

ONCE A RUNNER, ALWAYS A RUNNER? ATHLETIC
RETIREMENT PROCESSES OF FINNISH
FEMALE DISTANCE RUNNERS

A Thesis
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF SCIENCE

by
Irina K. Watkins
May 2014

Thesis Approvals:

Dr. Michael Sachs, Thesis Advisor, Department of Kinesiology
Dr. Lois A. Butcher-Poffley, Department of Kinesiology
Dr. Catherine C. Schifter, College of Education

©
Copyright
2014

by

Irina K. Watkins

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the athletic retirement processes of Finnish female elite distance runners retrospectively, and was loosely based on the theoretical-conceptual background of sport career transition models (Stambulova, 2003; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). The participants were Finnish female distance runners who have competed at the national level, or at the international level as members of the Finnish national track and field team. In Finland, the athletic retirement process has not been studied extensively, especially among distance runners. A total of nine former female runners who had retired 10 years prior and no less than one year ago participated in the study. The qualitative data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews in Finland, using an interview guide constructed by Kadlcik and Flemr (2008) as a model. Seven of the interviews were performed face-to-face, one via Skype, and one via telephone. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and a total of seven themes with 25 subthemes emerged from the data. The themes that emerged included: (1) avenues to become a distance runner, (2) meaning of running, (3) pre-retirement conditions, (4) retirement, (5) factors affecting quality of retirement, (6) major effects of retirement, and (7) current life.

Several reasons for sport career termination were identified, loss of motivation being the most prevalent. Most athletes did not have a plan for how to deal with retirement, although studying and other interests played an important role when methods of adaptation were discussed. As in previous studies conducted in other countries, the former Finnish athletes experienced significant changes in many aspects of their lives,

including social, psychological and health. Overall, the participants reported a challenging, but not overwhelming athletic career retirement process, with two out of nine participants stating that the transition was somewhat difficult. Recommendations for researchers and practitioners are also discussed.

In memory of my first Coach,
Mentor, and Dear Friend
Ari Juhani Salmi
1953 – 2002

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to express my appreciation to the nine women who participated in the study. Sharing your experiences is invaluable, and I sincerely thank you for your openness, and for making this experience unforgettable.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my thesis advisory committee: Dr. Michael Sachs, Dr. Lois Butcher-Poffley, and Dr. Catherine Schifter. Thank you for your encouragement, time, and feedback. I am especially grateful to Dr. Michael Sachs, who has been an irreplaceable mentor and advisor during my studies at Temple University. Thank you for supporting and encouraging me to embrace the topic I chose for this thesis. Your patience and tenacity working with your students is greatly appreciated.

I would also like to thank Noora Ronkainen, who helped me with my data-analysis process, and exchanged ideas with me, as she conducts research within runners, and is passionate about running. Additionally, a special thank you to my friends Niina-Annukka and Theresa, who have been an invaluable support during my endeavors in the world of academia, and life in general.

Last but not least, I express gratitude to my wonderful, understanding, and patient husband David. Thank you for encouraging me to fulfill my dreams, in running, in academics, and in life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	8
Research Questions.....	8
Limitations.....	9
Delimitations.....	9
Definitions of Terms.....	10
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
Part 1: Conceptual and Theoretical Background.....	12
Gerontological Theories.....	12
Thanatological Models.....	16
Transition Frameworks and Models.....	19
Reasons for Career Termination.....	25
Chronological Age.....	26
Deselection.....	26
Injury.....	27
Free Choice.....	28
Factors Affecting the Quality of Adjustment to Career Termination.....	28
Social Identity.....	29
Athletic Identity.....	29
Perceived Control.....	31
Coping Methods and Resources.....	31

Frameworks for Interventions and Retirement Service Programs.....	33
Athletic Career Assistance Programs.....	35
Part 2: Finnish Sport System.....	36
Studies Conducted on Finnish Athlete’s Athletic Career Retirement.....	39
3. METHODOLOGY.....	42
Research Design.....	42
Participants.....	43
Procedure and Interviews.....	44
Instrumentation.....	46
Data Analysis and Coding.....	46
Personal Bias-Statement.....	47
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	51
Presentation of Results.....	51
Theme #1: Avenues to Become a Distance Runner.....	57
Active Childhood.....	57
Focus on Distance Running.....	58
Combining Competitive Running with other Aspects of Life.....	59
Theme #2: Meaning of Running.....	61
Running and Self.....	61
Theme #3: Pre-retirement Conditions.....	62
Injury/Health Issues.....	63
Loneliness and Lack of Support.....	64
Interest in Other Things.....	64
Coaching Matters.....	65
Theme #4: Retirement.....	66
Retirement Planning: plan vs. no plan.....	67
Reasons to Retire.....	69
Reactions to Retirement.....	72

