

**CANADIAN STUDENT-ATHLETES ON THE MOVE: NARRATIVES OF  
TRANSITION THROUGH TIME AND SPACE**

by

DOMINIQUE FALLS

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## ABSTRACT

Every year, approximately two thousand Canadian student-athletes, aged 17-23, cross the border to pursue their university education in the United States (Barnes, 2008). However, there is a scarcity of in-depth research that considers the experiences of these athletes. More pertinently, little is known about how student-athlete movement can be understood in relation to research on 'detraditionalization' and 'individualization' which suggests that the influence of traditional ties (e.g. class, gender, ethnicity) on young people's experiences and identities is diminishing. With these concerns in mind a study was designed that explored the following two research questions: 1) how might processes of detraditionalization and individualization inform an understanding of the transition experiences of female Canadian student-athletes moving to the United States for their university education?; 2) how are female Canadian student-athletes' experiences and identities shaped by the transitions they are faced with in their move to and time spent in the United States? To pursue these questions, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 Canadian female student-athletes who pursued their education at and graduated from a United States' university.

Key findings included: the women's decisions to attend college were influenced by an interrelated set of sport-related factors (e.g. a desire to pursue sport at the 'highest level') and non-sport factors (e.g. to break free from the familiarity of home); transition experiences were complex and context dependent and were also influenced by sport-related factors (e.g. relationships with the coach and teammates) and non-sport factors (e.g. degree of culture shock). The research also showed that the women used diverse strategies to deal with their disconnection from home (e.g. use of various communication technologies) and that negative experiences were commonly reframed in positive terms.

In sum, the women experienced processes of individualization and detraditionalization but the structure of the sports team provided some of the stabilizing influences thought to be diminishing in the contemporary moment. This thesis concludes with a discussion of ways that these findings could be useful for athletes who are experiencing various forms of transition, and the coaches, peers, parents, and others who are attempting to support them.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iii
List of Tables .....	v
Acknowledgements .....	vi
Dedication .....	vii
1. Introduction .....	1
Rationale .....	2
Relevance and Research Questions .....	3
Organization of Thesis .....	4
2. Literature Review .....	5
Introducing Identity and Transition .....	5
Risk Society and Youth .....	6
Increased Youth Mobility in a Risk Society .....	10
Mobility and space .....	10
Mobility and youth .....	12
Transitions within the Sociology of Sport .....	15
Women in/and Sport .....	17
Beyond ‘Whole Circumstances’ .....	19
Sport and Mobility .....	21
Moving Forward: Future Research on Transition in the Sociology of Sport .....	24
3. Methods .....	25
Rationale .....	25
The Method .....	26
Sample .....	27
Justification of sample .....	28
Recruiting .....	31
Data Collection .....	32
Protocol .....	33
Doing Oral History Interviews .....	33
Challenges Encountered .....	35
Analysis and Interpretation .....	36
Transcribing .....	36
Concept and Code Development .....	37
4. Results and Discussion .....	39
Transitions through Time and Space .....	40
Phase 1: Before University .....	41
Thinking about going away to school .....	41
The ‘ad hoc’ recruiting process .....	45
Decision making- where do I want to go and why? .....	47
Phase 2: During University — Multiple and Concurrent Transitions .....	50
The soccer transition: (re)evaluating toughness, athleticism, and durability .....	51
‘It’s way more intense – not only mentally but physically’ .....	51

Win, win, win.....	52
Relief and burnout along the “roller coaster ride” .....	54
The coach: friend and foe .....	55
“Having everyone there with you aching helps you get through it” .....	58
Becoming a “better person” .....	59
The school transition: balancing the classroom and the pitch.....	60
“It would have been really tough if I wasn’t an athlete” .....	62
The cultural transition: experiencing and embracing a ‘newness’ .....	64
Not fitting in.....	65
Comprehending, learning, and embracing .....	67
The transition from home: growing (apart) physically & emotionally.....	69
Finding “community” in the team.....	70
Far flung and dispersed networks .....	72
Visits from family and friends .....	74
“Believe it or not, I started to miss the flatness of Nebraska” .....	75
“It became hard to relate to my friends and family back home” .....	76
Going away to school as a transformation process .....	78
Phase 3: After University- Experiencing, Learning, and Reflecting .....	81
“I was not ready to be done yet” .....	82
Uncertainty, disorientation, and new selves .....	83
“When I finished soccer, it was like I lost my identity” .....	85
Individualization and Detraditionalization .....	88
“It’s my life” – “That’s what I wanted to do” .....	88
“On my own in the real world” .....	90
Freedom vs the Way of Life of an NCAA Athlete .....	92
5. Conclusions and Implications.....	94
Contributions to the Sociology of Sport .....	95
Contributions to an Understanding of Youth, Transition, and Risk Society .....	98
Practical Implications: Sharing Experiences of Transition and Mobility .....	99
Future Research .....	100
References .....	102
Appendices.....	119
Appendix A.....	119
Consent Form.....	119
Contact and Information Form.....	122
Demographic Questionnaire .....	124
Appendix B .....	125
Interview Guide .....	125
Appendix C .....	127
UBC Research Ethics Board Approval.....	127
Notes .....	129

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1.1 Interviewee Information Summary.....	37
Table 1.2 Interviewee Information Summary.....	38

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## DEDICATION

*To my family  
For all your support through my own transitions*

## INTRODUCTION

It's getting away from home, not only leaving your country and home city but going somewhere  
just like [Hawaii]

Steve Bell-Irvin (Quoted in Zacharias, 2006b)

It's an adjustment in itself moving out to go to university. Then it was going to a smaller town  
and a new country. There was a lot of adjustment.

Katie Ward (Quoted in Zacharias, 2006a)

It was a real culture shock going from Richmond to South Carolina. They still hang the  
confederate flag in places down there.

Pasha Bains (Quoted in Zacharias, 2006a)

This study explores the experiences of female Canadian student-athletes who have pursued their education in the United States. Every year, approximately two thousand Canadian student-athletes, aged 17-23, cross the border to pursue their university education in the United States (Barnes, 2008; Deacon & Dwyer, 1997; Dheensaw, 2008; Paskey, 2000). For most, this movement entails a transition from high school to university and to a new 'athletic community.' In many cases this also means moving away from home and living in a different country for the first time, and/or moving from a small city to a big city (or big city to a small city).

Although there is some research focused on this phenomenon, student transition for young Canadian athletes has received most attention from journalists who have portrayed pursuing an education in the United States, on the one hand, as 'making it' in athletics (e.g. Briones, 2008; Mirtle, 2008; Zacharias, 2006a), and on the other hand as 'robbing' the Canadian intercollegiate athletic system of its best talent (e.g. Barnes, 2007; Bassett, 2007; Beamish, 2005; Deacon & Dwyer, 1997). This movement of athletes is commonly attributed to 'push factors' in the Canadian higher education system (e.g. the lack of scholarship money in Canada versus the



availability of ‘full ride’ scholarships in the United States) and ‘pull factors’ in the American equivalent (e.g. a higher level of competition associated with NCAA sports) (Beamish, 2005; “Chan”, 2007; Deacon & Dwyer, 1997; Grossman, 2000; Paskey, 2000; Wieberg, 2006).<sup>1</sup>

## **Rationale**

While the various journalists noted above have offered important insights into the patterns of student-athlete movement from Canada to the United States, there is a scarcity of in-depth research that considers the experiences of these athletes. In essence, little is known about the how student-athletes experience and interpret their move to the United States. More pertinently, little is known about how student-athlete movement can be understood in relation to an emerging literature that describes the implications of current patterns in migration, globalization and ‘stage transitions’ for the identity development of young people. For example, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) have argued that transitions for young people in the current historical moment are more complex and stressful than ever before because of the unprecedented range of choices that young people are exposed to – yet little empirical data exists that pertains to the experiences of the population with these choices and undergoing these very transitions.

Beyond academic contributions, the results from this study could be used to set up a partnership with sports organizations to help young athletes deal with issues and concerns they may have about moving and adjusting to a new phase in their athletic or non-athletic lives. For this reason, this study’s goal is to shed some light on how student-athlete movement impacts and shapes the experiences and identities of student-athletes, and how student-athletes negotiate and make sense of the various options and anxieties they encounter during moments and times of transition.

## **Relevance and Research Questions**

This study builds on previous research that states that youth today are experiencing more uncertainty because key social and cultural aspects of young people's transitions to adulthood are radically different from what they were in the past (e.g. youth are moving away from home at a younger age but also returning home after this initial 'launch'). For instance, young people are said to be more disconnected from traditional social ties (e.g. family ties, class ties, ethnic ties), and their identities are said to have become individualized (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Miles, 2000; Skelton, 2002; Thomson et al., 2002). Accordingly, this study considers the following two research questions:

- (1) How might processes of detraditionalization and individualization inform an understanding of the transition experiences of female Canadian student-athletes moving to the United States for their university education?;
- (2) How are female Canadian student-athletes' experiences and identities shaped by the transitions they are faced with in their move to and time spent in the United States?

The focus will be on the student-athletes' experiences during and interpretations of their time spent in the United States (e.g. 4-5 years). This is not to be confused with the process itself of moving. The transitions to be explored in this context include: the transition to a varsity sport program, the transition away from 'home' (i.e. parents' home, home city or town, and the support systems associated with this), the transition to university, and the transition out of university (sport). In addition, the study will explore student-athletes' experiences with changing social networks and support systems within these transitions. This study will also use the 'social position' (i.e. class background, gender, age, ethnicity) of these student-athletes as a lens through which to analyze their interpretations of their experiences of transition.

## **Organization of Thesis**

The thesis research is reported and contextualized in the following sections. First, a brief literature review will cover relevant works concerning youth, transitions, mobility, sport related socialization, and identity formation in a risk society. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which young student-athletes are said to manage multiple and concurrent transitions. The project's methodology will next be discussed with a focus on the use of oral history interviews in research on transitions and mobility. The context of the interviews as well as challenges which arose along the way will also be discussed. Finally, the results and discussion will describe the objective and subjective components of the 'career' of the female athletes interviewed in this study. The focus of this section will be on the identities and experiences of the female student-athletes. The conclusion will argue that student-athlete movement to the United States presents a unique case for the interpretation of risk society influences on young people. Finally, the thesis will end with some recommendations on how to utilize these findings to help current and/or future athletes deal with multiple and concurrent transitions in their lives.

## 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on which my study will draw is divided into two sections. In the first, I discuss the theoretical framework developed by Giddens (1990) and Beck (1992) on the modern risk society, as it has been adapted by Furlong and Cartmel (2007), Miles (2000), and several other researchers who study youth identity formation, mobility, and youth transitions. Second, I draw on the work of Coakley & Donnelly (1999), Wyllemann, Alfermann and Lavellee (2004) and other authors who study identity, mobility, and transitions as they relate to sport. With this in mind, I begin with definitions of the concepts ‘identity’ and ‘transition’ – terms that I refer to and develop throughout this chapter and thesis.

#### Introducing Identity and Transition

This thesis utilizes Schlossberg’s (1981) definition of ‘transition’ which states that a transition is “an event or non-event that 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). Although developed to investigate life transitions, Schlossberg’s definition of ‘transition’ has been applied by a number of researchers to the sport setting (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Danish et al., 1997; Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004). Schlossberg’s (1981) definition is pertinent to this project as it highlights the way in which transitions involve interpretations of experiences and the impact of these experiences on identity formation.

Here, my use of the term ‘identity’ relies on complimentary work by researchers who study youth and by sport sociologists (see Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Baker & Boyd, 1997;

Calhoun, 1994; Hall & du Gay, 1996; Laclau, 1994; McDonald & Birrell, 1999; Rizvi, 2005; Singh, Rizvi, & Shrestha, 2007; Taylor & Littleton, 2006; Youdell, 2006). Generally speaking, I consider identity formation to be a life-long process which occurs as individuals internalize, on the one hand, “who they create themselves as and present to the world,” and on the other, “who that world makes them and constrains them to be” (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p.23). Second, identity is considered “situational and changeable; it shifts and changes with time, context and interaction with others; therefore, it is constantly in the process of being (re)created” (Hall, 1996; Kondo, 1990; Shogan, 1999 as cited in Weis, 2001). In other words, identity is always “in a relative state of formation,” and any ‘closure’ around a particular identity – feminine, athlete, young or Canadian – is seen as provisional and conditional (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). Moments of transition are considered particularly pertinent to the (re)creation of identities. This brings me to the third point: the interplay of these multiple identities means that “some are rigid and long-lasting, whereas others quickly fade away” (Weiss, 2001, p.396). Moreover, “identities from multiple spheres may complement or conflict with each other” (Weiss, 2001, p.396). This may especially be the case in moments of multiple and concurrent transitions, such as experienced by the women in this study, in which the interaction of complementary and conflicting identities (e.g. ‘academic identity’ and ‘athletic identity’) may be more pronounced. The ‘athletic identity’ will be discussed further on in the project.

## **Risk Society and Youth**

The theoretical notion of the ‘risk society’ developed by Beck (1992) and expanded by Giddens (1998) has been widely used to help those who study youth and young adults describe how young people negotiate their experiences, identities, and transitions in an increasingly unpredictable world. According to the risk society thesis, the western world is witnessing an

historical transformation. Industrial society, based upon “industry and social class, upon welfare states and upon the distribution of goods organized and distributed through the state” (Beck & Willms, 2004, p.2), is being replaced by a new modernity (or ‘second modernity’), which involves the distribution of bads (i.e. nuclear radiation, global warming, poverty, technology) that flow within and across various territories and that are not confined within the borders of a single society. Here, the old, ‘scientific’ world view is being challenged as the predictabilities and certainties characteristic of the industrial era are being threatened, and a new set of risks and opportunities are being brought into existence (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p.3).

In a related way, risk society is characterized by a cultural shift described as detraditionalization. Detraditionalization refers to a process whereby the influence of ‘traditional ties’ (such as the family, education, and employment) on individuals’ life choices begins to wane. It is contended that in the industrial era social structures and overlapping and intersecting institutions ‘structured’ people’s lives. People’s experiences were “contained, ordered, and regulated” (Beck & Willms, 2004, p.8). In the late modern era, these structures (more specifically, their influences) are said to have partially dissolved. Lives are becoming less and less determined by structural and positional conditions and more and more determined by how an individual’s identity relates to those conditions (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Miles, 2000). That is to say, in a society with more fluid understandings of families, employment, and community life, people have no choice but to develop individualized and reflexive approaches to the management of their life projects (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002, p.4). Consequentially, detraditionalization has produced an environment characterized by insecurity – where, (according to these authors) people have nowhere to turn to but oneself, and for this reason they experience more doubts about their identity, career, and biography choices (Miles, 2000, p. 59; Tully, 2002, p.21)

Researchers who study youth such as Miles (2000) and Furlong and Cartmel (2007) are particularly interested in how detraditionalization has impacted young peoples' transitions to adulthood (cf. Cieslik & Pollock, 2002; Pollock, 2008). For these authors it is thought that youth transitions are undergoing significant change. Specifically, young people are apparently playing a more active role in shaping their identities than in the past. The responsibility associated with the freedom young people have to make a decision about life direction (e.g. which postsecondary institution to attend; which city to live in) is of heightened importance (Whalter, 2006, p.122). In a world such as this one, individuals frequently re-evaluate their daily practices – they must become 'reflexive' (Giddens & Pierson, 1998, p.116)<sup>2</sup>. As cultural traditions that at one time dictated the roles and identities adopted by youth begin to change, young people feel they can exercise more freedom and creativity over the ways in which they map out a sense of self (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002, p.10). Consequently, within late modern risk society discourses of transitions, youths are said to experience more non-traditional transitions both out of childhood and into the workforce. There is said to be an increase in the complexity of pathways and a consequent increase in types of pathways that young people can take as they begin to organize their life choices more around personal desires and needs (Pollock, 2008, p.470; Cieslik & Pollock, 2002, p.8).

At this point it is worth noting that many authors see the risk society portrayed by Beck and Giddens to be provocative and important – and perhaps overstated (e.g. Atkinson, 2007; Cieslik & Pollock, 2002; Cebulla, 2007; Mythen, 2005). Furlong and Cartmel and Miles, for example, argue that Beck and Giddens overemphasize the significance attached to how individuals interpret the world and subjectively construct their social realities. For Furlong and Cartmel the “grand paradox” of late modernity is that although “collective foundations” such as

class have become more obscure, they still provide “powerful frameworks” which guide young people’s experiences and life chances (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p.159). It is within these frameworks that young people make sense of their own realities (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Instead of arguing that class is a ‘zombie’ category which no longer has explanatory power (Urry, 2004 as cited in Beck & Willms 2004, p.10-11), Furlong and Cartmel and Miles argue that class still matters, albeit in different ways and to a different extent than in years past.

This can be exemplified by what Melucci (1992) calls the ‘multiplicity of memberships’ that characterizes today’s youth. Today’s youth participate in a number of “areas, groups and dimensions of social and cultural life” (Miles, 2000, p.154). That is to say, being born into a specific family or following a certain occupational pathways is no longer enough to define oneself, although these memberships remain relevant for analysts examining the options available to young people. As explained by van Eijck and Bargeman (2004) in their study on the influence of social background on contemporary lifestyles, “traditional boundaries are shifting and sometimes weakening, yet people still live their lives according to preferences (heavily driven by socialization) that are tied up with their social background” (p.456). As insisted by Lash (1994, p.133), socialization still makes some directions/choices (far) more obvious than others (as cited in van Eijck & Bargeman, 2004, p.456). In the end, being born into a certain family or class continues to influence identity formation and life direction, although this influence is less obvious and straightforward than in times past.

The key point here is that young people in contemporary societies are said to have fewer stable reference points by which they can plot their life-courses. Without these reference points, young people may feel as though the risks they face are to be overcome as individuals rather than as members of a collectivity (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p.9). In this respect, answering the



question, ‘Who am I?’ becomes an individual, sometimes isolating task where having enough options to choose from is crucial (Miles, 2000, p.153). In this way, youth transitions are being experienced under such different circumstances than those experienced by previous generations, that descriptions of ‘youth transitions’ merit a reconceptualization altogether – one which accounts for issues of mobility and identity (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p.9).

## **Increased Youth Mobility in a Risk Society**

### **Mobility and space**

With this in mind, researchers such as Rizvi (2005), Thomson and Taylor (2005), Gabriel (2006), and Jensen (2006), have recently turned their focus on processes of youth migration and mobility. For these authors, notions of mobility – movement in time and/or space (Jensen, 2006) – are central to young people’s transitions into adulthood in risk societies. It is important to note that one might engage in physical, virtual, imaginary or communicative mobility (Jensen, 2006; Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006):

1. The physical travel of people for work, leisure, family life, pleasure, migration, and escape;
2. The physical movement of objects delivered to producers, consumers, and retailers;
3. Imaginative travel elsewhere through images and memories seen on texts, T.V., computer screens and film;
4. Virtual travel on the internet (often in real time so transcending geographical and social distance); and
5. Communicative travel through person-to-person messages via letters, postcards, birthday and Christmas cards, telegrams, telephones, faxes, emails, instant messages, videoconferences, and ‘skyping’

The point of departure for this particular research project will be the physical travel of people for education and sport and the communicative travel these student-athletes experience through person-to-person messages via their emails and phone calls home, instant messages, and ‘skyping.’

Within this use of the term mobility is a specific conceptualization of the term ‘space.’ Here, the work by Massey (1993, 2006) is extremely influential and is worth briefly highlighting since the women’s transitions spanned across time and space. For Massey (2006), the concepts of ‘space’ and ‘time’ are intricately intertwined but are not synonymous. Time is understood as the dimension of change, while space is the dimension of multiplicity of processes. Space is then always in process; it is never finished because there are always connections and relations yet to be made or not made (p.90)<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, because space is conceptualized as something in a “state of becoming” (Singh, Rizvi and Shrestha, 2007, p.199), people’s experience with that space is not frozen:

[This experience] is part of on-going story. The ‘landscape out there’ is not a surface but a constellation of on-going human and non-human trajectories – the buildings, the trees, the rocks themselves, all moving on, changing becoming. It is not travelling across a surface but rather travelling across stories. (Massey, 2006, p.91-92)

Space is then seen as socially constituted because it presents us with the experiences of others through time and place. It recognizes that when student-athletes move to another place (city and country), their experiences of that place and of the place they left behind change over time as they experiences new places, meet new people, and ‘make new spaces’. Going back and forth, these student-athletes “imagine, conceive, and experience being insiders and outsiders in both places of origin and destination” (Singh, Rizvi, & Shrestha, 2007, p.196). In doing so, they contribute to a production of distinctive space which is neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’, neither ‘back then’ nor ‘now.’

