
68. Ποιές είναι οι προτάσεις σου προς το Κράτος, για την υποστήριξη που πρέπει να παρέχει στους αθλητές που βρίσκονται στο μεταβατικό στάδιο;

School of Sport and Exercise Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough
LEICESTERSHIRE
LE11 3TU

11 August 2003

Dear Madam,

I am a postgraduate student at Loughborough University, researching Greek Elite Female athletes' feelings and experiences when their sport career was terminated. My study attempts to understand how and what makes athletes decide to terminate their career and also what kind of support they receive and from where, during the transitional period after the end of their sport career. This study is unique as Greek Female Elite Athletes have never before been studied.

This study is sponsored by the committee "Woman and Sport" of the Greek Olympic Committee, whose president is Voula Patoulidou. Your participation involves answering some questions during an interview, which will take place wherever it is convenient for you. The time of completion will be approximately 60 minutes. I assure you that a full anonymity will be kept and that your answers will only be used scientifically.

This research project is extremely important because it will contribute to the creation of a rehabilitation program for those athletes who think to terminate their athletic career, and this will happen only with your participation. I hope you will find time in your busy schedule to participate in this study. Please do not hesitate to contact me if further information or clarification is required.

Yours faithfully
Katerina Patsourakou
MPhil Student

Tel: 2310 473055
Mob: 6973 807781
Email: E.Patsourakou@lboro.ac.uk

School of Sport and Exercise Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough
LEICESTERSHIRE
LE11 3TU

11 Αυγούστου 2003

Αγαπητή Κυρία _____,

Είμαι μεταπτυχιακή φοιτήτρια της αθλητικής ψυχολογίας στο Loughborough University και το θέμα της έρευνάς μου είναι οι εμπειρίες και τα συναισθήματα Ελληνίδων Αθλητριών Υψηλού Επιπέδου, την περίοδο που τελείωσε η αθλητική τους καριέρα. Η μελέτη αυτή προσπαθεί να εξακριβώσει ποιες είναι οι αιτίες που οδηγούν τους αθλητές στην απόφαση να σταματήσουν τον αθλητισμό, καθώς επίσης τι είδους υποστήριξη λαμβάνουν και από πού, κατά τη διάρκεια της μεταβατικής περιόδου αφού τελειώσει η αθλητική τους καριέρα. Αυτή η έρευνα είναι μοναδική καθώς ποτέ πριν δεν έχουν μελετηθεί Ελληνίδες Αθλήτριες Υψηλού Επιπέδου. Χορηγός αυτής της έρευνας είναι η επιτροπή «Γυναίκα και Αθλητισμός», της Ελληνικής Ολυμπιακής Επιτροπής, που προεδρεύει η Βούλα Πατουλίδου. Η συμμετοχή σας περιλαμβάνει μία συνέντευξη, η οποία θα γίνει από μένα, κατά τη διάρκεια της οποίας καλείστε να απαντήσετε σε κάποιες ερωτήσεις που θα σας γίνουν. Ο χώρος της συνέντευξης θα καθοριστεί από σας και ο χρόνος που θα χρειαστεί να αφιερώσετε θα είναι περίπου μία (1) ώρα. Σας διαβεβαιώνω ότι θα τηρηθεί πλήρης ανωνυμία και οι απαντήσεις σας θα χρησιμοποιηθούν επιστημονικά και μόνο. Αυτή η ερευνητική εργασία είναι πολύ σημαντική γιατί θα συμβάλλει στη δημιουργία ενός προγράμματος αποκατάστασης για αθλητές που σκέφτονται να τερματίσουν την αθλητική τους καριέρα, και μόνο με τη συμμετοχή σας η πραγματοποίηση αυτού του προγράμματος είναι εφικτή. Ελπίζω ότι θα βρείτε κάποιο ελεύθερο χρόνο στο φορτωμένο σας πρόγραμμα για να συμμετέχετε σ' αυτή τη μελέτη. Παρακαλώ να μη διστάσετε να επικοινωνήσετε μαζί μου σε περίπτωση που χρειαστείτε περαιτέρω πληροφορίες.

Με εκτίμηση, Τηλ: 2310 473055
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