Theme #5: Factors Affecting Quality of Transition.....	75
Coping Methods.....	75
Athletic Identity.....	76
Personality.....	77
Social Support.....	78
Perceived Control.....	78
Theme #6: Major Effects of Retirement.....	80
Time Management.....	80
Life Style.....	81
Health/Physique.....	82
Financial Situation.....	83
Self-perception.....	83
Social Life.....	83
Theme #7: Current Life.....	84
What is Important Now.....	84
Satisfaction with Athletic Career.....	86
Recommendations for Retiring and Competing Athletes.....	86
Discussion.....	88
Question #1.....	88
Question #2.....	90
Question #3.....	92
Question #4.....	93
Question #5.....	97
Question #6.....	98
Question #7.....	99
General Discussion.....	100
Self-reflection.....	103
Implications for Researchers.....	104
Implications for Practitioners.....	107

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	110
Summary.....	110
Conclusions.....	112
Recommendations for Future Research.....	113
REFERENCES CITED.....	115
APPENDICES.....	122
A. INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	122
B. INTERVIEW GUIDE IN FINNISH.....	125
C. INFORMED CONSENT.....	128
D. PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE AND VIDEOTAPE.....	132
E. INFORMED CONSENT IN FINNISH.....	135
F. PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE AND VIDEOTAPE IN FINNISH.....	139

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Table 1: Summary of Results.....	52

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The end of an athletic career at elite level is inevitable, even if an athlete has all the possible resources available to maintain an elite athlete status. If nothing else, natural causes such as aging will start playing their part and make it impossible for athletes to continue their sport at high level. For many athletes, athletic careers end sooner than they planned due to an injury, and often in these instances “letting go” is difficult. However, even though some athletes are able to continue their sport and have a long, fulfilling career, their retirement process may not be any easier than athletes who were forced to retire early (Alfermann et al., 2004). Former major league pitcher and sport psychologist Bob Tewksbury’s quote summarizes well some of the emotions athletes go through when it is time to retire from sport:

There’s depression, self-doubt, sadness. Even if you retired by choice, there’s this whole grieving process you go through because you’ve lost a part of yourself. You have to figure out, who am I? What do I do? You’re stripped down of everything people recognize you as. When you go through the loneliness of trying to find out who you are, you understand why people keep playing long after they’ve really stopped enjoying it (New York Times, 2011, para.13).

Athletic career transitions and termination have been studied extensively over the past four decades, with earlier studies focusing on adjustment to the difficulties that followed career termination (e.g., Curtis & Ennis, 1988; Mihovilovic, 1968), and more recent studies focusing on the factors affecting the quality of retirement, and career termination as a life event that influences former athletes’ well-being and development

(Cecić Erpič et al., 2004). Numerous factors impact the sport career termination process, such as career termination planning, athletes' support system, coping resources, and athletic identity (Grove et al., 1997). Additionally, several different frameworks have been developed and employed to explain the phenomenon of sport retirement, such as Stambulova's Sport Career Transitions Model, and Taylor and Ogilvie's five-step Conceptual Model of Adaptation to Career Transition (Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008).

Stambulova (and her colleagues) have also researched cross-national stability of reactions to career termination (Alfermann et al., 2004). However, in Finland the topic has not been studied extensively. Finland is a fairly small country located in northern Europe, between Sweden and Russia, with a population just over five million. It covers 338,145 square kilometers, about 130,559 square miles, an area slightly smaller than the state of Montana (Embassy of Finland, 2013). Reaching a status of an elite or professional athlete is extremely difficult, as it is anywhere in the world. Most athletes study and participate in sports simultaneously, even though in Finland sports and education are not combined in the same manner as for example in the United States. Higher education is free for students who pass the grueling qualification process to enter a university, and the Finnish government gives students living and housing allowances to support their studies. Athletes are members of different clubs, mostly associated with cities and towns, and many of them joined the club at an early age. These clubs are operated primarily by volunteer coaches and administrators, and funding is usually limited. Additionally, athletes are often responsible for acquiring sponsorships on their own, especially if they are not world-class athletes.