### **Mobility and youth**

It is argued that young adults have generally become more mobile: “they are more likely to travel for leisure or business pursuits and to move from country to country” (Mitchell, 2006, p.13). Mitchell follows by providing reasons for this shift:

Cultural values of independence and autonomy, improved transportation methods, the relatively cheap cost of airline travel, corporate business travel in an increasingly global work environment have no doubt made [increased mobility among young people] possible. Prior to the 1960’s[...] it was relatively rare for young adults (particularly single women) to spend time traveling, or for them to work in other countries on visas for a short time period. (p.13)

For other researchers, the increase in student mobility is symptomatic of the expectation for students to “take advantage of the opportunities offered by global expansion of higher education [...] and to see, imagine, and experience labour market possibilities beyond the nation-state” (Singh, Rizvi, & Shrestha, 2007, p.195). Work on changing youth transitions and the globalization of education has yielded considerable insights, particularly in terms of “understanding the complex and multi-layered nature of individual migration decisions among young people and changes in migration pathways over time” (Gabriel, 2006, p.34) – a point that will be of particular significance for this study of student-athlete cross border movements.

The emphasis on the individualized level of youth migration or mobility has lead to a shift away from describing patterns of movement to investigating experiences of young people’s move away from their home (Gabriel, 2006, p. 45). In turn, researchers have focused on how young people manage emerging differences between themselves and their families and peers after leaving home – a crucial topic in this proposed study. Gabriel (2006) et al.’s study is an example of this. Using qualitative interviews with youths who moved for work but still retained contact with home (similar to student-athletes), Gabriel explored young people’s experiences of managing their relationships with their friends and family after leaving home, and their

experiences of visiting and returning to work. When reflecting on their experiences of leaving home, young people expressed concern not only in relation to the spatial distance between themselves and their hometown, but also the cultural gaps that were opening up between young people and their friends and families. For instance, those who had not moved were described as 'still living traditional lives' very much in line with family, education, and employment ties. In comparison, those who had moved away from home described themselves as more 'cosmopolitan' and 'modern.' For these youths, the social distance between themselves and their friends and family grew bigger and bigger year after year and eventually lead to the dissolution of some of their relationships.

In a similar way, Rizvi (2005) has interviewed international students about how they experience mobility, transition and travel, as well as formal learning. He was particularly interested in how these events shift students' perceptions of their identity and of their own cultures. Additionally, he was concerned with how transnational experiences affect student identities, identities that are both local and global (p. 2). In a related project, Singh, Rizvi, and Shrestha (2007) examine how international students' identity shifts over time, "from their conceptions of life abroad, through their perceptions of life overseas, and to their lived experiences at home and away" (p.196). In other words, they study how the students' experiences of mobility, transition, and travel impacted their identity formation. Rizvi (2005) paints a picture of youth lives where "coming and going, being both here and there, across frontiers at the same time, has become the normal thing" (p.5). This observation is akin to what Furlong and Cartmel call 'living away from' vs. 'leaving' home or what Mitchell (2006) calls "the boomerang age." Moving back and forth from home, especially during university years, is now more common than ever (Mitchell, 2006, p.1). Research by Jensen (2006) confirms this

argument. In his interviews with young people about their attitudes towards mobility – which included broader questions pertaining to their life situation, identity constructions, and ideas of the future (p.344) – Jensen emphasizes the role of mobility in young people’s everyday experiences.

With this background, it would be fair to suggest that mobility is now considered central to the material and symbolic practices through which young people move from the status of children to that of adults (Thomson & Taylor, 2005). However, it must be acknowledged that mobility means different things in different places, and young people within different social locations may engage differently with mobility. While it has been explicitly stated that the role of class in the modern risk society has deteriorated as a social tie to identity and experiences, and that no matter where in the world they are, the lives of young people are becoming less and less prescribed by traditional ties in their transition to adulthood (Nilan & Feixa, 2006), class still affects to a certain degree the life choices that are available to some and not others (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). For example, Albert & Hazen (2004) found that international students from ‘developed countries’ had different motivations for and experiences of their move than those from ‘developing countries’. <sup>4</sup>

In addition, gender may also play a significant role in young people’s experiences of mobility. What is surprising is how scarcely it has been theorized in research on youth and mobility. In the aforementioned studies, gender is either not mentioned at all or mentioned in passing as a descriptor of participants (see Gordon & Jallade, 1996, for one of the few studies to distinguish between the experiences of male and female international students). In the broader context of migration studies, authors argue against the ingrained assumption that the typical migrant is young, single, and male with economic motivations for moving (cf. Kelson & DeLaet,

1999; Knorr & Meier, 2000; Nolin, 2006; Sharpe, 2001); in fact, women constitute just under 50 percent of international migration (Kelson & Delaet, 1999; Sharpe, 2001). While this work has added invaluable to research on migration, its focus has mainly been on socio-economically disadvantaged female migrants. Although this focus is “well chosen since it contributes to a better understanding of the precarious living circumstances among some migrant women” (Scheilbelhofer, 2008, p.116), it is also essential to continue the research on other women in transition if a richer understanding of gender and mobility is to be attained. The research on more advantaged women which I undertake in this thesis on female student-athlete movement is a step toward this broadened understanding.

So far, this thesis has discussed youth transitions within the risk society framework and has argued that mobility is a central part of young people’s transitions to adulthood in the contemporary context. In general, the highlighted authors argue that the changing nature of youth transitions is an important area of inquiry for those wishing to study young people more generally in the modern contemporary context. Moreover, that issues of risk, detraditionalization and individualization are important aspects of the modern youth context. Since this study will be looking at transition experiences of student-athletes, it is equally important to discuss work in the sociology of sport that has described transitional experiences of athletes.

## **Transitions within the Sociology of Sport**

While researchers who study youth have primarily been concerned with the transition into adulthood in terms of issues related to risk, detraditionalization, and individualization, researchers studying athletes have typically addressed transitions with regards to socialization into, in, and out of sport for athletes of all ages. More specifically, authors in this research area

have addressed ‘transitions’ mostly in terms of sport experiences specifically related to retiring from sport.

One of the most comprehensive collections of research in this area comes from Coakley and Donnelly (1999) who highlight the ways individuals get involved in sport, identify themselves as athletes, experience sport, and choose to terminate their involvement in sport. For these authors, researching transitions into sport demands that we ask how people are introduced to sport participation and how they attach meaning to that participation. For example, Coakley and White (1992), interested in how teens make decisions about whether or not to participate in sport, found that decisions were integrally tied to the way young people view themselves and what they want with their life. Participation in sport, for these teens, was tied to concerns they had about growing up and being seen as competent, but were also conditioned by factors related to gender. For instance, some of the girls chose not to participate in sport because it was seen as “un-feminine.” Moreover, those who had dropped out of sport expressed feelings of being pressured out by the boys and family members who did not endorse the girls’ competitive engagement in sport.

The majority of research in this area has focused on the transition athletes make out of sport. These scholars describe the transition out of sport to be a challenge to the athletes’ identity (e.g. Grove, Lavellee, & Gordon, 1997; Yannick, 2003), career aspirations (e.g. Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Lavellee & Andersen, 2000; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Ungerleider, 1997), and body image (Stephan & Bilard, 2003). These challenges are especially pronounced when athletes have been extremely invested in their athletic role and identity and/or lack the social and material resources to enter other careers, activities, and relationships (Coakley and Donnelly, 1999, p.201).

Coakley and Donnelly's edited collection includes qualitative descriptions of experiences related to becoming, being, and ceasing to be an athlete. Moreover, and in line with Furlong and Cartmel (2007), Coakley and Donnelly's accounts take into consideration the role that "whole circumstances" (p.63) (e.g. class, age, ethnicity, gender and so on) have in the development of one's athletic identity and experience. That is, while they view the identity formation process as active and self reflexive, they also stress the importance that socializing agents such as parents and siblings as well as gender, social class, and culture have on the ability or inability of athletes to enjoy their athletic experiences (see Lantz & Schroeder, 1999). For instance, access to economic means may help or hinder access to organized sport and general physical activity (Fenton & Frisby, 1999; Romero, 2005). The cost of memberships and equipment can be considerable for certain sports. Athletes considered as part of a "racial minority" negotiate their identity among racial threats, stereotypes and discrimination which are structurally embedded in many contemporary sport organizations (King, Leonard, & Kusz, 2007).

### **Women in/and Sport**

Of particular significance to this study, it has been argued that female athletes in North America shape their (athletic) identity in a society which considers them to be second-class citizens: "the de facto norm or standard against which performance is measured [is] maleness" (Creedon, 1998, p.90; Hargreaves, 1994 as cited in Hardin & Shain, 2006, p.323). While barriers to women's participation have been weakened, and cultural views of female athletes have been revised, women's sport continues to be marked by a struggle for control of both the institutions that regulate women's participation and the meanings of their sporting experiences (Theberge & Birrell, 2007, p.167). Through the practices of individuals, the rules and hierarchies of institutions, and dominant symbols of belief systems, women's experiences and



accomplishments in sport remain trivialized and marginalized (Messner, 2002; Wachs, 2005). As a result, women continue to be awarded fewer sport participation and career opportunities, and fewer resources devoted to their programs and less media attention (Eitzen, 2006, p.124).

According to many sport scholars, this assumption that sport is the domain of men (Fink, 2008) is maintained because of processes associated with hegemony – a form of control based on persuasion, not coercion (Gramsci, 1992). In sport, hegemony acts to reinforce and preserve social norms of masculinity and femininity. As articulated by Shaw & Frisby (2006):

[B]eliefs about the role of female athletes in society are often situated in subtle and usually taken-for-granted structures, policies, and behaviours embedded in organizations. Such characteristics serve to continually reinforce and perpetuate the gendered nature of sport organizations. (as cited in Fink, 2008, p.146)

Therefore, while the increased presence of women in the sporting community can be argued to reflect change in the composition of sport, greater presence does not inevitably result in greater acceptance and/or equivalence of the female sporting experiences (Meân & Kassing, 2008, p.127).

On another note, while researchers studying women in sport have done a commendable job outlying the context of women's sport more generally (Cohen, 2001; Eitzen, 2006; Fink, 2008; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Hargreaves, 1990, 1993; Robinson, 1997; Theberge & Birrell, 2007; Wachs, 2005) and the experiences of professional and recreational female athletes (Douglas & Carless, 2009; Heuser, 2005; Meân, L. & Kassing, 2008; Mennesson, 2000; Theberge, 1995; Wachs, 2005; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008; Young et al., 2006), the experiences of female intercollegiate athletes have been relatively neglected. Most research focuses on the history of Title IX<sup>5</sup> and its impact on the structure and composition of the NCAA (Anderson, Cheslock, & Ehrenberg, 2006; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Cohen, 2005; Gavora, 2002; Simon,

2005; Suggs, 2005; Ware, 2007). However, Eitzen and Sage (2003) argue, if researchers are to challenge hegemonic discourse in sport, research has to go beyond examining legislation:

- Prejudices are not altered by courts and legislation [;] culturally conditioned responses to gender ideology are ubiquitous and resistant to sudden changes. Therefore, laws may force compliance in equality of opportunity for females in the world of sport, but inequities in sport continue, albeit in more subtle and insidious forms [...]. (p.310)

For this very reason, this study focuses on the women's experiences of transitioning into college level sports more generally. This thesis will conclude with an examination of how the maintenance of traditional gender roles in sport runs in contrast to processes of individualization and detraditionalization which are said to be the consequences of more open understandings of the roles of women in society.

### **Beyond 'Whole Circumstances'**

Returning to general accounts of socialization and sport, what Coakley and Donnelly have not taken into account, are theories of youth development that account for issues related to risk society and its impact on young people's lives/transitions. When Coakley and Donnelly do take into consideration that youth transitions outside of the sporting realm "such as changing schools, getting a degree, getting a job, getting married, and becoming a parent" are part of an athletes' career (p.201), they do so in regards to retiring from sport. For these authors, transitions out of sport are often triggered by transitions in other parts of the athletes' lives and therefore play an important role in why athletes chose to retire.

However, to more responsibly theorize athletic transitions, it is important to also account for the variety of transitions that are taking place alongside (and in relation to) the sport related transitions. After all, as much as young athletes may identify themselves as athletes, they still share many experiences with other young people – they will mostly likely move away from

home, will make education and employment related transitions, and they must at some point make decisions about their future. In this regard, Wylleman, Alfermann, and Lavallee's (2004) holistic, whole-person approach to transitions in athletes' lives is a well-developed model for looking at transitions in athletes' lives and is extremely pertinent to a sociological analysis of transitions among young athletes. Based on research from intramural athletes, student-athletes, professional and elite athletes, and former Olympians, this model encourages researchers to consider "how transitions and developments in different spheres of an athlete's life overlap and interact" so that one transition, such as going from high-school to university, is understood to possibly be impacted by or impact another, such as making the national team (Pummell et al., 2008, p.428).

This model consists of four overlapping and simultaneous stages in athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic/vocational development transitions<sup>6</sup>. These stages are said to interact to influence the 'athletic development of the individual and vice versa' (Pummell et al., 2008, p.428). Pummell et al. offer an example that demonstrates how this model might be helpful for theorizing athlete transitions:

An athlete making the athletic transition from mastery to perfection may be concurrently making the psychological transition from adolescence to adulthood as well as the transition from secondary to higher education. Such multiple transitions might create difficult life situations for an athlete. In addition to this, at the social level, the primary interpersonal support network for an athlete at this stage may shift from peers, parents and coach to partner and coach. (p.429)

By drawing on Pummell et al.'s approach, I consider the complex ways that student-athletes moving to a United States university experience transition, while also theorizing mobility in a way that is somewhat unique in the sociology of sport.

## **Sport and Mobility**

Research on mobility and athletes has primarily approached the topic in terms of how professional athletes who move to another country represent another form of migrants and labour workers who must, for various reasons, ‘ply their trade’ outside of their home country (Maguire, 1999; Maguire & Pearton, 2000; Murphy-Lajeune, 2002; Sekot, 2005). For these authors, sport labour migration is symptomatic of the growing mobility that characterizes globalization more generally (Falcous & Maguire, 2005, p.140). In other words, the movement of athletes from their ‘hometown’ to their place of initial recruitment into elite or professional sports clubs is considered part of the now increasingly “socially and geographically mobile workforce” (Maguire & Pearton, 2000, p.176). As so, mobility has primarily been equated with travel and migration and has not accounted for issues mentioned by Larsen, Urry and Axhausen (2006), such as the use of communication technologies and notions of time and space.

Like research on youth and mobility, early work on sport labour migration utilized quantitative statistical research to map out patterns in sport migration and describe which sports were involved, how these sports were affected, and what international patterns were beginning to emerge (e.g. Bale, 1990; Magee & Sugden, 2002; Maguire & Stead 2000; McGovern, 2002). More recently, qualitative interviews have been used to focus on how these patterns are experienced by the migrants themselves (Falcous & Maguire, 2005; Molnar & Maguire, 2008; Stead & Maguire, 1998, 2000). Here, research has explored why professional athletes become international labour migrants, what they experience, how they deal with the personal and professional challenges that arise and what their views are about migration (Sekot, 2005; Stead & Maguire, 2000). For example, authors have reported on social-psychological problems of dislocation and adjustment due to the constant back and forth between different cultures and ethnic or racial settings (Sekot, 2005, p.65), questions of attachment to place;<sup>7</sup> and notions of

self-identity and allegiance to a specific country<sup>8</sup> (Maguire & Pearton, 2000; Maguire & Stead, 2002; Sekot, 2005). These issues, related to what Gabriel (2006) calls “socio-spatial identities” (p.34), may also be experienced by student-athletes who often travel back and forth for vacation periods and who keep ‘one foot’ in each country – one at home with their parents and friends, and one at school with their team-mates. Moreover, given how ethnically and culturally diverse Canada and the United States are, there is a chance that players may find themselves in a cultural setting very unfamiliar to home.

Unfortunately, and although research on sport labour migration has provided considerable insight into the population movement of athletes, it has been produced almost exclusively from interviews with professional (male) athletes (see Agergaard [2008] for the only study to date to look at female sport migrants). Self-admittedly, sport labour migration research has generally not included women in its analysis since, it argues, “it is men who have chiefly made up the various ‘talent-pipelines’ which have criss-crossed the world’s sporting stage” (Maguire, 1994, p. 18). Taking issue with Maguire, I argue that it is crucial to consider female (student) athletes who, for example, make up just under fifty percent of intercollegiate athletes in the United States (NCAA, 2004). Furthermore, and as emphasized by Hargreaves (2000), “women in sport from all over the world have been affected by the increased interconnectedness between countries, the encountering of other cultures, and the growth and accelerated pace and complexity of informational and cultural exchanges” (p.9-10). Clearly, there is reason for concern about excluding women from any analysis of sport migration or mobility.

On another note, issues related to being a professional and ‘older’ labour migrant, for example, may vary significantly to those of youth, amateur athletes (e.g. having to consider one’s spouse and children in decisions to move, making decisions based on the best salary). Therefore,

and although there may be similarities, the data gathered from sport labour migration literature must be used with caution in research concerning other athletic populations such as female student-athletes.

Sport labour migration research is also geographically limiting as it has focused mainly on issues of relations between ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ countries (see Bale & Sang, 1996; Darby 2000, 2007; Maguire & Stead, 1996). In fact, Bruner et al.’s (2008) research on Junior A hockey players’ transition experiences is one of the few studies to focus on athletes moving between and within ‘developed’ countries. For the young players (ages 16-18) interviewed in their study, moving away from home (whether to a new country or to a new city) and relying on a new network of social support was a crucial part of the transition to Junior A hockey. The move was a ‘culture shock’ that the players believed made them more mature in the end because, as one of the players remarked, “you [have to] grow up in a hurry” (p.246). Shifting support networks from their parents and old friends to billets and teammates also meant growing up faster and being more independent for these young men. However, this move can also be interpreted in a negative light. For instance, Dubé, Schinke, Hancock, and Dubuc (2007) explored how playing in a geographically remote town was particularly difficult for young players trying to adapt to playing Junior A hockey and being away from home. Moreover, Crow and Rosner (2002), O’Hara (2000), and Robinson (1998), have commented on the problems associated with rites of passage (e.g. hazing) for junior hockey players, and the culture of privilege and abuse that sometimes exists in and around these teams.

While Wylleman, Alfermann, and Lavallee’s model of multiple and concurrent transitions and Bruner et al.’s (2008) work on young male hockey players are an encouraging start in better understanding and describing transition experiences of young athletes, neither take

into account issues around risk society as related to youth transitions. The sociology of sport is sure to benefit from this study focused on youth, sport, transition and identity in a risk society – a study of young people undergoing transitions in both their athletic and non-athletic lives.

### **Moving Forward: Future Research on Transition in the Sociology of Sport**

At this point, I argue that on the one hand, the sociology of sport has not done a rigorous enough job of theorizing transitions because it has not taken into account issues of the risk society and its impact on young people's lives/transitions. Moreover, the sociology of sport is just starting to explore the concurrent sport and non-sport transitions experienced by young athletes, transitions which may also involve issues of mobility. The proposed study on intercollegiate athletes goes some way to address this gap by examining how processes of individualization and detraditionalization might manifest themselves in transition experiences of young student-athletes. On the other hand, researchers who study youth often times overlook transitions that take place alongside the normative 'stage transitions' (childhood to adulthood, school to work, single to family). This study will attempt to address this gap by studying sport related transitions in young female student-athletes lives.

## METHODS

This section summarizes the research methods used in this study: a mixture of an ‘oral history interview’ and a ‘semi-structured open-ended interview.’ The use of the interview method was intended to yield insight into how the event of moving to the United States for education may have shaped the experiences and identities of the female Canadian student-athletes in the study population.

### Rationale

My rationale for using a mixture of oral history and semi-structured open-ended interviews is two-fold. First, and more broadly, risk society research has been strongly criticized for “operating on the level of a grand theory, with little use of empirical work into the ways in which people conceptualize and experience risk as a part of everyday lives” (Lupton, 1999, p.6). In reaction, authors such as Tulloch and Lupton (2003) have urged future researchers to orient themselves toward exploring the ways in which people understand, negotiate and deal with individualization on a routine day to day basis (p.11 as cited in Mythen, 2005, p.139).

Second, and as a reaction to these remarks, the few authors who have empirically examined risk society, youth transitions, mobility, and identity issues have extensively relied upon the ‘biographical interview approach’ (see Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Gabriel, 2006; Rizvi, 2005; Thomson et al., 2002). Sometimes called the life story or life history approach, the biographical approach invites the interviewee “to look back in detail across his or her entire life course” (Bryman, 2004, p. 322). This type of interview is extremely unstructured, where the



interviewer may not have any questions beyond “tell me about yourself.” The oral history is a sub-type of the biographical interview where the interviewee asks participants to focus on a specific event in their life instead of retelling their entire “life story” (Bryman, 2004, p.323)<sup>9</sup>. For these authors, allowing young people to recount their biography “helps [researchers] understand agency and the ways in which individuals negotiate uncertainty and attempt to manage their lives” (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p.7). Moreover, it is believed that by focusing on people’s current life situations, reflecting on important changes, anticipating future directions and considering the meanings of adulthood, this method can aid in an understanding of how individuals make sense of their lives within the dynamic processes of transition and change. Furthermore, it may help to highlight how different strands of transitions may interact and how these biographical changes in young people’s lives are related to wider social processes (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p.7; Thomson et al., 2002, p.336-338). Furlong and Cartmel additionally argue that it is an effective way of learning about young people’s interpretations of their experiences and of discovering the ways in which they attempt to plan their futures and put together the pieces of life’s jigsaw.

## **The Method**

The oral history method relies upon two assumptions (Chaitlin, 2004, p. 3). First, it is assumed that although “each individual being interviewed has a unique story to tell and a unique understanding of that experience” (Rosenthal 1993, 1998 as cited in Chaitlin 2004, p.3), these experiences are also tied to social structures, dynamics, cultural values, mores, and norms in which the individual lives (Cuadraz & Uttal, 1999). This point reflects what Furlong and Cartmel argue is the ‘grand paradox’ of late modernity. Second, “people do not speak in random, unconnected sentences; when they relate their life [experiences], they are choosing what to say

and how to say it” (Chatlin, 2004, p.3). In this sense, and in line with the individualization thesis, individuals ‘construct their own biographies and identities’ (Lauder et al., 2006, p.21).

The goal in using this method of interviewing is to learn about the lived experience of moving to the United States as a Canadian student-athlete, get at how and where this experience figures into the student-athlete’s life, and how the student-athlete understands life in light of this experience. In other words, I consider this in the context of a ‘risk society’, connecting micro and macro elements of my participants’ experiences. As nicely summarized in Mitchell (2006):

Micro-level phenomena should be viewed in terms of macro-level contextual features, and conversely, macro-level phenomena should be viewed in light of their significance for and impact on micro-level phenomena. Social forces not only “trickle down” from social structures to individuals’ lives, but also “percolate up” from individuals’ action [...]. (p.26)

Simply, this study recognizes that young people negotiate their own lives as individuals as well as members of specific, historically informed groups. My goal as a researcher then, is to understand how the “current historical moment and historical processes both shape how individuals view their experiences and live their lives”, bridging individual experience with social context (Cuadraz & Uttall, 1999, p.179).

## **Sample**

Twelve interviews were conducted for this study. This number of interviews allowed for focus and depth, with enough breadth to allow for a discussion of themes and patterns (Bruner et al, 2008; Gearing, 1999; Pummell et al, 2008). While I acknowledge that I will not achieve a representative sample, this is not my intention (Cuadraz & Uttal, 1999; Belgrave et al. 2002). My intention is to study a small sample in order to get an in-depth analysis of the experiences and stories of the interviewees.

### **Justification of sample**

I chose to interview females for two reasons. First, I am responding to calls for “accounts of women’s sports centered on sportswomen’s own narratives and experiences” (original emphasis, Tannsjo & Tamburrini, 2000, p.3). These calls are directly related to the patterns in sport research which have focused on “the assumptions, values, and ideologies of males, maleness, and masculinity” (Dunning, 1986; Hargreaves, 1994; Kidd, 1987; Maguire, 1986; Messner & Sabo, 1990 as cited in Maguire et al. 2002). For example, female athletes have not been included in studies of sport migration as they have traditionally been considered to be travelling as ‘partners’ of elite athletes, not as elite athletes themselves. If, as Messner and Sabo (1990) argue, “we wish to understand a broader experience in sport than just the dominant male one, we must talk to, and take seriously, as many athletes as possible” (as cited in Tannsjo & Tamburrini, 2000, p.3). It is the position of this thesis that the perspectives of female athletes should be sought and considered with sensitivity to the wealth of research that speaks to inequality in and around sports.

Second, research on young people has been criticized for a lack of attention paid to young women (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). Earlier studies suggested that young men were at the center and women at the margins of youth (sub)culture. Furthermore, and as Mitchell (2006) argues, the shift toward egalitarian gender roles which has produced changing economic opportunities, increased labour force participation, and the need for higher education among women has affected the kinds of choices young women make. For this reason, it is important to document what choices young women are making and how they are making them.

It is also important to note that I have chosen female soccer players. In her article which was part of Soccer & Society’s special issue entitled “Soccer, women, sexual liberation” (2003), Hong suggests that “soccer, the traditional bastion of masculinity and the symbol of men’s

prestige and privilege, has become something of a significant talisman for women's egalitarian progress in sport." (p.268). While she and other authors in this special issue argue that the "institutionalized game still represents male superiority and female inferiority" and that "women players get far less and poorer quality media exposure and far less sponsorship" than men (p.269), in Canada and the United States it is the women's game that has attained a unique prominence in the world rather than the men's game. As sociologist Ann Hall remarks, soccer has become the "game of [female] choice" in Canada (2003, p.30). In 2002, just under fifty percent of kids playing soccer in Canada were girls and females now accounted for over one third of new registrations each year (Hall, 2003, p.30). In the American context, Markovits and Hellerman (2003) insist that "nowhere else is women's soccer the cultural equivalent of – or even superior to – the men's game as it is in the United States" (p.14). Moreover, they suggest that "with American football, baseball, basketball and ice hockey completely covering the male-dominated sports space in the United States" women succeed in a niche that has remained unoccupied by the men (p.14). The substantial presence that women have in Canadian and American soccer communities and their growing presence in the greater sports landscape may allow for unique insights into the experiences of female athletes in the current historical moment – a contemporary moment caught in between, on the one hand, great advances in participation and opportunities for women, and on the other, continuing institutional and structural masculine hegemony.

The following tables provide a summary of participation information.

**Table 1.1 Interviewee Information Summary**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Post-secondary options other than United States</b>	<b>Soccer experience after graduation</b>	<b>Degrees other than undergraduate</b>
Cary	29	Caucasian	None	Professional & National Team	Masters (2)
Karen	28	Caucasian	None	Semi-professional	None
Erin	23	Caucasian	Canada (soccer)	Recreational	Phd (in progress)
Gail	23	Caucasian	Canada (soccer)	Competitive club	None
Linda	26	Caucasian	None	Recreational	Medical School (in progress)
Amy	30	Caucasian	None	Semi-professional, professional, competitive club	Masters, Phd (in progress)
Sarah	23	Caucasian	Canada (soccer)	Semi-professional, National Team	None
Loona	23	Caucasian	Canada (academics)	Recreational	Medical School (in progress)
Nicole	26	Caucasian	None	Recreational	None
Nora	25	Caucasian	None	Semi-professional, competitive club	Phd (in progress)
Carmen	26	Caucasian	Canada (soccer)	None	None
Rachel	29	Caucasian	None	Competitive club	Masters

**Table 1.2 Interviewee Information Summary**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Parents' Occupation</b>	<b>Parents' Education</b>
Cary	Dad – Engineer Mom – Homemaker	Dad – Undergraduate Mom – High school
Karen	Dad – Soccer coach Mom – Caregiver	High school (both)
Erin	Home – Homemaker Dad – Fire Captain	Dad – High school & firefighter academy Mom – Nursing LPN
Gail	Dad – Sales Coordinator Mom – Project Coordinator	High School (both)
Linda	Dad – Entrepreneur Mom – Interior Designer	Dad – High school Mom – Assoc. Degree
Amy	Dad – Freelance Illustrator Mom – Civilian officer, Police Dept.	High school (both)
Sarah	Dad – Architect Mom – Elementary school teacher	Undergraduate (both)
Loona	Dad – Network management Mom – Lab Technician	Dad – Bsc and Certificate Mom – Msc
Nicole	Dad – Welder Mom – Project Manager	High school (both)
Nora	Dad – Engineer Mom – Teacher's Assist.	Dad – Engineer Degree Mom – College Dipl.
Carmen	Dad – Executive Director Mom – Mental Health Therapist	Undergraduate (both)
Rachel	Dad – High school teacher Mom – Regional Office manager (Both Retired)	Undergraduate (both)

## Recruiting

After obtaining ethical approval from the Research Ethics Board Association (REBA) at the University of British Columbia, I began recruiting participants. Purposive, convenience and snowball sampling was used in this study. The participants were chosen based on their status as Canadian intercollegiate female student-athletes who had attended and graduated<sup>10</sup> from a United States university. Convenience sampling was used because I have connections to individuals in the local sports community. Snowball sampling was used in two cases where interviewees gave

my information to some friends they thought would be interested in taking part in my study. Both cases provided future interviewees. Convenience and snowball sampling have also been commonly used by authors studying sport-related transitions and issues of identity (Bruner et al., 2007; Gearing, 1999; Pummel et al., 2008; Roderick, 2006).

Each potential interviewee was initially contact through Facebook<sup>11</sup>, email or in person. This initial contact served two purposes: to provide each potential interviewee with the basic details of the research project and to inquire about possible participation in the project (see Appendix A). After participants confirmed their intention to participate in the study, they were emailed the consent form as well as a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A). The participants were given three weeks to read over and fill-out the consent form and the demographic questionnaire and were asked to bring them to the interview. In a few instances, the participants emailed signed scanned copies of the forms. If the participants forgot to bring the forms, I had spare copies on hand. The interview only proceeded once I had verbally re-confirmed that the participants had signed the consent forms because they wanted to take part in this study and not because they felt obliged to. All approached female student-athletes accepted to take part in my study.

## **Data Collection**

My interviews were conducted from early December 2008 to mid February 2009. With the exception of one interview, interviews took place near the participants' homes or work places. Importance was placed on meeting where it would be convenient for the participant. Five interviews took place in a coffee shop, three at the interviewee's house, and four in a library.

## **Protocol**

All interviews began with a basic description of the project. It was important for me to give the participants the time to ease into the interview and to establish rapport (Amis, 2005). If important material was talked about before the microphone went on, I made sure to ask the participant for permission to use the information in my final project. All interviewees were also given a chance to ask me as many questions as they wanted to and many of them did so. Because the interviewees were cognizant of the fact that I had also gone to the United States for my undergraduate education, and because the soccer community in the Lower Mainland is quite tight-knit, interviewees asked questions about who else I had interviewed. In this instance, it was hard for me to negotiate my role as a friend or acquaintance to all of the participants with my role as a researcher.

In response to this dilemma, I described the ethical guidelines that researchers are suggested to follow (Bryman, 2004). Although this project can be considered minimal risk for the participants, I went over issues of confidentiality and anonymity where issues such as the identity of other participants were discussed. The women were reminded that all research material would be kept confidential.

## **Doing Oral History Interviews**

While the traditional oral history method refers to a complete open-ended interview in which the interviewer asks no more than an initial question about the interviewee's past (e.g. Tell me about your childhood?), this study adopted a more interactive approach, such as the one used by Phoenix and Sparkes (2007) in their study on young athletes and their narrative maps of ageing<sup>12</sup>. Following their propositions, I acted as an active listener (Wolcott, 1994, as cited in Phoenix and Sparkes, 2007, p.4). Thus, rather than adopt a distanced stance towards the participants as is suggested in the traditional oral history method (Chaitlin, 2004) an empathetic



stance that displays interest and openness was adopted throughout the interviews. This was done in the following ways.

By asking a “grand tour question” (Lally, 2007, p.89) at the beginning (Would you mind telling me about your experiences going down to the U.S?), the participants were given the chance to answer in any way they wanted, to talk about whatever they felt like talking about, and to answer in any format they wanted. Giving the interviewees ‘answer-freedom’ is beneficial to the research process as people are likely to feel more comfortable when they are allowed to identify issues that are relevant to them (Roderick, 2006). Typical of the open ended format, some interviewees were unsure in which direction to go. They asked questions such as, “So do you want me to talk about how I ended up down there?”; and “So the social aspect as well as the sport?” Following the oral history tradition, I replied that the choice was their own and that they should feel free to talk to me about whatever was important to them (Chaitlin, 2004).

In all cases, intrinsic questions – that is, probes or questions that arise from the interview- were used in order to flesh out more detail, an example, or for clarification (Chaitlin, 2004; Lally, 2007; Phoenix & Sparkes, 2007). An example of an intrinsic question is: “Can you talk to me a little bit more about that?” This process also required me to condense, and interpret the meaning of what the interviewee described and ‘send it back’ (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.195).

Similar to Ross and Shinen (2008), an interview guide was also used to ensure that the same general areas of information were presented to each interviewee (see Appendix B). Questions were theoretically informed and revolved around issues related to the transition away from home, from high school to university, and to a new sports community. They also addressed issues of support networks, communication, mobility, and identity. In some cases, very few

extrinsic questions were posed as the interviewee mentioned topics to be covered in the questions (e.g. multiple and concurrent transitions). The following are examples of extrinsic questions: “How did you feel going back and forth for your four years?” and “How or do you think that your four years have shaped who you’ve become or who you are today?” Most interviewees used stories and anecdotes to describe their experiences, thus confirming Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) view that people commonly use narratives and stories to “organize and express meaning and knowledge” (p.135).

Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half with most lasting roughly an hour. This is consistent with oral history interviews used in others studies (e.g., Bar-On, 1995; Chaitin, 2003; Chaitin & Bar-On, 2001; Rosenthal, 1993 as cited n Chaitlin, 2004).

As suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), most of the interviewees commented about how they enjoyed being interviewed because it gave them the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences in a new way. For example, reflecting on the ups and downs of her college experience allowed one participant to step back and realize the opportunities it had given her. In response, she said, “Now that I think of it, I am really glad I did it.” One interviewee told me she enjoyed talking to me because it gave her the opportunity to reflect on her experiences as a whole instead of in separate parts as she usually does with her friends.

When the interview was finished, interviewees were asked if they wanted me to send them their transcript to look over. All of them said that given their busy schedule, they did not and would rather see a final copy of the actual work.

## **Challenges Encountered**

The main challenge encountered in this study was arranging interview dates and times. Most participants were swift in getting back to me with their availability. However, some

participants who had expressed interest in being interviewed waited more than a month to reply with their desired dates. Others simply ‘vanished’ over email. One of the participants “forgot” about the interview and was a ‘no-show’ on the intended interview date. Inclement weather also caused some re-arranging of interviews.

Another challenging aspect of the interview process was dismantling my interviewees’ negative assumptions about ‘doing interviews’. Even when I described the basic procedure for oral history interviews, I got the impression that they assumed this interview was going to be a survey-based interview in which I sat in front of them with a list of questions and asked them one by one (Cuadraz & Uttal, 1999, p.160). Thankfully, the format of the oral history interview was conducive to easing this ‘artificiality’ and ‘weirdness’ initially expressed by these participants.

Technological difficulties only arose during one interview. In this particular interview, the batteries ran out and the recorder stopped recording without the interviewee or I noticing. Consequently, the interviewee and I ‘recapped’ what we had talked about and continued our conversation after I had inserted new batteries. Therefore, fewer direct quotations are used from this participant.

## **Analysis and Interpretation**

### **Transcribing**

I was the sole transcriber in the research project. Digital audio files were transferred to a password protected computer immediately after the interviews. Interviews were transcribed within days of the interview in order to maximize my ability to remember non-verbal queues and contextual factors of the interview setting. Interviews notes (e.g. “She was smiling while talking about her friendships but was very agitated while talking about her soccer experiences”) were

used during the transcription process in order to confirm or make clearer the intonations or tones in the interviewee's responses. Microsoft Word was used to transcribe my interviews.

## **Concept and Code Development**

I was the sole coder in the research project. I used a “personal intuitive” analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.278) which is a mixture of a ‘bricolage method’ and ‘theoretical analysis’, to develop themes, concepts, and codes. The bricolage method is a common mode of ad hoc interview analysis. The researcher may read through the interviews and get an overall impression, then go back to specific interesting passages. This may include counting statements that are indicative of a certain perspective, mapping out patterns, creating metaphors and narratives to capture key findings (and so on) (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.233-234). For example, in this study I noticed a chronological pattern emerging in the interviewees' response. As such I created a chronology for each interviewee's narrative followed by a general chronology for the entire group of women. This later became the organizing scheme for the results section.

Guided by Grbich's (2007) assertion that “themes may come from previous relevant research which you have reviewed from myths/evidence within the area being studied, or from your gut feeling, as well as from the views of those being observed or interviewed” (p.32), initial codes were broken up into two types: codes that were based off of my interview guide and codes which were developed through multiple readings of the transcripts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.202). Similar to what Grbich calls the “block and file approach” (p.32), each code was then assigned a post-it or a highlighter colour. Transcripts were read once for each code individually where data was highlighted or marked with a post-it. This process was undertaken more than once for each code as the definitions were refined and clarified. Because the data were kept in

the physical context of the interview, data that were ‘tagged’ for multiple codes were recognized. This was the first step in the recognizing overlapping and interacting codes.

The next step was ‘displaying’ my data. After multiple readings of the text, and confidence in the codes developed, data were ‘decontextualized’ (that is, taken out of the physical interview text) and organized in Microsoft Excel. Each code was assigned a ‘page’. Quotes for each code were then displayed in Word format and grouped by interviewee. These files were then individually reviewed for sub-categories, key quotes, and key themes.

Interpretation involved moving beyond a description of the experiences described by the interviewees. In what Cuadraz & Uttal (1999) consider the first of two phases of interpretation in in-depth interviews, “individual accounts are treated as individual experiences” (p.173). Here, the researcher asks how the interviewees view the topic under study. In the second phase, “the interviewer asks how the categories, views, and issues that emerge from a collection of individual accounts are possibly shaped by each respondent’s social location” (Cuadraz & Uttal, 1999, p.173). This step:

recognizes that the individual’s understanding of their own life is shaped by both their situational location (the contemporary moment that they are reporting about) and their social location (more than situational location; a location shaped by particular social histories of race, class, gender), as well as the contemporary social context (the stratification of society and the politicization of certain topics).

This step contextualizes the individual views in the current historical moment, identifies common experiences across individual accounts, and “brings the material context of their lives into the analysis” (Cuadraz & Uttal, 1999, p.173).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although the women in the study came from a diversity of backgrounds, all of them went through a decision making process during late high school, all transitioned away from home, to a new country, to a new city, to a new school, and to a new sport context. In addition, the women shared the experience of competing as athletes at the collegiate level outside of their home country and city. However, the diversity of experiences in relation to these common processes cannot be understated. The relationship each woman had with her coach and her team, the ways the student-athlete roles were negotiated, and approaches to maintaining connections with family and home, taken together, were the basis for a set of unique experiences transitioning through time and space.

As a way of explaining and contextualizing these experiences, I have divided the findings into two sections. The first describes the unique and common experiences of the female student-athletes interviewed and demonstrates how transition experiences of young female athletes are complex and interconnected. I also illustrate in this section how the ‘career’ model (a model drawn from interpretive sociology) is a useful aid for interpreting processes underlying athlete socialization. The second section discusses these experiences in relation to processes of individualization and detraditionalization. Here, it is argued that while these processes were evident in the experiences of these student-athletes, they were conditioned by the student-athletes’ involvement in the highly structured and contained social institution of intercollegiate sport.

## **Transitions through Time and Space**

Guided by the tradition of research that explores sport ‘career’ involvement (Hastings, 1983; Heuser, 2005; McQuarrie & Jackson, 1996; Murray, 1985; Mennesson, 2000; Messner Snyder, 1986; Stevenson, 1990, 1991), the following section is divided into the three ‘phases’ which represent the “career-like process of moving from one stage to another” in the experiences of the women interviewed (Heuser, 2005, p.49). The sections are: before university, during university, and after university. These reflect the stages of socialization described by Donnelly and Coakley (1999) which are ‘being introduced to sport’, ‘becoming an athlete and identity formation’, ‘being deeply involved in one’s sport’, and ‘transitioning out of the sport field’. In the first section, the women speak about their decision to go to the United States and the recruiting process more generally. In the second section, the women take us through their experiences of the multiple and concurrent transitions they faced in their move to the United States. These include the transition into a new soccer program, to a new city and country, into university, and away from home. Finally, the third section highlights the women’s experiences of the transition out of university athletics and into their ‘new selves.’

I acknowledge that the interviewees did not arrive at these categories themselves. Rather, I have ‘organized’ their experiences to emphasize the similarities across stories, while accounting for differences within and across phases. This is in line with Heuser (2005) who argues that research on the careers of athletes must account for the objective and subjective features in the experiences of athletes. In other words, rather than attempting to present an image of a singular ‘career of a female student-athlete’, I present individual lived experiences of the female student-athletes in this study, while noting similarities and ‘social processes’ that were revealed during analysis (Ross & Shiner, 2008).