Finland is a country where sports have always been a strong part of society. In the beginning of the 20th century, when the country was still a grand duchy of Russia, Finland used sports to strengthen its national identity. Finally, in 1917, Finland obtained independence in the tumult of WWI and the Russian revolution. Finland has an especially strong and long history in distance running: in 1912 at the Stockholm Olympics, the Finns dominated the distance running events with Hannes Kolehmainen winning the 5,000 and 10,000 meters. A famous Finnish slogan states “Hannes Kolehmainen ran Finland onto the map of the world.” This started the Finnish 70-year-long domination of distance running (Miller, 2012).

Finnish women have never had the same success in distance running as Finnish men. Of course, in the beginning of the modern Olympic era, women were not allowed to participate in longer distance running events (Miller, 2012), so the Finnish women cannot be blamed for not living up to their male counterparts. During recent decades, Finnish athletics in general have been through some tough times. Despite the success of javelin throwers, there have been very few success stories of Finnish track and field athletes. This certainly has not been because of a lack of talent. Finland has had several young athletes place well at the youth track and field World Championships and other international meets, but the same success has not transferred to the adult level.

Additionally, Finland has many resources on sports research, mainly funded by the government. Finnish sport research expertise is known around the world, but the sports system itself has not been able to develop more than a few world-class female distance runners. For example, since the introduction of the modern Olympic Games,

according to the sports-reference website, so far Finland has had only twelve female participants in the distance events (Finland Athletics).

Since the expertise seems to be in place, sports facilities are outstanding, sports centers are offering their services from athlete testing to medical services, and athletes have higher education possibilities, it is difficult to grasp why Finnish female distance runners have not been able to reach a level that they could qualify for the main championship events of their sport, let alone win medals. Reasons such as increasing popularity of team sports and lack of funding are often speculated, although popularity of other sports solely cannot be blamed for the lack of runners. Additionally, some of the athletes retire at a fairly early age to have a career outside sports, or focus on academic studies, or have a family. Athletic retirement has rarely been discussed publicly, with the exception of athletes announcing their retirement. However, after the tragic death of Finnish cross-country skier and Olympic winner Mika Myllylä in 2011, professionals started to ask if athletes should be offered services to deal with athletic career ending retirement.

There are different opinions about the outcomes of athletic career retirement within Finnish sports circles. Arto Bryggare, the 110 meter hurdles bronze medalist from the 1984 Olympics, stated in an interview in 2011 that “there is not a one single athlete who ends his/her career without pain” (Saarinen, 2011). However, a Finnish sports sociologist, Jari Lämsä, stated in an interview in 2007 “there is nothing extraordinary about ending an athletic career, since everyone has to face it eventually anyway” (Kulju, 2007). Similar variations of opinions have been presented in the literature examining

athletic career retirement, whether the process is part of a normal life cycle or a major event that causes retiring athletes tremendous distress. As mentioned earlier, there has been fairly little research done about Finnish athletes' athletic career retirement, and the majority of the studies address the reasons for retirement, not the actual retirement process (e.g., Ristolainen et al., 2012, Toiviainen, 2011). Additionally, the majority of the Finnish research focuses on male athletes, and there have been just a few studies looking specifically at female Finnish athletes (e.g., Toiviainen, 2011).

The life of an elite athlete is certainly not easy in today's society. Pressure, demands to excel, and constant criticism from fans and media make it difficult to concentrate on the essential factors of being an athlete. Athletes who focus on sports from an early age and are disproportionately invested in sport participation are often characterized as unidimensional people (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). This, however, does not mean that athletes live in a closed environment where non-athletic factors do not affect them. Therefore, the most current research takes on a more holistic approach to examine athletic career transitions (e.g., Cecić Erpič et al., 2004; Stambulova, 2010).

Participation in sports starts often at a very young age either in a playground setting or as a member of a youth sports team. Through sports participation, children have an opportunity for social involvement, and extrinsic factors such as winning and status are not significant motivators for children to be involved in sports (Baillie, 1993). Many children explore several different sports before they decide in which sport they want to participate. However, as obtaining an elite or professional athlete status has become more and more attractive, a growing number of coaches and parents believe that

the best way to obtain elite athlete status is to have young athletes participate in early specialization (Malina, 2010). The competition to be part of a little league traveling team is fierce and for college athletic scholarships the rivalry becomes even more vicious. Lastly, the possibility for an athlete to become a professional or elite athlete is rare. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (2012), only 1.2% of male college basketball players will reach the professional level and for women the percentage is even lower, 0.9%.