## **Phase 1: Before University**

I remember that feeling of, “ok, we're talking to all these different schools, and there are any, any, number of reasons why you could chose any of the schools. And just thinking about it hurts your head because you're like, “well, do I care about this, or that?” (Sarah)

Desforges (1998, 2000), who has written extensively on youth travel, argues that travel and identity are intricately linked to the standard ‘youth narrative’ in Western countries.<sup>13</sup> One’s decision to travel, for instance, often comes at an important stage in youth identity development. This “critical moment” – an event which has important consequences for their lives and identities (Thomson et al., 2002) – is seen as a time when individuals have the freedom to find out about the world and about themselves. As described by Giddens (1991), these significant points of transition in individuals’ lives encourage increased reflexivity about the (future) self.

### **Thinking about going away to school**

The young women in this study expressed differing reasons for wanting to go to school in the United States. In contrast to media narratives, the stories told by the group as a whole rejected the image of student-athletes motivated solely by money and sport excellence. Yes, for some, pursuing soccer at the highest level was something they had always planned. For Rachel, a woman who told stories of regret concerning not having sleepovers as a child because of her commitment to soccer, going down to the United States was a natural progression in her athletic career. As she explains:

It was always a big goal of mine because I loved playing soccer and I had spent my whole life playing it, and that’s what I knew. And I wanted to obviously pursue soccer to as high a level as I could and at the time I felt like going to the States was the best option. I guess I just had this thing in my head that that was the place to be if I wanted to be a good soccer player. That was where all the good soccer players went and where the level would be higher than here.



Rachel's focus on progressing as a soccer player was important because soccer was "all [she] knew." Similarly, Cary who described herself as "very diehard soccer," said that her focus at the time was "becoming as good of a soccer player as [she] could." She wanted to be in an environment where there would be other people like herself – other "diehards". Karen, whose father was a professional soccer coach, who was "always known as the 'good soccer player' in high school," and who had "identified with that for so long" felt like the United States was where she belonged. At the time, these women's athletic identity – "the degree to which [they] identified with the athlete role" (Albion, 2007; Erpic, Wylleman, & Zupanic, 2004) – guided their decision making (Weis, 2001). In other words, the United States was seen as the place where these women could 'be who they wanted to be' and so the move was a crucial step in this identity maintenance and development.

For one young woman, the decision making process privileged a re-understanding not only of her identification with the athletic role, but also with "who she was". Like the others above, Amy was "soccer, completely soccer" before going to university. However, due to her parent's "messy" divorce and her "coming out," she re-evaluated the role that soccer played in her life. In a heartfelt manner, Amy reflected:

[It was about] me figuring out who I was. And I kinda started to be like, "who am I?" My life had been soccer, completely soccer. And now all of a sudden, myself as I know it, is not – I *don't* know it. And so with the soccer me in my life: "Do I want it to be my, do I want it to be all about me?" And I remember my graduating year I got voted "the most likely to go to the Olympics" and I actually took offense to that because I was like, "all you think of me as is this jock" you know? And I thought [...] the people that I go to school with only know me as "the good female athlete" and I had this kind of resentment. But yet [soccer] gave me all these amazing experiences<sup>14</sup>.

The tension between Amy's athletic and 'other' identity/ies is evident in her statement. While Amy embraced her athletic identity and related experiences, she wanted a change that would

allow her to carve out a new path. Desforbes (2000) suggests that the decision to start travelling is often closely linked to moments in individuals' lives when self-identity is open to question. These moments are often triggered by a "need for a new beginning" (White & White, 2004). In this case, going to the United States was Amy's "ticket out of [her] home town, the scene, the people, [her] family." She wanted to "take on a new chapter" in her life where "nobody would know [her], nobody would know [her] past, no one would know anything." She could just "start fresh and figure out who [she was]."

For Linda, Erin, Gail, Sarah, and Nicole, all of whom also identified themselves later on in the interview as "sportos" or "athletes," playing soccer in the United States was never 'the plan'. They "played soccer to play soccer" instead of "playing to go to the States," suggested Erin. As Linda elaborated:

I had the attitude that if the opportunity presented itself, "yeah, sure, I'll do it." And if I go on a visit and I like the school, "yeah, I'll do it." That would be sweet to get my school paid for and play soccer while doing it.

Their desire to move abroad was not necessarily driven by their athletic identity. They did want to play soccer in university and they knew they wanted to go away for school; but, the steps they took to get there were not as calculated as those of the first group. This sentiment was exemplified in the women's descriptions of this process as "a fluke," "random," or "weird." For Nicole, who was a high level basketball player but who had started playing soccer later on in her life, going to the United States just "never crossed [her] mind." Sarah, who later went on to play for the Canadian National Women's Team, always imagined herself at a Canadian university, playing intramural sports, joining groups, and meeting friends. "There was school, and there were friends", she understood. It was not until her last years of high school, when she realized the opportunities that were available in the United States, that she said "ok, cool, I'll try this."

Laughing, she laments, “part of me, even today, feels like I never had that ‘university experience’ that I pictured, because I had the ‘college’ experience in the United States.”

Another group of women expressed a “non-specific need for change” – a sense that there was more to life than the everyday routines of home (White & White, 2004, p.206). Going away to school was also about ‘getting away’: it was about “going as far away from home as possible and experiencing other cultures”; about the freedom away from [their] parents’ rules (Holdsworth, 2009); and about not wanting to “stay at home and keep doing the same thing.” For example, Nora felt that she needed to challenge herself by stepping out of her comfort zone:

Sure, 18 years old was young. But I was the type that was really close to my parents – to an extreme. I didn’t even want to go away on weekend trips or anything. So for me, it was about getting out of that. It was about saying, “Nora, you know what? You can’t limit yourself to Vancouver. You need to go see what else there is out there.”

For this group of women, it did not matter where they ended up going away to school; what mattered was that they did. Once again, it was not about servicing their athletic identity. Rather, it was about the development and negotiation of the multiple and concurrent identities (Weiss, 2001).

As is evidenced by the discussion above, the women presented a diversity of reasons for wanting to go away to school. Some women focused on their soccer careers while others wanted to ‘get away.’ Some always knew they wanted to go to the United States while others saw it as an option among others. However, what the women shared was a desire to go to university and live away from home. These results are similar to Ateljecvic & Doorne’s (2000) study which found that young women travel for a variety of reasons such as “a new meaning in life,” as a “process of transformation,” as well as to mark a break and change in their habitual patterns of daily living (as cited in White & White, 2004, p.201). In addition, some of the female student-

athletes interviewed here travelled for career advancement – a decision traditionally associated with male (sport) migrants (Maguire, 1994; Maguire & Pearton, 2000; Nolin, 2006; Sharpe, 2001).

The results reflect what Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) argue is common among middle to upper classes in Western countries. That is, the ease with which young people are able to integrate mobility into their day to day lives and career pathways. In this way, young people in middles to upper classes no longer understand mobility as a privilege – it is a part of life. The significant place that mobility holds in the experiences of many of the interviewees in this project is perhaps related to their somewhat privileged social background.

### **The ‘ad hoc’ recruiting process**

High school students wishing to go onto to post-secondary education must eventually start the process of choosing where they want to go. While this usually entails sending transcripts and filling out an application form, student-athletes must also meet the coach and players and decide whether the team will be a good fit for them. Contrary to the well-documented recruiting process of American college athletes into American universities (see Lawrence, Kaburakis, and Merckx, 2008; Reynaud, 1998; Rooney, 1987; Tenkin, 1996 for a detailed description of the rules and procedures involved in the recruitment of college athletes in the United States), very little is known about Canadians (and international) student-athletes at American universities. While Canadian high school students have access to academic counselors whose main job it is to help them navigate their way through the Canadian university application process, no such formal support network exists for Canadian student-athletes who wish to go to the United States. Instead, Canadian student-athletes navigate their own way through a network of companies and individuals – some affiliated with Provincial or National sport organizations, others privately

owned. With no governing body to assure consistency and quality, student-athletes and their families are often left to their own devices. This results in a process which may look very different from one family to the next.

A group of the women in the study (Nora, Nicole, Linda, Rachel, Karen, and Cary) perceived that going to the United States for school was “not a common thing” to do at the time of their departure.<sup>15</sup> This was in stark contrast to now, remarked Karen, when “it seems anyone can get a scholarship to the ‘University of Anything’!” These perceptions were generally reflected in the experiences of the older women in the group; namely, the women who graduated high school in the late 1990’s. In 1996, the NCAA published a report entitled NCAA Study of International Students where it was reported that roughly 2,500 Canadian student-athletes played in Division I-III sports. Unfortunately the report did not break down the results by gender. While recent journalistic pieces suggest that the number of Canadian athletes playing in the NCAA has remained constant over the past decade or so, it is not evident whether this number reflects freshmen or the general student body. Regardless, what is important is that the women *perceived* themselves to be part of an uncommon phenomenon. Their lack of knowledge about “others like them” (and perhaps the associated support networks) caused them to feel “lost” or at a “disadvantage.” Linda felt strongly about this:

I found it hard on my own because you know, in the States, there are all these – you talk to friends in the States, they are almost raised that way. They are raised with that as an option and this is what you need to do. Whereas here I found that it was like, if you want to do it, you have to figure it out for yourself kinda thing.

Moreover, the process itself (deciding where to go, contacting universities, sending letters, communicating back and forth and so on) was described by this group of women as ‘relatively uncharted’ where they felt they had to be innovative and persistent. Whether it was sending emails back and forth, looking up schools on the internet, or sending out VHS tapes in

the mail, some women in the group described the process as “ad hoc” and “learned along the way.” With a comedic tone, Carmen described the process:

My sister and I went into Google and were like, “University of...Idaho! Ok!” And I had this letter that I had written and I just went through and changed all the names of all the things. I definitely didn't have any idea what I was doing or anything like that. I never really hired anyone or spoke to – I mean there were family friends who had done similar things or had coaching experience in universities and gave opinions or help or whatever, or advice. But as for anything concrete or somebody helping me do it, or writing the letter, or something, nothing. It wasn't – I don't know the word I am looking for – really put together or anything like that. It was just kinda like, “well, I will give it a try” and see how it goes.

With no formal direction, Carmen figured her way through the process. Linda, on the other hand, relied on “intuition.” When asked why she decided to go down to school in Louisiana, Linda laughed in a somewhat embarrassed tone and said, “I had a dream about Louisiana and so I went.”

An interpretation of the why one group of women felt as though it was uncommon for Canadians to go down to the United States on scholarship may be due in part to their access to resources. In other words, the arrival of the internet in most Canadian homes in the late 1990's (Dryburgh, 2000) provided future student-athletes with resources that were more accessible, efficient, and numerous. Carmen's use of Google exemplifies the transition from the older to the younger group.

### **Decision making- where do I want to go and why?**

After realizing they wanted to go away to school, contacting the necessary people, and going on recruiting visits to respective schools, the women had to decide where they wanted to go to school. For Cary, this decision was an important life decision that forced her to re-evaluate what was “important” to her:

When I was making the decisions, I just kinda thought 5 years down the road, or 10 years down the road, and like, I just felt like it was the biggest challenge on every front, you know? And I think with all those things, that was sort of what pushed me towards going there.

Since intercollegiate athletes not only choose a university, but also a team and coach, their college selection process – or what is “important” to them – may be much different than non-athletes. Although there has been much research focusing on the decision making process of students, the literature focusing on student-athletes’ decision making processes is limited to the American context (see Adler & Adler, 1991; Doyle & Gaeth, 1990; Kronnert & Giese, 1987; Letawsky, 2003; Mathes & Gurney, 1985). Earlier work found that “sport related” factors were generally important. For example, the opportunity to play early in their career, the availability of athletic scholarships, the academic reputation of the university, the perceived future in professional sports, the campus environment, and the reputation of the coach were influential in student-athletes’ decision-making. The most recent studies suggest that the degree program options, the academic support systems on campus, and the type of community in which the campus is located are more important to today’s student-athletes than “sport related” factors which were found to be influential for earlier generations of student-athletes (Letawsky, 2003; Pauline, Pauline, & Allen, 2008).<sup>16</sup> For students, the academic reputation of the university, majors available, cost of going to university, and the influence of family and friends have been found to significantly impact their decision making (Gallotie & Mark, 1994; Hu & Hossler, 2000; Sevier, 1993).

The women in this study provided a variety of important ‘criteria’ for their final decision. While Erin and Karen felt that it was important to go somewhere where they would come out with more than a “Mickey Mouse Degree,” as Erin put it, it was the connection that Cary had with the coach that drew her to an otherwise mediocre program: “I always said that if he had

been at the ‘United States Crap school of America’, I would have wanted to go there.” Karen, along with, Erin, Loona, Nora, and Amy, focused on “places [they] would want to live.” In an apologetic tone, Erin remembers feeling uncomfortable during her recruit trips on the East coast: “it was just too fast paced with too much money.” For Amy, being in Michigan was a “no brainer” because it was a good way to get out without “going too far.” As she jokingly remarked, “I mean I can drive three hours in Ontario and never get out of the province!” After going on several recruiting trips, Nora, who went to school in Hawaii, and Karen, who went to school in California, felt like it was a cultural (and scenic!) opportunity they could not give up. For Cary, the fact that she was able to connect with a coach who happened to be within a driving distance of New York and Boston was also a bonus. For Nicole, it was plain and simple: “go somewhere where the people are nice and they will treat me well.”

While journalistic accounts have suggested that scholarships are the main reason for which Canadian student-athletes move to the United States (Beamish, 2005; “Chan”, 2007; Deacon & Dwyer, 1997; Grossman, 2000; Paskey, 2000; Wieberg, 2006), and while eleven of the women were on full athletic scholarships and one was on a 90 percent athletic scholarship, only two of the women mentioned the availability of money/scholarships as an important reason for choosing their school. The availability of funding was a factor that, in retrospect, the women felt provided them with the opportunity to go to the United States. But, it was for personal, academic and athletic development that they wanted to go in the first place. This finding suggests that the decision-making process for this group of women was much more complex than is portrayed in media accounts. It also suggest that issues pertinent to young people’s contemporary transitions into adulthood (i.e. identity development through mobility and an early desire to break free from the familiarity of home) also factored into the women’s decision-making and



should be considered in future research on transition experiences of young athletes. In addition to this finding, and as will be discussed further on, it is interesting to note that almost all of the women exhibited characteristically ‘individualized’ narratives of decision making. The sheer variety of reasons and the extent to which the women displayed ‘freedom’ in choosing their own paths is characteristic of changing youth transitions.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the women in this research came from a relatively similar and privileged social location. Female student-athletes from other economic backgrounds may have revolved their decisions more around financial availability than a desire to become mobile. Moreover, the extent to which women of lower a economic status have the ‘freedom’ to choose their own pathways must be acknowledge. This statement points to a need to contextualize research on young athlete’s experiences of transitions.

## **Phase 2: During University — Multiple and Concurrent Transitions**

There was something really refreshing about being in this new place, in a different country, this new stage in your life, this new chapter, and just kinda taking it head on. Embracing the newness. (Amy)

Um definitely 18 was young...and so on top of going to a new country, new city, new university, like starting out all new, I was a minority. (Nora)

Just like others transitioning into post-secondary education, the women in this study encountered adjustments related to leaving family or familiar supportive environments; finding new accommodation; balancing full-time or finding new part-time work (in this case, balancing soccer with school); making new friends; establishing new networks; and managing their many and varied roles, of which “student” is but one (Krift & Nelson, 2005 as cited in Nelson et al., 2006). The following section discusses these multiple and concurrent transitions faced by this group of young women. While each transition contributed to a unique set of experiences in the

women's lives, the transitions are not mutually exclusive. Rather, as Wylleman, Alfermann, and Lavallee (2004) emphasize, these transitions – and the athletes' experiences within them – overlap and interact.

### **The soccer transition: (re)evaluating toughness, athleticism, and durability**

Soccer is your life while you're there. (Gail)

We all connected along the lines of being a student-athlete because to be a student-athlete was essentially a way of life. (Amy)

#### **“It's way more intense – not only mentally but physically”**

The existence of intercollegiate sport provides many student-athletes with the opportunity to play the sport they love and experience the thrill of going to university. However, intercollegiate athletics, especially in the United States, have been associated with an intense desire to succeed financially and to win-at-all-costs (Chu, 1989; Dealy, 1990; Ronney, 1987; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Zimbalist, 1999). In this context, intercollegiate athletes commonly deal with physical exhaustion, mental fatigue, increased anxiety and stress, as well as demanding coaches (Humphrey, Yow, & Bowden, 1980).

While the women interviewed in this study may have played in a variety of soccer programs<sup>17</sup>, they shared many common experiences transitioning into college sport and a new style of play. For all of the women interviewed, getting used to the intensity and physicality of university soccer, both on and off the field, was part of the transition. As Carmen described:

It's way more intense and way rougher. I guess that would be it in a nutshell: the huge difference is the intensity on the field – not only mentally but physically, it's just, I mean it's so much more physical, especially – and we'd find that, especially as BC players going down to the States to play against American teams. They were way more physical. And I found the referees would allow more physical tackles and that kind of thing.

Cary and Karen found the soccer transition difficult because they felt underprepared for the physical level of play – a style of soccer which has been described as “characteristically American” (nscaa.com). Karen, who has since had substantial semi-professional experience, and Cary who has played professionally and on the National Team, laughed when they said they admitted they weren’t ‘starters’ on their respective university teams. They suggested that the coach preferred bigger and tougher players, and felt like they had to work exponentially harder just to get to the level that the other players were at. Cary and Rachel remember being at practice and asking themselves whether they had ever played soccer before.

The emphasis on strength and conditioning was also a surprise to Nicole, among many, who had “never stepped foot in gym until pre-season.” Sarah, a National Team player and experienced defender, recalls her coach’s disappointment every pre-season when she wouldn’t be “winning slide tackles or fearlessly heading the ball.” Erin’s injury during the first game in pre-season was a stark reminder that the level of play was going to be much more physical. “American college soccer was about toughness, athleticism, and durability” she said in an ominous tone, “it was about how you recovered from a really bad Charlie horse in less than 24 hours.”

### **Win, win, win**

The intensity off-the-field was also something that some of women felt they needed to adjust to. In a revealing story about her transition into college sports, Carmen remembers the first time she realized what it was going to take to be a college athlete:

We went on a camping trip freshman year for a team building thing and the coach went around the circle and was asking random questions and we were supposed to answer them [laughing]. So he went around the circle and asked, “Would you rather play really well and lose, or play really badly and win?” and he went around and everyone had to answer. I remember saying, “I would rather play really well and win. I don’t want to win if I didn’t deserve to win and I’d

rather give it my all on the field – give it everything I have – and come away feeling prideful of what I’ve done rather than finishing a game and going, “wow, we snuck that one in.” His answer was, “I would rather play really badly and win, because winning is everything basically. You need to win. It doesn’t matter why you’re losing. If you lose, you still lost and it’s still a loss” So I think that was when I realized it was a lot more intense. They just want the result. They want the score board to read, “We won” and he just wanted to put goals away. So I think that was bit of a culture divide between – and most of the girls around the circle, said, “I’d rather play bad and win” – so it was kind of, they were all, after the result. They wanted to win. So I don’t know. It’s definitely a very, very competitive culture. So um, yeah it’s definitely how I first felt about it. When I first got down there.

Although Carmen had been part of the Junior National Team and therefore “knew what it took to play at the top level,” she felt out of place in an environment that emphasized results over development. She did not identify with “American sports culture” – a culture which Franks and Cook (1995) state “has always demanded winners in school, business, politics, and sport” (as cited in Eitzen, 2006, p.54). While Carmen’s team environment may have displayed these ‘stereotypically American’ characteristics, research also suggests that male coaches tend to have more aggressive and demanding mentalities which are apparently evident in their approach to sport as ‘you gotta go out and get it’ and ‘win, win, win’ (Frey et al. 2006). Moreover, and while the data in this thesis cannot directly speak to this, I suggest that the intensity described by Carmen may be more representative of the NCAA culture and more specifically of a school in a State where most university sports are considered “big-time.”

In a similar way, Sarah and Erin felt that their teammates’ intensity and competitiveness was unbelievable. Whereas they were used to teammates pushing each other on the field, their college soccer environment was characterized by individuals pushing themselves, and as Sarah puts it, “Everyone was working to better their own cause.” “We were teammates and friends off the field, but we were trying to take each other’s starting positions,” recalls Nicole, “it was just

so intense.” Since scholarships are renewed on a year to year basis, and are more often than not based on athletic performance and contribution to the team’s success, student-athletes may put individual success ahead of their relationship with the team. Remarkd by Eitzen (2006), in this type of atmosphere the “athletes soon realize that winning is the important thing, not how they play” (p.61).

### **Relief and burnout along the “roller coaster ride”**

Some women spoke in terms of “relief” when the season was over. Karen recalls that by the end of season she and some of her teammates would want to lose because they were “sick of it.” They were sick of the intensity and felt that their mental and physical health would “go backwards” because they were over-trained and exhausted. Having to get up for early morning practice before class, going to class, going to study hall and then going to lift weights took a toll on their health. “We would go here, go there, and have no time to catch our breath,” recalls Karen. At the end of every season, “I didn’t want to touch a soccer ball.” Erin felt that although the season was only three months long, it was the most soccer she had ever played in her life. For Karen, Gail, and Nora, the cumulative effects of this intensity were sometimes too much to handle:

It was not a good experience at the end. I think it was literally a build-up of those five years: working so hard, having that much stress on my body, all the school, and then I never felt that I had time to deal with anything else in my life, right? It was just like, “ok, I can’t deal with it. I just needed to survive.” (Nora)

These findings would seem to support Eitzen’s (2006) lengthy call for a reform of college athletics where he argues that the physical and emotional stress placed on student-athletes exceeds what is morally responsible. He suggests lowering the in-season (practice, weight training, film sessions, meetings, and travel) and off-season commitments (spring practice, fall

practice before classes start, mandatory off season workouts) to manageable limits (Eitzen, 2006, p.164-165).

On top of feeling physically burnt out, several of these players were mentally worn out from the “roller coaster” ride of emotions they experienced during the year. It was “peaks and valleys” according to Carmen:

It was like: one minute “I am a star. I am playing every minute of every game” to “I am on the bench and I am too slow to compete at this level and will never get to play again” to “you’re a star again” to back down again. They changed their opinion about me every season. So it was really hard to handle. It was like, “who is the flavour of the month!”

Gail and Carmen had a theory that “everyone had their glory year.” Gail remembers her own because it was the year her coach let her wear her Adidas boots. At the time, the team was sponsored by Nike but if the coach liked you, he would let you wear your own boots. She laughs, “I only got to wear them for one season.” This story reflects an overall theme in the women’s experiences: a lack of control over their experiences of college athletics. While I will discuss this in more depth later on, it is worth acknowledging that while the women had exhibited (to a certain extent) freedom in their decision to go to their university, their experiences of college athletics were structured, regulated, and ordered. The coach, among many others, was responsible for this structure.

### **The coach: friend and foe**

Expressed by the women in this group, and argued by Frey et al., (2006), the “roller coaster” ride and the burn outs often had to do with the relationship the women had with their coach. In their study of twelve NCAA female student-athletes, Frey et al. (2006) found that the coach-athlete relationship has profound impacts on athletes’ satisfaction, performance, and overall life experiences.

For instance, when asked about her general experiences of college, Gail's biggest regret was that she didn't take the time to get to know her coach and his coaching style before she went down to school. After all, "you're going to be with these people 24/7. You have to get along with the team. You have to get along with your coach and the way he coaches has to be. You have to either adjust to it or it has to be your style to begin with, right." Gail went on to suggest that it was the "worst coaching experience of [her] life." She remembers sitting in the locker room when her coach was punching the walls, screaming, and telling everybody they sucked. That was his way of "bringing up the intensity" before a game, Gail said rolling her eyes. Sherman, Fuller, and Speed (2000) suggest that not only do female athletes not respond to the overemphasis of a coaches' power or authority, this can be counterproductive.

Cary, Karen, Sarah, Loona, Carmen, and Rachel also had a hard time with their coach. Linda's and Carmen's experiences of college changed "180 degrees" when their team experienced a change of head coach. Because neither of them fit into their new coach's vision, they "didn't see the pitch" for the last years of their university soccer career. This left them disengaged from the team and the sport. Rachel ended up transferring to another school because she and her coach "did not see eye to eye." As a result of Karen's difficult relationship with her coach, she did not describe her general college experience (including her 'good years', like freshman year) in positive terms. While Sarah showed indifference towards her relationship with her coach, she longed for a positive and fulfilling experience. As a result, she often questioned her decision to go to the United States more generally. Cary could not understand why her coach treated her like his best friend in the off-season but completely ignored her during season.

On the other hand, Linda, Amy, Nicole, and Rachel (at her new school) considered their coaches as friends. These women also showed no dissatisfaction with the structure of being an

NCAA athlete. For example, Rachel ended up working as an assistant coach at her university while she finished up her Master's Degree because she had "so much respect" for her coach. "She knew the game so well and was so dedicated." Amy particularly spoke about her coach in endearing terms:

There was something about him that was just like a true soccer coach. And um, of all the male coaches that I've had, he was a) the most knowledgeable b) the most self-confident and c) self secure and had no problem with strong women. And that I learned over my years is so hard to come by.

In a further discussion, Amy also spoke about how her coach created a "safe space" for homosexual soccer players and how she respected him greatly for this. She felt that she was lucky to be in an environment where a strong man worked side-by-side with strong women. Nicole and Rachel felt that their coaches were their "second mothers" and relied on them for more than just advice on the field. During the interview, Nicole continuously referred to her coach as her best friend, "even if she could be somewhat of a "#\$^\$%" sometimes," she laughed.

While research suggests that personal relationships between female athletes and male coaches are very different from the relationships between female athletes and female coaches (Frey et al. 2006), the experiences of the women in this study suggest otherwise. Five of the women in the group were coached either exclusively by women or by both women and men. Positive experiences with coaches were not exclusive to the women who had female coaches, nor were negative experiences exclusive among women who had male coaches. Rather, the type of experience the athlete had was related to the type of personal connection the athlete had with her coach (Frey et al. 2006). Moreover, women who had a personal connection with their coaches were more likely to accept or embrace the structure imposed upon them by their coach. Likewise, the women who had negative experiences with their coaches spoke out about their frustration with the control that was imposed on their day to day living.



**“Having everyone there with you aching helps you get through it”**

While extensive research on male sports has shown that being part of the team is one of the defining features in the career of male professional hockey players, Theberge (1995) argues that women athletes also spend extensive amounts of time together and have ample opportunity to enjoy the bonding, camaraderie, and the sense of togetherness that male athletes enjoy. In a recent study by Heuser (2005), the female athletes interviewed suggested that beyond the love for their sport, the camaraderie “made it worth it in the end” (p.52). This is particularly poignant since research on the experiences on young people in the contemporary context argues that with the waning influence of traditional ties, young people have no one with themselves to turn to in times of struggle.

While the women interviewed in this study experienced the physical, mental and emotional intensity of college soccer differently, the bond that many of them created with their teammates and the shared identity they developed was crucial in their attempts to deal with the larger and smaller challenges they all faced during their various transitions. The fact that they “were all going through that together helped,” Loona describes, “because we pulled each other through. Of course it was hard, really hard. You ache. You are exhausted. But just having everyone there with you aching helps you get through it.” Karen, could only get through grueling pre-season training camps because her teammates were laughing and crying with her. When Linda’s team hired a new coach, she felt like quitting. However, she adamantly stated, “the thing that kept me from, say, quitting, or not playing soccer anymore, was the fact that I loved my teammates so much and couldn’t see myself going to school without seeing these girls every single day.” One of the most memorable parts of Nora’s Hawaiian experience was the friendships she developed with her teammates and Erin’s fondest memories were of the talks she had with her teammates.

### **Becoming a “better person”**

According to Sage (1998) and Miracle and Reese (1994), one of the most common “myths” about sport is that it enhances ‘character development’. This myth suggests that through sport participation, people acquire socially desirable characteristics such as a willingness “to strive for excellence, to persevere, to sacrifice, to work hard, to follow orders, to work with others, and to be self-disciplined” (Sage, 1998 as cited in Eitzen, 2006, p.53) and therefore become ‘better people.’ However, these authors are skeptical about sport’s ability’ to contribute to character building – especially in light of the well-documented cases of physical, verbal, and emotional abuse, discrimination, and cheating (Eitzen, 2006; Miracle & Reese, 1994; Sage, 1998). It is significant then, that the women in this study believed that their sporting experiences had ‘made them better people’. Karen, Nicole, Carmen, and Norah felt that they developed “thicker skin for criticism” and that “it was way good for [them] to go through [their negative experiences]” because such experiences prepared them for the ‘real world.’ For example, learning to fend for herself was an important life lesson for Karen:

I was shot down way hard and had to pick up my own pieces. I just think I am a better person for it and maybe that's typical but I think it was really good I went through getting chopped down by my coach. I had never had that. I had never had anyone tell me I wasn't good enough. I needed to stick it out, show myself, show other people I am tough, I did this.

Because Karen reframed her less-than-ideal experiences as “part of life” and as instrumental in teaching her to be “what the world is really about”, she perceived her soccer transition as positive on the whole despite the fact that many negative experiences existed and persisted throughout her transition. This sentiment was perhaps best exemplified in Carmen’s closing remark during our interview. When asked to recap her experiences in general, Carmen said:

I always say to people that I meet or people’s kids who ask what I think about going down, I say, “I recommend it to everyone to go down and try it. If you’re thinking about it, just try it and go down and see how it goes and you might find

a few people that are terrible and a horrendous coach, but it will give you a life experience that you can look back on and say, “oh, it wasn’t for me, or it was for me or whatever” and you might find the exact opposite. Or it was amazing and you love it and you know, it’s just so worth the experience... I just find it such a positive experience for people no matter how it worked out in the end. I think it’s positive.

This is an important finding for work in the socialization of athletes because it suggests that the way in which athletes reframe their experiences (at times positively portraying a system in which they have had negative experiences) can serve to re-enforce the very system they struggled in.

This is not uncommon among athletes, argues sociologist George Sage (1998), who provides a reason why they rarely contest the conditions under which they labour:

In one way, it can be expected that the athletes would not find anything to question: they have been thoroughly conditioned by many years of organized sports involvement to obey authorities. Indeed, most college athletes are faithful servants and spokespersons for the system of college sport. They tend to take the existing order for granted, not questioning the status quo because they are preoccupied with their own jobs or making the team...(p.248)

As the next sections will highlight, not only did the women ‘gloss’ over the negative soccer experiences, their relatively more favorable academic experiences also led them to view their overall transition experiences in a positive light.

### **The school transition: balancing the classroom and the pitch**

So I would be running in, sweating, heart racing trying to calm down, you know, trying to basically go from this mental state from practice and physical whatever, to sitting and trying to collect, what do I know to put on this paper to do well on this test. So that was really hard. (Erin)

For many of the women in this study, one of the hardest parts of being a student-athlete was balancing school with soccer. Although it is evident that all of these women had to balance these two components of their lives during high school, the added pressure of being on

scholarship is what made it that much more important. On the one hand, it has been well documented that athletes in commercialized sport have a hard time reconciling the roles associated with their dual status of athlete and student (Adler & Adler, 1987; Sack & Theil, 1985). This is because the athletic role, in the eyes of many coaches and athletes, supersedes the student role.

On the other hand, women, ‘whites’ and athletes in non-revenue sports (where women are over-represented) have been found to exhibit less role distancing. For example, research indicates that female college athletes tend to outperform male college athletes (Birrell, 1988; Settlers, Sellers, & Damas, 2002), they take more responsibility for the creation of their academic schedules (Bedker-Meyer, 1990), and they tend to graduate at a higher rate than male college athletes (NCAA, 2005)<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, female college athletes graduate at a higher rate than women in the general student body (Harrison et al., 2009, p.88). The women’s stories in this study tend to support this more positive view of the relationship between athletic involvement and academic performance – although only some athletes appeared to be highly invested in their student identity. Harrison et al. (2009) went on to suggest that the reason why female college athletes experience less role distancing has to do with the fact that they tend to compartmentalize their (at times) conflicting identities as student and athlete (p.83).

For example, although Nicole, Gail, Linda, Loona, and Nora, felt that school was “essentially a write-off” during season because of time constraints, they devoted extra time to taking more than a full course load in the off-season and/or had to complete degree requirements in the summer. For Sarah and Erin, this meant taking an extra year to graduate. Another component of the “balancing act” was maintaining enough energy throughout the day to “survive”; many of the women relied on their “power naps” to get them through the exhaustion

brought on by waking up at 5am to go weight lift, go to class, practice, and study until midnight. While their exhaustion could have impacted their desire to do their homework, most of the women “managed to squeeze it all in.” Others relied on teachers who were sympathetic of their busy schedule (Eitzen, 2006). It also helped when the women had coaches who valued their academic pursuits. Whereas Nicole’s coach wouldn’t let the girls “miss practice for anything,” and gave her athletes greater positive reinforcement for their athletic performance than their academic performance (Adler & Adler, 1991), Gail’s coach “was great” with giving them balance: “If you needed to miss practice because you had to study, it was ok. He treated us like students first and then like athletes.” Finally, although the off-season provided little respite from conditioning and practice, almost all of the athletes talked about how it was a time when they “threw themselves” into academics. These are good examples of how the women negotiated their roles as athletes and students instead of distancing themselves from one altogether.

**“It would have been really tough if I wasn’t an athlete”**

The athletic departments at the universities attended by the interviewees all had academic counselors who were in charge of making sure the student-athletes’ academic needs were taken care of. This can mean giving the students advice on certain degrees or career paths, providing tutors, writing letters to teachers, or simply making sure homework is being done (Eitzen, 2006, p.140). Although balancing soccer with school was at times very challenging for some of the women, they felt as though they were given all the tools to succeed: “We had study hall; we had millions, and millions of computers, printers, tutors, every different kind. Like anything you needed to pass,” expressed Gail. It was further expressed that these tools alleviated the transition that some freshmen feel when they get to university. Being a student-athlete may have been

challenging, but it was precisely because they were student-athletes that the women were given extra help to succeed.

Cary believes she would have been overwhelmed with the transition into university had she not had the type of support afforded to her by the athletic department. She compared her experiences to that of her brother's, who was not a student-athlete, and felt it was much easier to transition because she was "so well taken care of." This is a particularly interesting point to acknowledge as it demonstrates how one transition impacts another (Wylleman, Alfermann & Laval, 2004). The women's transition into university (academics) was alleviated by a transition into university athletics. Had the women transitioned more generally into university without that concurrent transition into university athletics, they may not have been afforded the same kind of academic support nor would their meals and accommodation have been taken care of – a big stress for the "average" college student (Nelson et al., 2006).

As a result of these more positive experiences related to their academic transition, some of the women enjoyed school more than they did soccer. For example, Karen "ended up liking school better than soccer. Soccer wasn't a particularly positive experience for me but I felt like I came away from the whole experience with a great degree and that's what was going to matter in the end." Erin's last two years as the captain of her team "weren't great" because she began to feel disconnected from her teammates. For this reason, she began to embrace her relationship with her classmates. Like others, she also got involved in extra-curricular activities like the Chemistry Club. When Sarah's knee injury forced her to miss an entire season, she joined two campus organizations which she remained heavily involved in until she graduated. Meeting people outside of soccer was important for her to get a different perspective on life. After Loona's team hired a new coach, she focused her attention on running and various other campus

organizations where she felt she could at least “contribute” something more than sitting on a bench.

While women like Amy, Sarah, Nicole, Erin, and Linda had relatively “good experiences” with soccer, it was the opportunities, the support, and the variety of courses they were exposed to that “opened up their world.” Whereas Amy “didn’t pay attention in high school” and “went through the motions without thinking about the larger picture,” her perspective and thought process “focused in university.” By being exposed to new subject matter and allowing herself to “fall into her academics,” she figured out “not only who [she was] during university, but also who [she] wanted to be.” Erin’s academic successes caused her to see herself in a different light. Whereas she said she “was someone who did things” in high school, she “was someone” in university. Sarah’s involvement in extra-curricular activities, volunteering, and being on a college campus full of life were some of the aspects of university she was going to remember more than any on-field memories. While Cary was the only woman to adamantly suggest that her core self and her true friendships were based on her high school experiences, she nonetheless felt as though her university experiences added another dimension to her worldview. Her degree in Gender and International Studies and her experiences mentoring a low-income girl lead her to start her own company focused on inspiring young girls to be active members of their community – both physically and socially<sup>19</sup>.

### **The cultural transition: experiencing and embracing a ‘newness’**

It was so hot and humid. My eyelids sweat. I never knew eyelids could sweat!  
[Laughing] (Gail)

The flight comes in [...] and you're like, "uh – it's so flat. God. It's just flat."  
[Laughing] (Sarah)

Moving somewhere new is often met with “culture shock”: culture shock refers here to, (a) a form of alienation from the ‘familiar’ and (b) “an attempt to comprehend, survive in, and grow through immersion in a second culture” (Adler, 1975, p. 14). Relocation to a new environment, as Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002) suggest, is often accompanied by “a profound sense of loss [and] intense feelings of anxiety and confusion” (p.459). Adler (1975) also suggests that this process can lead to “cultural learning, self-development, and personal growth” (p.14). The women’s experiences of being somewhere new were met with a mixture of alienation, learning, and personal growth. The extent to which the women experienced culture shock depended on how “different” they felt they were from their host environment and how much they already knew about the environment into which they transitioned. For example, those who went to school in the southern United States gave more accounts of culture shock than did those women who went to school a few hours away from home.

### **Not fitting in**

Instead of feeling completely alienated, which Adler (1975) suggests can lead to panic and anxiety (p.13), the women described situations in which they felt as though they did not “fit in.” This was a constant theme in the conversations the women and I had about living somewhere new. For Cary, it was because “the type of people who go to [that school] are super elite – preppy – and I say that in quotation marks. But there's just a certain amount of pretentiousness about them and that's totally not who I am.” Nicole, who was raised in a staunch Italian Catholic family, went to school in the “Bible Belt” which was a “whole new thing” for her. She said, “Going to Catholic school, I had never met a Baptist in my entire life.” For others, it was the change in demographics. As Loona recounts, “I came from somewhere where the biggest ‘racial minorities’ were East Indians, Pakistanis and Asians. Then when I got down there,



I could count the numbers of Asians on one hand. African Americans and Hispanics were everywhere.” Karen, who went to university in a white Californian upper class city, talked about feeling out of place in terms of being exposed to a considerably large homosexual population.

Geographic segregation was also something the women talked about. Cary, Gail, Amy, Erin and Loona all described their campuses as being “in the middle of poverty.” Cary reflected:

I think that was very representative of the American socio-economic system because you have the most prestigious and most rich campuses in the world basically, and then you literally walk a block outside of campus and you were in the ghetto. And that again, that was a huge adjustment because you know, [as a kid growing up in Canada] the farthest you venture is to [a suburb] for a soccer game or when you get older, to a club or something but you don't see that kind of poverty unless you go to the Downtown Eastside. So anyways, I just felt like it was a huge shock to me, to see just again, the difference of what you know, like one side of the street had versus the other side of the street had.

Gail did not ‘see’ segregation on her campus, but the minute she stepped outside, there was a stark difference: “in the houses, the streets, and the kids running around.”

What the women also had in common were their stories of being picked on “for being Canadian.” For instance, Nora’s first few years on her team were “tough” because she was from Canada and “no one could relate to [her] because [she] was so different.” Loona also did not enjoy feeling “different”:

Initially, what really upset me was that everyone would make fun of you all the time as “the Canadian.” About everything. Everything, and everything you said, was the butt of the joke. If one person did it, it was fine and you brush it off. “You’re just being ignorant or whatever or trying to be funny or something.” But if everyone does it, it just gets to the point where you are like, “I am just fed up with it!” and you get angry at them!

Carmen also remembers “standing apart” the minute she opened her mouth and people would say, “um, you’re Canadian, aren’t you? Can you repeat about?” Amy laughs loudly when she remembers how strong some of the misconceptions were about Canada: “In minus 40 degree

weather, people would turn to us and go, ‘you know, you should be able to handle this, you are Canadian! Don't you have snow eight months of the year?’ and we'd be like, no!” Others described more subtle instances where they felt being from another country made them stand apart. For instance, Carmen didn't know how to react when the academic advisor on her recruit trip referred to her as a “foreigner” and Amy and her Canadian roommate felt out of place at the orientation for international students because it was all about “learning the English language!”

Although “being Canadian” was something that made the women stand apart, it also brought them together. For instance, Adler (1975) and Hechanova-Alampay (2002) suggest that individuals may seek out relationships with those ‘like themselves’ when they have negative experiences in their new surroundings. Some of the women in this study described instances where they would “seek out” other Canadians on campus for the “comfort” it provided them with. For example, Carmen felt like every time she met a Canadian, they were automatically “best friends.”

### **Comprehending, learning, and embracing**

Adler (1975) suggests that people are able to critique their own and new cultures once they have become comfortable in their new environment. Reminiscent of this, while many of the women in this study initially highlighted the different behaviors, values, and attitudes they encountered, they also provided examples of the ways in which being exposed to different mentalities and cultures allowed them to be more critical and reflexive of their own and new environments (Adler, 1975). For example, Cary was critical of her school's multicultural orientation week: "If the whole point of this is to have everyone be united, why would you have a week prior to school where you can only come if you are not ‘white’?" Although it was hard for Linda to understand why people felt like “because someone was born a different colour, it

made any difference in that they are a person” these encounters opened up her eyes. It made her reflect: “Ok, that's how they were raised. It doesn't make it right, but how can you help open their eyes a little bit better?” Linda also shared a story about the role of religion on her team:

It was interesting to *see* religion because I wasn't raised really religious. So I go down there and everyone was praying before games. I was laughing because we'd get in a huddle and say a prayer before our game. It was interesting to see how much people put faith into their skills. For someone who is neutral basically, it was really hard. I was 16 or 17 and it was hard to sit back and say, “Do you really think this is going to help?”

Similar to the participants in Gabriel's (2006) study who were also from a 'small town', Amy and Rachel were critical of where they came from and how they were raised:

If you take into consideration the demographics of where I am from. I mean, I am not saying anything bad about [it] but it is 'small-town'. When I was there, it was mostly populated by a lot of white people. There were a lot of Europeans there. Um now I mean it's different. But I think getting out of that security bubble and then exposing me to what life was really about was an important part of my life. (Rachel)

Relocating somewhere new and experiencing culture shock was an important part of Rachel's life – a part which she felt was what life was really about. As a whole, the women learned to experience and eventually embrace the 'newness' that surrounded them, although to differing degrees. While a group of women were initially uncomfortable in their new surroundings, they were able to speak about how their experiences had “opened up their eyes”, had made them more aware of “what else is out there”, and had “impacted who they had become.”

Some embraced their surroundings so much that they stayed in the United States for a time after graduation.

### **The transition from home: growing (apart) physically and emotionally**

The day to day is what I think makes you progress as a person. Kind of, you know and you're building – I am, all of a sudden I am at university, I'm out of Ontario, I'm way from my family, I am living this life of new independence, I'm free from the emotional stress from my family's divorce, or my parents' divorce. It was obvious [we] had grown apart you know? And no matter how many times she came down on the weekend to visit, it was still just a visit. It wasn't; you can't recap your life on a weekend. (Amy)

Many researchers studying youth transitions in the contemporary moment have turned their attention to the way in which support networks have changed. The current moment is said to be characterized by a “time-space compression” (TSC) (Harvey, 1989). New systems of transport and communication technologies have caused the pace of life to become faster and faster. For example, business memos which at one time took days or weeks to reach their recipients can now be received almost instantly via email; business partners working half way around the world from each other may never meet face to face.

Larsen, Urry, and Axhausen (2006) also suggest that TSC involves a time-space “distanciation” – that is “a geographical spreading of people's networks” (p.1). Symptomatic of advancements in transport and communication technologies, as well as the consequent increase in travel worldwide, people are said to find community in networks (not groups) which are now spread beyond cities, regions, and nations. In contrast to Hoggart's (1930) study which argued that social networks were located within a physically confined space such as a neighbourhood (as cited in Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006), today communities “are argued to be far-flung, loosely-bounded, sparsely-knit and fragmentary” (Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006, p.15). “There seems to be a shift from ‘little boxes’ of spatially dense and socially overlapping

networks to networks where connections are spatially dispersed and memberships of one network does not necessarily overlap with that of others”, contend Larsen et al. (p.1).

An examination of the women’s experiences with changing support systems and networks, however, suggests that some young people may experience a spreading out of their networks while still finding a community in groups. This was especially the case in freshman year – a period in young people’s identity formation which Lubker and Etzle (2007) suggest includes the mourning of the loss of growing up, leaving old support systems, making new attachments with others, and coping with the responsibilities of being a college student. For the women in this study, the transition into university was alleviated because of the ready-made support networks afforded to them by their role on a team.

#### **Finding “community” in the team**

Briefly, it was customary for the women to arrive to school at the beginning of August for pre-season – well over three weeks before the semester started.<sup>20</sup> For those three weeks, the campus was occupied by athletes and the occasional international student. The “bonding experience [with the athletes] was awesome,” recalls Erin, “cuz it’s a whole new thing. You don’t know anybody and you are meeting all these new people. I remember that a lot.” Because the team spent so much time together in isolation, Carmen remembers the “instant connection” she developed with her teammates. “Everybody is going out and you’re automatically included in everything right away. I never had nights where I was just sitting around with no one to phone and no one to hang out with.” After all the running, the two practices a day, the weight lifting and all around body fatigue, “We all united in despising our coach,” she laughs, “we all became friends.”

As a result, it was common for the women to feel that their involvement in intercollegiate athletics mediated their feelings of homesickness, especially every pre-season. Rachel did not call her parents for the first three weeks of pre-season because she was “having the time of her life.” Having others to “show you the ropes” was something the women knew they wouldn’t have had if they weren’t athletes:

Even though I moved to the United States and I moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, which is extremely different, you know [laughing], it made it so easy because you were doing soccer and you felt comfortable. It wasn’t like “new student on the first day of class” – you didn’t have to worry about that stuff. You were on a team and you listened to what they said [because they had done it all before]. You were on your way and so it made it a lot easier. (Sarah)

Knowing that they “essentially had another family” waiting for them eased what Erin felt would have otherwise been a “pretty daunting” transition. “I can’t imagine going away to school without that,” said Carmen. In retrospect, Nora knows how fortunate she was to have that instant group of friends. When she moved back to Canada, she realized that “you don’t automatically move somewhere where you have this group of people, right? It’s scary!”

Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002) suggest that moving to a new environment deprives an individual from his or her pre-established support networks, which in turn may cause feelings of being uprooted, lost and homesick (p.462). In the case of international students, support networks are crucial in helping with adjustment to the new surroundings (Hechanova-Alampay, 2002, p.462). It is often assumed that international students know very few (if any) people upon arriving to the host country and therefore have to work much harder than domestic students to identify social support (Hechanova-Alampay, 2002). However, the findings in this study suggest that membership in a sports team and the private time the team spends on campus before others arrive provide a rich “already made” support system and therefore may alleviate the transition into a new environment for international students-athletes.

In a related manner, it is suggested that transitions have become more individualized and that young people feel as though the stress and anxiety associated with transitions is to be dealt with on their own. Yet, the findings in this study reveal that the support network found in a team may replace, to some extent, the role previously held by 'traditional ties' and may therefore mediate feelings of "being alone" in moments of transition. For example, while the women's experiences of their team varied, and while some women (more than others) adopted their team as a 'second family', the team still figured prominently in most of the women's narratives of transitions.

### **Far flung and dispersed networks**

While the women in the study did find a community through their membership on a team, they also experienced a distancing of their old communities and networks. As a result, they relied on techniques to manage this distance. Researchers suggest that with the increase the distance of people's networks has come an increase in "longer-distance" communications such as cell phone calls, text messaging, emails, instant messaging, and Skyping. So, suggest Larsen et al (2006)., while transport and communication technologies have allowed for far-reaching networks, so too have they "reconnected people by helping to afford intermittent visits, meetings, and frequent communication-at-a-distance" (p.1). What results is a phenomenon which the authors call the "disconnection and reconnection of social networks":

People can travel, relocate and migrate and yet still be connected with friends and family members 'back home' and elsewhere. So, increasingly, people who are near 'emotionally' may be 'geographically' far apart; yet they are only a journey, email or a phone call away.

Similarly, and while the team provided interviewees with a community and "family," there were still times when some of the women were homesick and needed to talk to their "real family and friends." Referred to as "meetingness" (Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006, p.19), talking,

emailing, travelling, and visiting was integral for the maintenance of some of these women's pre-established networks. Different modes of communication were used by the women to keep in touch. For 'older' women in the study (Cary, Rachel, Karen, Amy), phone calls and email were the most common way of communicating. As Cary laughed, "I don't want to date myself, but I didn't have an email account until I went away to university!" While phone calls and emails were still mentioned in the younger group of participants, instant messaging service such as MSN or IM and social networking sites such as Facebook were used more often. "MSN was my saviour" said Nora. Free internet calling services such as Skype were not available until the youngest participant was in her third year. Because the participants did not have access to these inexpensive or free callings services, and because of the high cost of international calls made from cell phones, most women used land lines and calling cards. This often meant scheduling a time to talk to their families.

Some women maintained communication with their friends and family back home because this community or support network was stronger than new ones. For Gail, it was especially important to talk to her parents when her injury socially removed her from the team and she subsequently became depressed. Moreover, she also talked to people at home more often when "soccer wasn't going well." Cary sent email "essays" back and forth with one of her high school friend who happened to also be an intercollegiate athlete: "That's who I would vent to when I was having a bad time with soccer." Even though Carmen felt as though she was "pretty lucky to be on a team where everyone got along," she knew that "if there was ever a problem or a crucial incident in [her] life," she would phone a friend or a family member at home. Of course, Rachel reminded me, "I also called home just to chat. Just to update them after a game. How was the game, did you score. You know, that type of stuff." Carmen would give her dad



“play by plays.” “In the first years”, Erin describes, “you discuss your plans and what you are going to do. You know, groceries, or laundry or whatever [laughing]. You are just thinking out loud so you can have their approval.”

According to Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen (2006), because more and more people are on the move and thus somewhere else, ‘catching-up’ has become an indispensable condition in order to re-establish social contacts. As a result, networks which were otherwise based on narrative and experiential sociality have become informal and hard to maintain (Wittel, 2001, p.52 as cited in Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, p.21). The changing nature of relationships will be explored further on.

### **Visits from family and friends**

Larsen, Urry, and Axhausen (2006) are also interested in why people travel. They suggest that although communication technology has afford people with the ability to re-connect with each other, people still travel because of a powerful “compulsion to proximity” – the need to be physically co-present and to fulfill social and cultural obligations with significant others (p.5). As suggested by Gail, for the women’s family and friends, travel was perhaps seen as an opportunity to alleviate homesickness and to visit a new city and/or country. The women’s parents typically came to visit once a year while those who lived within driving distance came much more frequently. Although Loona understood that her parents came as much as they could given the cost and the timing, she felt “it was hard when everyone’s parents would come to town for a game and you would go back to your dorm with no one.” The visits also allowed Amy, Nora, and Gail to show their parents what their day to day life was like. Amy and Nora agreed that they “couldn’t recap their life over the phone” and that it was important for their parents to see what was going on. “It was amazing. It was such a special time for us,” said Nora. However,

especially when visits came during season, life got so busy that it was hard for Gail to accommodate her visitors:

You get in your routine. I remember my mom came during season and the times where I napped before practice, I was with my mom and I was like, “oh my god. I’m so glad you’re here. But this is my nap time!” This is my routine that I have to follow to get through every day to have enough energy to go do this, or wake up the next morning at 5:30 to go do this, you know? It was so good to see them but it really ruins your routines. You have to adjust everything.

This is one example of a time at which old networks conflicted with new networks; where the women’s experiences and lives away from their family and friends caused a disconnection between the old and the new. So, not only is it important to highlight the reasons for which people travel and how these have changed over the past decades (Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006), it is also important to highlight the reactions or the impact of this increased travel on those who are being visited.

**“Believe it or not, I started to miss the flatness of Nebraska”**

Going home was also an important part of the women’s experiences. Almost all of the women went home for Christmas break and summer to visit their family, play soccer, and work full time. Those who didn’t go home stayed at their university during the summer to work. These were also the women who tended not to “miss home” as much or who did not feel as much of a ‘compulsion for proximity.’ For instance, Erin “couldn’t imagine staying there any longer than she had to” and Karen “was on the first plane out after finals.” Conversely, Amy stopped going home after her second year because she didn’t have a good relationship with her parents and hadn’t kept in touch with many of her friends: “I just didn’t feel like that’s where I wanted to be anymore.” Linda and Nicole also only went home for winter break as they started to consider their university towns as “home.” These are also the three women who, after graduating, did not immediately return back to their hometown. They stayed in the United States to work or continue

school. This is reminiscent of the youth respondents in Gabriel's (2006) study, who indicated the more time they spent away from home, the more they felt that they no longer belonged or identified with their hometown.

While some women wanted to go home more than others, other women mentioned that going back and forth became harder and harder. Every time Gail went home, she would tell her parents she "wasn't going back." There was something comforting about being home. However, as Gail, Nora, and Sarah women made more and more friends at school and embraced their surroundings, it wasn't "as easy to take off," remembers Sarah. Everything that was going on in their life was at school, recounted Gail. This was illustrative of what Gabriel (2006) found among her interviewees: "the participants found that beyond anecdotes [about school], their experiences outside the region were of limited interest to their friends and family" (p.40).

Moreover, in this study, the women's friends who had gone away to university (especially in Canada) stopped coming home. As a result, Nora feared that she "could only spend so much time with [her] family before [she] realized there was no point on coming home for as long anymore." At the beginning of college, some of these women wanted to stay home for as long as they could but at the end it was hard to leave their friends behind. "Believe it or not," laughs Sarah, "I started to miss the flatness of [the Midwest]"

**"It became hard to relate to my friends and family back home"**

One of the main reasons why most of the women felt their "allegiance" to home change over time, was because their relationship with people at home changed. Very similar to Gabriel's (2006) findings, the socio-spatial distance between home and their university experiences grew too large to maintain relationships in both places. When reflecting on their experiences of leaving home, these young women expressed concern about the spatial distance between

themselves and their hometown, as well as the cultural, social, and emotional gaps that were opening up between them and their friends and families. They had constructed a view of who they were and how they wanted to live that, for some women, was at odds with their hometown friends and family and way of life. This happened for a few reasons. First, they felt as though the sheer amount of change that had occurred in their day to day life was too much to compensate for:

I mean all of a sudden I was in university; I was out of Ontario; I was away from my family; and I was living this life of new independence. On top of that, I was completely focused on soccer and every minute was scheduled. I felt like I was so consumed with the life I was living down there that it became hard to relate to my friends and family back home. (Amy)

The women felt as though they couldn't recapture their experiences, their 'hometown identities', over the phone or over a weekend visit. For Nora, who was "not a drive away" from her friends and family, going home meant trying to "squeeze people in." After a while, it did not feel genuine telling her friends that she would "see [them] soon!" when she knew it would be another year or so before she would return. The defining moment for Loona was when she went home and realized she had not met nor knew anything about her best friend's boyfriend. Her best friend had been an integral part of her life yet she felt extremely "disconnected."

As a group, the women also mentioned the "awkwardness" of coming home and having "superficial" conversations. "The conversation went something like this," recalls Gail:

"So, how's soccer?"

"Good, what are you doing?"

"Oh going to school"

"Oh good"

"And then you are just standing there staring at each other." Nora hated "having the same conversation over and over again." These moments triggered what some of the women referred

to as a conscious move to avoid “situations like that.” Interviewees in Gabriel’s (2006) study also began to view reunions with old friends as an obligation rather than a pleasure (p.39). By going away, the women realized who mattered to them and what friendships were “worth saving.” As a result some women dissolved ties with former friends while some took a break from these friendships in the short term (Gabriel, 2006, p.42). Cary and Carmen specifically mentioned these short breaks. Although leaving their home town had changed them and their relationships with their friends, “they continued to share interests with these friends, and it was this common ground that they emphasized when they returned home for a visit” (Gabriel, 2006, p.41). They wouldn’t talk to some friends for months and then when they would see each other “it was like we had never left each other”; they would ‘snap right back into it’ (Gabriel, 2006, p.42).

### **Going away to school as a transformation process**

The degree to which the women drifted away from their friends at home was dependent on the extent to which they connected with the people at school and therefore, the degree to which they felt that they had changed themselves. For example, although Cary made some friends in university, she felt as though she “never really changed or got influenced by what she was surrounded by in university”:

I feel like I've done all these cool things, and I've gone to all these cool places and lived far away and whatever, but I just feel like “this is who I am, my identity is with [my high school friends] as opposed to anything else. But then I think the fact that I have this strong network of friends allows me to travel all over the place because I know who I am: my roots are here.

However, all of the other women emphasized feeling as though the reason they had drifted apart from so many of their friends was because they had ‘matured’ while their friends hadn’t. The women continuously talked about how they had “grown-up” and “matured” in comparison to

others who had stayed at home. As Linda remarked, “it took them longer to get to the same place.”<sup>21</sup> The others were “still 17”:

I changed while others stayed the same. Coming back and feeling like everyone is still 17. You guys are the same people. You are still friends with the same people. You have the same interests. They still do the same thing. They haven't grown as people. (Gail)

The women felt they had matured exponentially because they had been on their own for four years (some more), in a different country, in a different culture, without anything familiar to fall back on. In general, for these women the differences between those who had stayed and those who had left had grown over an extended period of time and as a consequence of their diverse experiences living away from home (Gabriel, 2006, p.36). It was obvious that the women perceived going away to school and the associated transitions as a ‘transformation process.’ They considered mobility, development and change as positive in contrast to “stagnation and passivity which they associated with ‘the others’ who stayed at home” (Wiborg, 2001, p.33). As a result, they felt disconnected from their peers at home.

Many researchers studying youth transitions in the contemporary context have also drawn a “clearly demarcated line between those who move and those who do not” (see, for example, Bjarnason and Thorlindsson, 2006; Gabriel, 2006; Jamieson, 2000; Jones, 1999). Mobility has been positively linked to the transitions to adulthood, independence, ‘well rounded’ personal development, acquisition of social and cultural capital, and identity development (Holdsworth, 2009). For example, Christie (2007) argues that researchers often suggest how it is “the process of leaving home [that allows] students to construct a new and individual identity for themselves, free from the ties of their families or connections to their home spaces” (p.2445).

However, Holdsworth (2009) warns against taking mobility, particularly transitions out of the parental home, “as the only marker of independence and maturity” (p.2). While the women

were “keenly aware of how their mobility was associated with being free from the constraints of home life” (Holdsworth, 2009, p.9) and with independence, simultaneous events in their lives also contributed to this feeling. For instance, Rachel attributed her feeling of maturity to the multiple and concurrent transitions which she went through:

I think going away was huge. Getting out of that security bubble and then exposing me to what life was really about, and especially going to Texas, I mean that's huge culture shock...And it taught me a lot about responsibility and then some of the ups and downs I went through, because I had to deal with it a lot and then my parents being on the other line, kind of over the phone, you learn kind of how to adapt on your own. So I think it's a lot about maturity. [I mean it's] amazing what you do when you are in a state of desperation: when you don't have your mom or dad's door to knock on or someone there to help you. You just find ways to do it. I think I learned that a lot. When I was down there, I was like, “I don't care what you say, I am going to do whatever it takes because this is ‘my plan’ and I am going to do whatever it takes. (Rachel)

Going away, experiencing new cultures, the ups and downs of soccer, and being away from her familial support network were important markers in her personal growth. In different words, Carmen agreed that it was not only going away but rather putting herself out of her comfort zone and being somewhere where she didn't have her close family and friends to fall back on that was “character building.” “Picking up things along the way” and having “so many experiences” made Cary feel as though she had “grown as a person” and “added more layers to her foundation.” Personal growth was the biggest step for Nora who had convinced herself to “go out, get out, and experience.”

Linda, Nicole, Erin, Carmen, Sarah, who were captains of their soccer teams, emphasized these feelings of maturity. For example, Nicole believed that the stress and the added pressure she endured in the captain's seat caused her to age twice as fast as her teammates. She was expected to be an “adult” even though she had come from a “tight-knit, over-protective family”

that had coddled her. She adjusted “extremely quickly” and has been on her own since leaving home.

As a whole, the data suggests that the experiences of becoming independent and mature was recognized and celebrated by the women. They perceived that their sport and non-sport related experiences and their subsequent impact on ‘who they had become’ affected their relationship with their family and friends at home.

### **Phase 3: After University- Experiencing, Learning, and Reflecting**

Out of all the transitions in an athlete’s life the transition out of sport is perhaps the most researched (see, for example, Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Coakley, 1983; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Lavalley, Gordon, & Grove, 1997; Parker, 1994; Rosenberg, 1984; Werthner & Orlick, 1986; Young, Pearce, Kane, & Pain, 2006). It is suggested that the transition out of sport can be traumatic to an athlete’s identity, sense of self and mental well-being (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2001; Sparkes, 2008; Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). This is particularly the case when career termination is abrupt and not expected. In this study, all of the women experienced an ‘expected transition’ out of university sport. That is, they either ended their career because they finished their eligibility and/or because they graduated from university. This is a standard exit from intercollegiate athletics.

Transitions out of sport – even ‘standard transitions’ – can be traumatic when the athlete identifies strongly with the role and identity of ‘athlete’ (Douglas & Carless, 2009). Lally (2007) and Albion (2007) contend that it is common for athletes to strongly identify with the athletic role because it differs from other role identities in that it is often formed and internalized much earlier than other role identities. Also, because of the public dimension and the kudos associated with sporting excellence, sporting identity is likely to dominate and subsume all other identities.



For this reason, the premature adoption of a personal or career identity occurs frequently among athletes.

Recent work on the transition out of sport also suggests that the process of transition can take place over a period of time alongside, and in conjunction with, other potentially significant transitions in athlete's lives (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004). As such, the transition out of sport is a complex process within which a high degree of individual variation exists (Douglas & Carless, 2009). For instance, in the case of the women in this study, transitioning out of university sport was almost always met with the transition out of undergraduate education. Also, some women went directly into the work force and some continued with graduate education. Some women moved back home, some stayed in their university city, and some moved somewhere new. Many of the women transitioned out of soccer or team sports completely, while others still play recreationally, and a few continue to play soccer at an elite level. As a result of this diversity some women felt the transition was very difficult because it involved an 'identity crisis' while others felt it was a natural progression into their soccer careers.

**“I was not ready to be done yet”**

Only two women in the study expressed a desire to “keep going” in soccer after university. These were also the women who described their intercollegiate athletic experiences in more positive terms than did the other women. In her senior year, Amy was “not ready to be done yet” and consequentially went on to play (and still plays) semi professional soccer. Perhaps this was due in large part to the fact that Amy had disconnected with soccer coming into university and may have therefore re-engaged with the sport through her positive experiences with her coach and team. However, her positive academic experiences also lead her to pursue a

graduate and post-graduate degree alongside her playing career. Cary, who went to an Ivy League university which focused much more on academics than on athletics, did not feel as though she had peaked in university. As a result, she continues to play semi professionally in Europe, plays for the Irish National team, and owns her own soccer school. As with Amy, Cary is also in the process of finishing a graduate degree and plans on pursuing postgraduate education.

### **Uncertainty, disorientation, and new selves**

In contrast, the other women in the sample experienced uncertainty and disorientation. However, they were eventually able to construct new selves and identities (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2001). For instance, some of the women's relationship to soccer changed so significantly initially that they questioned their identity. As Amy said, "being an NCAA student-athlete is a way of life." When that way of life was gone, said Karen, I had to think, "what am I then?" However, over time, Karen rebounded from her negative college experiences and now plays semi-professionally in Vancouver as well as coaches and works full-time for a school board. Erin, who at once trained with the Junior National team and "who was always a sporto" realized that "soccer wasn't [her] whole life." Upon graduating she took two years off soccer and is now considering playing again. She is also starting her postgraduate education. Nora, whose experiences as an intercollegiate athlete were marked by racism, extreme homesickness, and eventually a full-blown burnt out, and who tried-out for professional teams in Europe upon graduating, realized that soccer was no longer the most important part of her life:

No matter how much you put into your sport, into your school, or into everything else, the most important thing in life is the people you love. Becoming a doctor or being a soccer player or having gone to school abroad – all those other things that you put on your resume – they really don't have much meaning. It took me a long time to realize that and part of the experience was figuring that out.

Although she knew that she would always be a competitive athlete at heart, she no longer wanted to push her body to the extreme that it was pushed during university. As a result, she developed a “balance” in her life. She continues to play club soccer but is also heavily invested in her postgraduate degree and her volunteering efforts.

For some women, discovering new selves involved a re-orientation of their athletic identity to a more recreational based role. While they still considered themselves athletes, they no longer identified with the structure of elite college sport. For example, when Linda graduated she was “sick of just playing soccer and working out twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.” It took her over two years after graduation to say, “Ok, I love soccer and I love sports to actually want to play it again.” The time she took “off” from soccer while she went to medical school was necessary for her to realize that she still loved the sport but did not like the structure associated with elite competition. Nicole was also “completely retired from it” because she grew tired of the structure of an NCAA athlete’s life. Today she seldom plays structured sports and prefers to be “on her own schedule.” Carmen, who also trained with the Junior National team, echoed this sentiment. She was sick of the commitment and being stuck on someone else’s program:

[Graduating] made me realize how much I value my free time. I enjoy being in charge of what I am doing. I really enjoy being able to do what I want whenever I can do it. I love that sense of being able to, you know, and especially right after I finished, I just remember, it felt awesome working out whenever I felt like it, doing whatever I wanted to do whenever I felt like it. It was definitely freeing. That was a really important thing and it's something that I have discovered is really important. How I want to be. And to be able to just really enjoy having free time when you are not tied down to certain things.

Instead of being committed to a team and to a coach, Carmen took up trail running where she felt she could be on her own schedule and set her own goals. Linda, Loona, and Nora also “replaced

soccer” with individual sports such as running, hiking, road biking, snowshoeing, and skiing; they wanted to be in control of their bodies and of their own time.

**“When I finished soccer, it was like I lost my identity”**

Most elite athletes go through that phase of realizing how much of their self-worth and identity is wrapped up in their sport and what kind of a negative thing that is. (Cary)

For two women in the study, transitioning out of university sport was met with regret and disillusionment when they realized they no longer identified themselves as “student-athletes” nor did their day to day life consist of being part of a team. In contrast to Cary and Amy, who continued to play semi or professional soccer after graduation and who therefore still had the “daily presence of soccer in their lives”, these women felt that the transition out of university sports was the hardest out of all the transitions they faced. They had gone from playing soccer every day, their entire life, to graduating and “having to get a real life.” Rachel said powerfully,

When I finished soccer, it was like I lost my identity. I was working my ass off at the gym but why? I didn’t know how to make friends because it was so natural for us to be part of a soccer program and have friends instantly. I didn’t have to try. And then now it’s like, “you mean I actually have to engage in another activity? Or do something outside of sports, like work?” That seemed weird to me. It’s just completely different. I have different focuses in my life. I got depressed my 3rd year in grad school when I realized, “wow, this is all going to end for me. No more college soccer life. It’s going to be completely different”

As echoed by Eitzen (2006), Rachel missed the camaraderie of being on a team; the travelling; the atmosphere at home games; and the celebrity status that athletes received on campus.

Eventually, Rachel got over her initial “trauma” and has since become an integral member of her club team and has found a new sense of community among her teammates.

However, Loona who was in her first year of medical school, feels as though she is still having “withdrawal” – “some sort of identity crisis” – because she is not going to school for soccer nor is she playing on a soccer team:

When you are on a team, your whole day consists of going to class and to practice. You have this core group of girls that you are seeing every single day. But now, you are still going to class, you are still going to school, but you have that gone. I used to define myself as an athlete but now I don't feel I am an athlete anymore because I am not doing that: I am not training, I am not having games, I am not on a team. I think I've kinda realized this recently in my life. That group of people you shared that common interest with. You could be so completely different but somehow that made you be able to relate to each other. And I think that that's what I am really missing coming out here. I moved out here for school, and you know, yes, I am a soccer player, but I don't have any friends that play soccer. So that's just weird. And it's hard. I feel kinda empty because that part is not filled as it normally was.

Although she has since successfully taken up competitive long-distance running, she has a hard time identifying herself as an athlete. Sarah, who has also recently graduated, is also having a hard time adjusting to life without her “team.” “The hardest thing and the thing that ‘hurts the most’ is being home and not having that team there with me.” Although she wants to pursue medical school, her desire to be part of a team is pushing her towards playing professional soccer.

This group of women found it hard to transition out of sport because they had lost what they had focused on for so long and the primary source of personal identity: the team. These women echo sentiments that Lubker and Etzle (2007) have found to be common among females. In their study on college adjustment in athlete and non-athlete populations, the authors contend that for females, “relationships are historically viewed as an important part of one's worldview and are linked to one's own identity” (p.473). Moreover, peer group support is also seen as an important part of female adjustment to transitions. Therefore, just as the transition into college athletics was found to be alleviated by the existence of a “ready-made” support network, the

transition out of sport and out of such a peer group triggered an identity crisis. This is no surprise considering most of the women described their best memories or their best experiences as those with the team: the talks they would have, the pre-season and road-trip bonding and the sheer amount of time they spent together played heavily in their experiences of university.

In summary, some of the women in the group experienced a relatively 'stress free' transition out of university sport. Their more positive experiences of transition were perhaps linked to the fact that they still play soccer at a high level where a strong sense of community and athletic identity reinforcement is common. The second group of women experienced initial shock but were able to re-establish (albeit in a different way) their identities as athletes. For some this entailed a re-evaluation of the role that competitive soccer played in their life. For others this meant completely forgoing any structured environment and taking up individual sports instead. This group managed to balance their athletic identity with other parts of their lives. For the last group of women the transition out of sport was particularly difficult because they still identified strongly with their athletic identity – one which was based on being part of a team. Although this group of women tried to supplement their feeling of loss and identity crisis by taking up other sports and focusing on school or work, they did not fulfilled.

These findings support research which suggests that transitioning out of sport is a complex and context dependent process. While some athletes find the transition out of sport extremely difficult, others suggest that it is 'just another transition' in their life – one which allows them to explore new interests. Research on female athletes has particularly argued that transitioning out of sport is not necessarily as traumatic to an athlete's identity and that the context of the transition (e.g. female, male, amateur, professional) should be discussed (see Douglas & Carless, 2009; Young et al., 2006).

## **Individualization and Detraditionalization**

As noted previously, in the modern contemporary context young people (especially those undergoing transitions) are said to have become the makers of their own futures; their paths are no longer mapped out for them as they were for past generations. As such, their own agency more so than their reliance on traditional ties, is said to determine their future (Skelton, 2002). This paints a picture of “increased independence, self-determination, and self-realization” (Miles, 2000, p.68).

However, and as I discuss in the following section, for the group of female athletes in this study, this picture is not as clear. While the women did feel on their own and in charge of their own life (especially with regards to mobility) their place in organized college sport and its associated ‘community’ served as a “powerful framework” (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007) which guided their experiences and identity formation.

### **“It’s my life” – “That’s what I wanted to do”**

Contemporary patterns of transitions among young adults suggest that the individual has increasingly gained some freedom to choose and create his or her own lifestyles during transitional events (Lauder et al., 2006). This sense of personal choice was especially evident in the way these women spoke about the decisions they made regarding going down to the United States for school. They felt as though they had the freedom to decide whether or not they wanted to go away to school and where they would end up.

“I needed to go” emphasized the self-described “sheltered” Karen. Although Nora described herself as a ‘dependent homebody’, she “wanted to do it, would love to do it, so did it.” Cary, who has “always been sort of strong willed”, “always knew what she wanted to do.”

She made her decision when her father was away because she knew that he would try to exert as much influence on her decision as possible:

He was so pissed when he came home but I knew I just had to make that decision before he came back. I really knew that's where I wanted to go and that I would regret it if I didn't go. I felt strongly that it was my life and I was going to do whatever I felt was going to help me achieve my goals.

Similarly, Erin's mother "knew it wasn't her life" – it was Erin's. Her mother's friends "couldn't believe" that she had let Erin go away: "they would be afraid I would find someone and marry and never come home." However, Erin's mother felt as though "those are the things you can't control and that's not my decision to make." Carmen's parents encouraged her to do what she wanted: "It will work out if you want it to. We will support your decision" they said. When Rachel was forced to transfer soccer programs after her first year, she thought: "I was going to do whatever it took because it was 'my plan'."

For this group of women, decision making was an individual task. However, for some authors (e.g. Cieslik & Pollock, 2008; Jensen, 2006), it is highly debated whether or not this boundless freedom of choice is beneficial to young people's journeys into adulthood. On the one hand, this individualization of transitions presents young people with new opportunities to experiment with their social identities and lifestyles (Polhemus, 1999; Muggleton, 2000 as cited in Cieslik & Pollock, 2008). On the other hand, it creates new dilemmas about how they should construct their biographies. For instance, while all these options offer freedom of choice they can also be a source of confusion since they make it hard to decide which choice is the 'right' choice (Jensen, 2006, p. 347; Melucci, 1992, as cited in Miles, 2000, p.154). In contrast to the women above who 'enjoyed' the freedom associated with the individualization of transitions, Sarah thought it was a "scary" process because of the range of options she was given. "At least" she says, "I knew I wanted to play soccer so that's what I based my decision on." Coming out of



university, however, playing soccer is no longer Sarah's goal. She is caught in a decision making "frenzy" which she finds stressful:

Do I want to go to school? Do I want to travel? Do I want to play pro soccer? Do I want to get a job or do I want to go to medical school? They are all so completely different! And I am not sure exactly what I want to do!"

Although she sometimes takes individual responsibility for her problems, and feels as though her decisions are "the worst in the world," Sarah suggested that she looks to other people for support and comfort. She attributed her "passion for community and support networks" to the fact that she developed an intense bond with her teammates at school. As a result of graduating, however, Sarah had lost this community and now feels "on her own" in her decision making – a feeling she attributed to "today's society."

### **"On my own in the real world"**

One of the main arguments in research on youth transition in the modern contemporary context is that youth feel as though they have to undergo significant transitions on their own instead of as members of groups (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Within the women's narratives, however, was a constant dialectic between being "on their own" and "alone" at university, and their most cherished memories of the built-in support network of friends and confidants they had as part of a team. For some this was their teammates, for others their coach. Many of the women gave lengthy stories about the memories they had with their team and spoke about the team in terms of a "second family." However, throughout the women's narratives, a distinction arose between "being alone" and "being on your own." The women never felt alone because they were constantly surrounded by teammates: "I never had a night where I couldn't call someone up to do something," said Linda. Yet, they felt "on their own."

Although the women maintained contact with their friends and family at home through communicative travel (i.e. phone calls, emailing, instant messaging, and skyping) as well as through physical travel (either going home or having family members and friends visit them at school), the women felt “on their own.” For example, although Nora’s parents were “on the other [phone]line”, she had to “figure it out” by herself. Even though Erin spoke in great lengths about how important it was to have those weekly conversations with her parents, she felt as though she was “fending for herself.” Moreover, Nicole, who developed many new friendships during university, still described herself as an “orphan” because she was away from her parents. “When you don’t have your mom or dad’s door to knock on or someone there to help you, you just find a way to do it on your own”, stressed Rachel. Being physically distanced from their family, friends, and/or “the familiar” caused the women to feel “on their own.”

However, there was also a conviction among the group of women that “being on your own” was what the “real world was about”. Having continuous help from family and friends was *not* going to last their whole life. They would eventually “figure it out” but going away to university allowed them to do it sooner. Nora described her “realization”:

I was kind of brought up in a little bubble and my mom always made me feel like everyone was good and everyone wanted the best for you. And that was probably the hardest thing there. Was learning that you are fighting for yourself. And when you're in the real world, and you don't have any family, you have to be really strong just to get by and survive.

Rachel also described “getting out of that security bubble” (home) and realizing “what life was really about.” It was about “responsibility” and “adapting on your own”; it was about “survival” and being “strong and confident” for Nora; it was about “taking care of yourself” for Nicole; it was about “fending for yourself” for Erin. Karen and Gail believed that life was about picking up

their own pieces in moments of adversity and conflict. It was about personal responsibility for Linda: "It was hard [going through all those transitions] but I put myself there."

### **Freedom vs the Way of Life of an NCAA Athlete**

[Today's young people] are no longer obliged to do what a particular group is doing but can legitimately choose to do their own thing (Miles, 2000, p.68)

While Miles (2000) suggests that people have been freed to some extent from the constraints associated with traditional ties, the findings in this study suggest that by their membership in the NCAA, intercollegiate student-athletes' freedom to do their own thing is tempered. As independent as the women may have become, and as much as they may have described their journey "on their own," they were also part of a highly structured environment (Eitzen, 2006).

Reactions to this highly structured environment varied among the women. Some loved the environment while some grew tired of its rigidity. For instance, Cary "loved" her life "in the sense that it was structured with soccer; you had people to play with, the weight training, and the physiotherapist, and the good coaching." Amy also enjoyed "setting the alarm, putting on [her] stuff, and walking to the change room." Others like Karen felt like they could never "catch their breath." Her day to day life was structured from the minute she woke up to the minute she went to bed: "it was all like 'get up, go, go here, go there'" mentioned Karen. Nicole gave particularly vivid examples of how "restricted" her life was:

We practiced twice a day and we had to watch film. Our life was pretty much soccer. So socially, our coaches said there were three important "s's". There was school, soccer, then social. Those were the things that we had to follow. So we had curfew at 10:30. They'd come and check on us. No boys in the rooms. When you have scholarships, they make sure that you live in the athletic dorms. Then when you moved off campus, there were more restrictions. So they had special meals for us, they could check our cafeteria, to make sure we were eating, and

how often we were eating. Everything was very, very planned out. So they weighed us, they did everything. They monitored us like crazy.

Although not all of the women were “monitored like crazy” they did describe their day to day lives as “packed” and “scheduled.” Their descriptions provide a unique perspectives on what many researchers have considered the “old way of life” where people’s experiences were “contained, ordered, and regulated” (Beck & Willms, 2004, p.8).

## 5

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

By interviewing Canadian female student-athletes about how their identities and experiences were shaped by their move to the United States and by describing and discussing the women's pathways through their careers as intercollegiate athletes, the complex and interconnected nature of their experiences were highlighted. Not only did these careers involve more 'standard' youth transitions (e.g. moving away from home, moving into a new cultural environment, and going to university), they also involved such sport-related transitions as moving to the next level of competition, playing under a new coach and with a new team, and adjusting to a new 'style' of play.

Key findings from this study were described in relation to literature on: (1) transition experiences and socialization in and through sport; and (2) individualization and detraditionalization processes. Prominent results and themes that emerged in this context include: the women's decisions to attend college were framed by an interrelated set of sport-related factors (e.g. a desire to pursue their sport at the 'highest level' and to play in the 'best environment') and non-sport factors (e.g. a desire to develop their identity through mobility and to break free from the familiarity of home); transition experiences were complex and context dependent and were influenced by sport-related factors (e.g. relationship with the coach and teammates as well as the adjustment to a 'new style of play' and sport mentality) and non-sport factors (e.g. academic support received, degree of culture shock and feelings of 'fitting in, and extent of homesickness); the women used diverse strategies to deal with their disconnection from

home (e.g. decreasing pre-established ties, using various communication technologies to ‘stay in touch’, and visiting home during breaks); and negative experiences were reframed into positive ones and were contextualized in terms of ‘life experiences’ (e.g. in terms of ‘character-development’). Speaking more generally, these insights into the career of an intercollegiate athlete not only allowed for a richer understanding of the socialization processes of young athletes, they also presented novel thinking about ways that work on ‘risk society’ explains the experiences of geographically young and mobile athletes. For example, the student-athletes in this study experienced processes of individualization (e.g. in their decision-making, around education, in their mobility pattern and relationship with home and family), but the structure of the sports team provided some of the stabilizing influences thought to be lost in a ‘risk society.’

## **Contributions to the Sociology of Sport**

This study worked within and moved beyond a tradition of research in the sociology of sport that focused on the socialization experiences of athletes (see Coakley and Donnelly, 1999), on transitions in athletes’ lives (see Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004) and on the careers of female athletes (see Heuser, 2005). The study did this in three ways in particular. First, the study focused on the sport and non-sport transitions experienced by athletes along their postsecondary education-related career pathways and in doing so gave voice to the experiences of Canadian intercollegiate athletes. Unlike sports journalists, who commonly interview prospective student-athletes before their ‘big move south’, this study included interviews with student-athletes after their careers had ended. In these interviews, the student-athletes shared their experiences along their career path and were able to reflect upon these experiences as they relate to their identities.

The implications from the findings reveal that the student-athlete experience is much more complex than has previously been described. For instance, one of the most significant findings in the study is that the experiences related to moving away from home, moving into a new environment, and moving into post-secondary education were just as meaningful in the identity formation of the young women as ‘becoming an NCAA athlete.’ These other factors impacted the decisions these women made about going to school abroad, which school they chose, how much they enjoyed their time in the United States, and how they transitioned out of student and intercollegiate athlete roles. Significantly then, and while the media accounts uncovered in my research paint a picture of the student-athlete focused solely on athletic goals, the women’s accounts in this study suggest that student-athlete experiences and identities are related to the multiple and concurrent transitions they go through. These accounts also suggest that Canadian student-athletes moving domestically may also encounter similar experiences to those who cross borders (e.g. missing home, adjusting to living ‘on your own’, and gaining independence). While crossing the border might have played a significant role in the women’s interpretations of their experiences ‘away from home’ (e.g. increased feelings of ‘not fitting in’, increased desire to come home), student-athletes moving across the country, across the province, or even across town may have many of the same experiences. This would suggest that media reports should also pay attention to the multiple and concurrent transitions faced by athletes on Canadian intercollegiate athletic teams.

Second, by attending to issues related to the female athletes’ movement away from home, this study extends work on sport transitions to include conceptualizations of mobility. Previous research conceptualized the physical movement of athletes from one place to another as a form of labour migration (see Maguire, 1994), focusing mostly on economic reasons for movement

(i.e. salary) and largely excluding amateurs and female athletes. However, this study's findings suggest that the women's movement involved more than economic motivations (e.g. scholarships). Rather, a constant reshaping of identities, of support networks, and of relationships figured prominently in the women's experiences. Strategies were required to deal with the disconnection from home: communication technologies such as Skype, instant messaging and email, as well as visits back home played a significant role the women's ability to manage new and 'pre-established' support networks. By accounting for the multiple consequences of and contexts of mobility, this study pushes sport sociologists to broaden their understandings of what it means for athletes to move away – an understand which includes new ideas about the identity development of young female athletes.

Third, this study supports research which highlights women's positive (e.g. Blinde, Taub, & Han, 1993; Mennesson, 2000; Wachs, 2005) and negative experiences in sport (e.g. Hargreaves, 1990; Messner, 2002; Theberge & Birrell, 2007). What is more significant is that the results reveal how the women glossed over their negative experiences as part of their 'character development' and 'life experiences'. Although the data cannot determine whether or not gender played a role in the women's experiences, what is important is that by reframing their experiences, the women consented to a system which has traditionally been oppressive to female athletes (Hall, 2002). Other authors have also found that female athletes and/or females working in the sport environment who do not directly experience discrimination, belittlement, or sexism have a tendency to consent to the status quo (Hardin and Shain, 2006; Tomlinson, 1997). Significantly then, the women's narratives suggest that it is important to recognize the relationship between experiences and the structural conditions under which they exist.



## **Contributions to an Understanding of Youth, Transition, and Risk Society**

This study also complimented and provided a new context for the application of research by authors such as Furlong and Carmel (2007), Miles, (2000), and Mitchell (2006) on risk society and young people's transition experiences. This study did so in three distinct ways. First, it is well argued that one of the consequences of an individualized society is the dismantling of traditional support networks and that young people have to turn to themselves and to loosely-bound informal and/or temporary support networks (Miles, 2000). However, the experiences of the women in this study suggest that participation in intercollegiate athletics may have provided support networks best described within 'older' models of social relations. For example, the women in this study were constantly surrounded by, and looked for support from, their teammates and other athletes who were going through tribulations of their own. In some cases, this support network was so strong that it replaced the "family" – one of the most 'traditional' support networks. As such, the results suggest that the student-athletes experience processes of individualization (e.g. in their decision-making, around education, in their mobility patterns and relationships with home and family), but that the structure of the sports team provided some of the stabilizing influences thought to be lost in a 'risk society.'

Second, it is also contended that in the industrial era people's experiences were "contained, ordered, and regulated" (Beck & Willms, 2004, p.8) and that one of the defining characteristics of the contemporary moment is the dissolution of this order. However, the results in this study reveal that intercollegiate athletes experience both containment and freedom. While the women experienced freedom in terms of deciding to move away to school and to take-on new experiences and challenges, their lives were heavily structured and regulated (e.g. regulation of daily routine, diet, academics and mobility). This finding suggests that the context of

transitions is crucial when assessing the extent to which individualization and detraditionalization processes are at work.

Third, women are said to have benefited from processes of detraditionalization and individualization as these have pushed a ‘progressive’ picture of a woman’s freedom to choose and create her own lifestyle (Mitchell, 2006). However, the positioning of women (and athletes more generally) in the NCAA – an organization which is argued to be bound largely by the perpetuation and promotion of traditional gender roles and patriarchal relations (Bryson, 1987; Hargreaves, 1990; Messner, 2002) – shows how freedom is context dependent. In this sense, traditional institutions like the NCAA and young people’s experiences within them need to be considered alongside broader observations of young people’s lives in risk societies.

### **Practical Implications: Sharing Experiences of Transition and Mobility**

As was mentioned by the women, leaving home at a young age to go play soccer in another country was a life changing experience. However, these women also faced many challenges: deciding where to go to school; navigating the ‘uncharted’ territory of recruitment; ‘fitting into’ their coach’s playing style and mentality; missing their family and friends; experiencing culture shock; and transitioning out of intercollegiate athletics. As such, I suggest that the examples provided through the diverse experiences of the female student-athletes could be useful to high school counselors, families, coaches, and teammates in their effort to help future Canadian student-athletes navigate their way through their own multiple and concurrent transitions. The results from this study could also help the media write a more well-rounded account of the Canadian student-athlete experience. A social networking site would be an ideal

place to bring together media accounts with past and future student-athletes, teachers, family members and coaches.

Also, by acknowledging that mobility is playing an important role in young athletes' lives, the results in this study could be used to start a dialogue between sport organizations and young athletes and their families. For instance, young Canadian athletes presented with the opportunity to move to the other side of the country to pursue their National Team dreams may have questions and concerns about being on their own, in a new environment, and without their parents. As such, sport organizations may want to use results from studies like this one to encourage athletes to make informed decision about their move.

Lastly, and with particular significance to coaches, the results in this study highlight how transitions in all parts of an athlete's life may have an impact on their athletic successes and experiences. Therefore, it would be in coaches' best interests to understand and help young athletes deal with issues and concerns they may have about moving and adjusting to a new phase in their athletic or non-athletic lives.

## **Future Research**

While this thesis has contributed to work in the sociology of sport and youth, it has also opened up dialogue for future research. Three suggestions are made here. First, future studies should be conducted with athletes from a variety of social backgrounds (e.g. ethnicity, gender, sport, sexuality, and socio-economic status), sports, and pathways along their athletic careers (i.e. returned home early from the United States) because research shows that these factors can impact athletes' experiences of sport participation (Coakley & Donnelly, 1999; Eitzen, 2006). Second, risk society theory would gain from an examination of young people's experiences in social arenas (such as sport) in which the conditions of individualization and detraditionalization

(e.g. loosening of traditional gender roles, support networks, and social structure) are not as evident. Third, different types of mobility should also be considered for sport sociologists interested in how young athletes deal with 'being on the move'. For instance, future research could examine experiences of road-trips may factor into the identity development and personal growth of athletes. The time away from home spent travelling to new places (e.g. internationally) may impact young athletes' transition into adulthood. Fourth, a longitudinal study interviewing athletes before transitioning, during their transitions, and after transitioning would also add depth to current research on transitions in sport.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Consent Form**

See next pages.

# THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



## School of Human Kinetics

210, War Memorial Gym  
6081 University Boulevard  
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z1

Tel: (604) 822-3838 Fax: (604) 822-6842  
[www.hkin.educ.ubc.ca/School](http://www.hkin.educ.ubc.ca/School)

## INFORMATION AND CONSENT SHEET: FOR A STUDY OF CANADIAN INTERCOLLEGIATE STUDENT-ATHLETES' EXPERIENCES ATTENDING UNIVERSITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

**Brief description of the study:** This study aims to find out more about the experiences of Canadian student-athletes (like yourself) who went to the United States for their university education. Specifically, I am interested in better understanding how involvement in intercollegiate athletics shaped the experiences of these students. I also intend to identify other factors that impact these experiences, such as living away from home, living abroad, and transitioning academically from high school to university.

The hope is that this study will uncover information that will, in the future, guide student-athletes who are faced with decisions about moving abroad to pursue academics and athletics. A further goal is to better understand how identities of student-athletes are shaped by their various experiences attending universities in the United States.

This study is conducted through the School of Human Kinetics at the University of British Columbia and will be conducted by Dominique Falls (a Masters student), who is working under the supervision of Dr. Brian Wilson (an Associate Professor).

**The Interview and Your Participation:** Your recollections about your time as an intercollegiate student-athlete in the United States would be extremely helpful and much appreciated as I try to find out more about the topics mentioned above. The interview will take approximately 1-2 hours of your time, depending on your availability, travel time, and the nature of the conversation that takes place. The interview will be audio-recorded.

**Confidentiality:** Your name will not be referred to in any of the documents emerging from the completed study. The transcripts from the data will be secured by password on a computer and the audiotapes will be secured in a locked cabinet. The data will be kept in a UBC facility. Data may be used in Dominique Falls' future academic publications and presentations.

**Your Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You are free to not answer any questions, and you may withdraw from the interview at any time. If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or by e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

**Further Contact Information:** If you have questions or desire further information about the project please contact the student-investigator Dominique Falls at 604-910-2928 or her research supervisor Dr. Brian Wilson at 604-822-3884.

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### Consent

I have read the above information and understand the nature of the study. I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate in or withdraw from the study at any time.

I hereby agree to the above stated conditions and consent to participate in this study.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

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Subject Signature

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Date

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Printed Name of the Subject



## **Contact and Information Form**

See next page.

# THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



## School of Human Kinetics

210, War Memorial Gym  
6081 University Boulevard  
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z1

Tel: (604) 822-3838 Fax: (604) 822-6842  
[www.hkin.educ.ubc.ca/School](http://www.hkin.educ.ubc.ca/School)

Date \*\*\*

Dear \*\*\*

My name is Dominique Falls. I am a Master's student in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of British Columbia. For my Master's Thesis, I am conducting a study that is intended to find out about the experiences of Canadian student-athletes who went to the United States for their university education. I am particularly interested in better understanding how these experiences were impacted by factors such as moving away from home, transitioning academically from high school, and playing sports at an elite level.

The goal of this letter is to request an interview with you about your experiences going to the United States for your university education. Your involvement in this study would be most helpful in my attempt to find out more about the experiences of young athletes, identity formation, and life choices.

I have attached an information and consent sheet that includes a more detailed overview of the study. When you have had a chance to look over the information and consent sheet attached, please let me know if you are interested in being involved in the study (either by e-mail at [dominique.falls@ubc.interchange.ca](mailto:dominique.falls@ubc.interchange.ca) or by phone at 604-910-2928). If you are interested, we can then work out a time and location for an interview that is most convenient for you.

Thank you very much for your time and for considering this request. I look forward to being in touch.

Sincerely,

Dominique Falls  
School of Human Kinetics  
(604)-910-2928  
[Dominique.falls@ubc.interchange.ca](mailto:Dominique.falls@ubc.interchange.ca)

## Demographic Questionnaire

### 1. General

Age:

Home town/city:

Current town/city:

### 2. Education: Please write “in progress” if you have not yet finished to date.

Your major in undergrad:

Your specialization in your Masters (if applicable):

Your specialization in your Phd (if applicable):

Other certificates/degrees:

Your parents' level of education (list highest):

### 3. Soccer:

If you played soccer after graduating, please be specific and describe in what capacity (ie: National Team, USL...) and whether or not you are still playing:

### 4. Employment:

Did you work during university? If so, when, where, and what was your job (i.e. during the summers...):

Are you currently employed? If yes, briefly describe your job and whether or not it is in the area in which you graduated.

Your parents' current job/occupation:

### 5. Living situation

Since graduating, have you lived with your parents? If so, for how long? Are you still living with your parents?

If not, are you living alone? With a partner? With roommates?

## Appendix B

### Interview Guide

1. (General question) I'd love if you could talk about your experiences going down to the United States. Talk about whatever you feel like and take as long or as little time as you want. I'm interested in anything you talk about so feel free to go in the direction you want to.
2. (University context) So I want to know a little bit more about the university setting where you went to. Can you tell me a little bit more about the university you were at? Size, rural, general atmosphere? Role of the sports team? Athletes? Your work load? Other activities? Live on campus? Know anyone before? Was there a Canadian contingent on campus? Examples. Your relationship to them?
3. (Decision process) Could you tell me a little bit more about your decision to go down to the States? The process? Think about it in high school? Academics? Stressful? Other played a part? Friends doing it too?
4. (Moving away from home) Going away to university can sometimes mean moving away from home for the first time. Do you mind if I ask you a little bit about this? How did it feel to leave home? Always in plans? Ready? Impact experiences? How old? Ever lived from home before? This impact adjustment to move? Prior travel experience?
5. (High school→ University) On the academic side, what was it like to go from high school to university. Issues you remember facing? Work load? Lifestyle? Relationship with teachers? How prepared did you feel?
6. (Local→varsity) What was is like going from your club, or provincial program soccer to a varsity program? Issues? Problems? Being Canadian? How prepared did you feel?
7. (Networks, support system) How do you think your support network, or those who you relied on the most for advice, help, support (sports or non sports) changed when you went to university? Explain who. Coaches? Teammates? Friends? What was your relationship with the team like? Canadians? Hang out?
8. (Communication) For people who study young people's travel experiences, keeping in touch with a home base is something they are interested in since this has changed substantially over the decades. How did you stay in touch with people (etc...) at home? Hard? What did it mean to you?

9. (Mobility) Part of staying in touch can also mean going back and forth between school and home. How often did you get to go home every year? For what reasons? Anyone come visit you? How important was this for you? Change over the years?
10. (Relationships) Can you talk a little about your relationship with people at home? With your family? Boyfriend or girlfriend? Long distance? What changed? Was it hard to accept? Did you try to keep them going? Still keep in touch with people you met in university?
11. (Identity) Like I mentioned before, sociologists are interested in issues of identity formation. I am interested in how your experiences have shaped your who you are? Do you mind sharing your thoughts on this?
12. (Wrap-up) Strongest memories you have about your time in the United States? Any regrets? Do you wish things had gone differently? What do you remember the most?

## **Appendix C**

### **UBC Research Ethics Board Approval**

See next page.



The University of British Columbia  
Office of Research Services  
**Behavioural Research Ethics Board**  
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK

<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b> Brian Wilson	<b>INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:</b> UBC/Education/Human Kinetics	<b>UBC BREB NUMBER:</b> H08-01679
<b>INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:</b>		
<b>Institution</b> UBC		<b>Site</b> Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)
Other locations where the research will be conducted: The location will be determined by the subject (the goal is for the subject to be comfortable in the location, and to be in a location that is easily reached). Sites will include a university classroom, university office, and public location of subjects' choice.		
<b>CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):</b> Dominique Alexandra Payette Falls		
<b>SPONSORING AGENCIES:</b> Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) University of British Columbia		
<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b> Canadian Student-Athletes: Narratives of Transition through Time and Space		

**CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE:** September 19, 2009

<b>DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:</b>	<b>DATE APPROVED:</b> September 19, 2008	
<b>Document Name</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Consent Forms:</b>		
Transition Consent Form	1.2	September 30, 2008
<b>Letter of Initial Contact:</b>		
Transition Contact Form	1.2	September 30, 2008
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
<p>Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:</p> <hr/> <p>Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair Dr. Ken Craig, Chair Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair</p>		

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Other reasons used to explain this student-athlete exodus from Canada to the United States include athletes believing that a professional sports career is more attainable from a United States university (Besson, 2008; Deacon & Dwyer, 1997; Mustafa, 2008) and the NCAA's reputation for offering the 'best' coaching and facilities (Deacon & Dwyer, 1997; Quan, 2000). Athletes' own egos (Beamish, 2005) and the peer pressure put on athletes by their coaches, parents, and friends to 'play at the top' (Beamish, 2005) are also factors apparently influencing student-athletes' decisions. Reasons for returning to Canada part-way through student-athletes' degrees have also been granted attention. Some of these motivations include missing family, being on a losing team, lack of play time, spending money on flights home, paying taxes on scholarships, culture shock and disappointing academics (Zacharias, 2006a, 2006b).

<sup>2</sup> In a similar manner, Lauder et al (2006) argue that one of the defining characteristic of the current contemporary context is that "decisions made often have consequences for others who live perhaps thousands of miles from where those decisions are taken." These trends, as the authors state by quoting Giddens (1994) reveal that "decisions have to be taken on the basis of a more or less continuous *reflection* on the condition of one's action. 'Reflexivity' [then], refers to the use of information about the conditions of activity as a means of regularly reordering and redefining what activity is" (p.22, italics added)

<sup>3</sup> According to Massey (2006), there are two common ways of misconceptualizing space. First, there is a tendency in both research and every-day speech, to "turn space into time, geography into history" (p.90). For instance, remarks Massey (2006), reactions to global inequality and poverty are often expressed in such terms as "they will catch up" or "they are behind". This way of conceptualizing space conceives differences as temporal and therefore as 'solvable' with time. The second way of misconceptualizing space, and perhaps the most common, is as a surface. In casual talk, space is equated with "something out there" – it is a landscape, the surface of the ocean, the surface of the table (p.91). With particular significance to this study, travelling or 'mobility' is rendered 'travelling across a surface'.

<sup>4</sup> Generally speaking, most of the literature on international student migration has focused on students moving from 'developing' to 'developed' countries. As a result, motivations often surround issues of economic betterment, future immigration, and language acquisition (Balaz & Williams, 2004; Baruch, Budhwar & Khatri, 2007; King & Gelices, 2003; Rizvi, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> In 1972, the United States Congress passed Title IX of the Education Amendments. Title IX was passed to provide inclusion and equal opportunities for women and men in all educational activities, including intercollegiate athletics. While participation of women in school athletics increased dramatically after its inception, debate remains around issue of equality, equity, and representation (see Wushanley, 2004 for a detailed account of the history and development of Title IX).



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<sup>6</sup> Athletic stages include initiation, development, mastery, and discontinuation. Psychological stages include childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, with psychosocial stages highlighting changes in the athletes' significant social agents as they mature (e.g. parents, siblings, peers; peers, coaches, parents; partner, coach; and family, coach). Academic and vocational transitions include those from primary to secondary, and on to higher education and/or professional vocation.

<sup>7</sup> Sekot argues that sport migrants may have little sense of attachment to a specific place or local community because their status is derived mostly from the ethos of hard work, differential rewards and a win-at-all-costs approach (p.65). This is also supported by Molnar and Maguire's (2008) piece on Hungarian athletes.

<sup>8</sup>For example, issues of taking up nationality in a host country (See Takahashi & Horne, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> A benefit of this method is that it can be used to study the lives of many as opposed to traditional biographic accounts which have a tendency to focus on one or two lives (Squire, 2000, p.198 In. Bryman, 2004b, p.323).

<sup>10</sup> I acknowledge that not all Canadian female intercollegiate athletes remain in the United States long enough to graduate and that an early homecoming may be due to the difficulty some women might encounter in their adjustment to multiple and concurrent transitions.

<sup>11</sup> At the time of submission of this document, the REBA at the University of British Columbia did not have a policy regarding social networking sites as recruiting tools.

<sup>12</sup> Lally (2007) refers to asking participants to recall past experiences as the 'retrospective approach.'

<sup>13</sup> Loker-Murphy & Pearce (1995) argue that young people in Western countries are more likely to travel for pleasure than those in 'less developed countries.' Generally speaking, in post-industrial societies more and more young people are afforded the ability to postpone their entrance into the workforce until their late 20's. Many receive continued financial support from their parents who endorse these travels as 'character-building' and necessary in a globalized workforce. In contrast, the majority of young people in 'less developed' countries become active members of the workforce much earlier in order to survive.

<sup>14</sup> Amy's experiences relate to what Ross and Shinenew (2008) have acknowledged is common among high school girls: that despite more female participation in athletics since the 1950's, a majority of male adolescents continue to want to be remembered as outstanding athletes while most females want to be remembered as outstanding students (p.42).

<sup>16</sup> There is no indication whether or not earlier studies included female athlete responses. Results from recent studies may be a result of the inclusion of female athletes; female athletes are said to pay more attention to their academic role (Harrison et al., 2009).

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<sup>17</sup> It has been argued that the experiences of Division I, II, and III athletes can vary substantially because of the extent to which athletes are expected to manage their dual student and athlete roles (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). Moreover, researchers have also been cautioned not to generalize about sport programs within NCAA divisions as these can range for a variety of reasons such as size of school, existence of a football program, size of city and so on (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). For this reason, I note that although all the women attended Division I schools, the soccer programs into which they transitioned were different from school to school. Moreover, the places the women lived in ranged from small 'typical college towns' to large metropolitan cities.

<sup>18</sup> All of the women in this study graduated with a Bachelor's degree. See Appendix C for a full profile of the participants.

<sup>19</sup> I only interviewed women who graduated and therefore may have had more positive experiences.

<sup>20</sup> The university soccer season begins at the end of August and typically runs until the middle of November (depending on the success of your team). While most university's academic calendars start at the end of August and go until the beginning of May, some schools chose to start their semesters at the end of October and end at the end of June. As a result, some soccer players may be on campus for over two months before they meet another 'regular' student.

<sup>21</sup> While Bruner et al.'s (2008) study reports that the young men also felt as though they had matured as a consequence of having moved away from home at an early age, the methods used in the study (e.g. interviewing the men shortly after their move) did not yield insight into the ways in which the men negotiated their relationships with people back home.