Early specialization is supported by the concept of deliberate practice, which suggests that to attain an expert level one has to engage in deliberate practice activities for at least 10 years (Ericsson et al., 1993). The primary focus is on the quality of instruction, practice, the ability of the individual to organize the specific knowledge, and repetition (Malina, 2010). However, early specialization puts young athletes at great risk. Focusing on a single sport may cause isolation from family and peers, and limit experiences in other sports and activities (Malina, 2010). Young athletes whose lives are highly regulated can become over dependent on others and lose control of what is happening in life. This may result in socially maladaptive behaviors later in life (Malina, 2010). Another drawback of early specialization is burnout, contributed by negative performance evaluations, inconsistent feedback from coaches, mixed messages, and overtraining. Young athletes can be easily manipulated and exploited, and are subject to mental, physical, and sexual abuse (Malina, 2010).

An alternative to deliberate practice and early sport specialization is early diversification and sampling. Côté, Horton, MacDonald, and Wilkes (2009) argue that sampling is beneficial for athletic development because of exposure to a number of

different physical, cognitive, and psycho-social environments, reinforcing physical, personal, and mental skills needed for future successful sport specialization (Côté et al., 2009). Previous studies have proven that the majority of elite athletes participate in various sports during their early years (Malina, 2010). As young athletes reach the adolescent years, they weigh their options whether to continue their competitive sports career, obtain an education, or enter the work force and focus on a career outside of sports.

If reaching an elite athlete status is difficult, maintaining it is not easy either. Even a multimillion-dollar contract holding ice hockey player with a manager, team doctors, and physical therapists making sure the athlete stays healthy, and a knowledgeable coach helping him/her get better, faster, and stronger, the possibility of falling below the level that is required from elite athletes both physically and mentally is something athletes must deal with every day. Athletes participating in sports such as track and field often do not have the luxury to earn a living by doing their sport and struggle to survive. Sports at a high level have become more and more like a profession, and the audience, sponsors, national sports federations, and media demand athletes succeed every time they set their foot on the court, field, track, or ice. Nowadays, an elite athlete must have a thick skin and a remarkable ability to handle pressure, as the audience has the means through technology to deliver their grueling messages to athletes who did not deliver the performance of their life.

Being an elite athlete is a full-time job, full-time meaning 24 hours a day. It is vital to sleep nine hours a night, eat healthy, train several hours a day, ice, stretch, have massages, and deal with the demands of sponsors. Therefore, it is not surprising why

some athletes feel as they are sacrificing their years of youth to sports. When the athletic career is over, athletes are often behind their non-athlete peers in numerous aspects of life. Athletes who are 30 years of age are rather old to apply for a first job. Additionally, in most cases, being an athlete does not qualify as job experience. Yet, athletes are still willing to try.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the athletic career retirement process of elite Finnish female distance runners.

Research Questions

The following research questions were examined in this study:

1. How did elite female Finnish distance runners react to their athletic retirement?
2. What were the reasons for retirement?
3. What was the degree of difficulty faced in the athletic retirement process?
4. Which factors were the most significant in influencing the quality of adjustment to retirement?
5. Was there a need for assistance before and/or after retirement?
6. Was there assistance available before/after retirement?
7. What was the former athletes' level of life satisfaction before, during, and after their athletic retirement?

Limitations

The following limitations were present in this study:

1. Temporal issues: there is the potential for deterioration of memories in retrospective recall. For example, if it has been close to 10 years since retirement, the individual may have forgotten some of the feelings caused by the retirement process, or how she coped with those feelings. Additionally, if the retirement was recent, the interviewee may still be processing the different aspects of retirement, which may have skewed the answers.
2. The study was based on self-report information that is retrospective in nature. Therefore, the study was dependent on the participants' level of openness, and how they wanted to talk about their experiences.
3. Some of the runners are the researcher's former competitors in distance running, and due to the prior connection some of the answers may have alterations.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were present in this study:

1. Participants were required to be former Finnish female distance runners, who were elite athletes. Athletes were also required to have participated at the Finnish track and field championships, and/or represented the country as a member of the national team, and/or participated at the track and field World Championships/Olympic Games/European Championships.
2. The minimum time elapsed since the initiation of retirement was restricted to one year, and maximum time elapsed since the initiation of retirement was restricted to 10 years.

Definition of Terms

Following terms were included in this study:

Athletic Career Retirement: An athlete who is no longer planning on training and competing at the national or international level. Some athletes have also made a public announcement to retire.

Distance Runner: An athlete who participates in events ranging from the 800 meters to the marathon (800m, 1500m, 3000m steeple chase, 5000m, 10000m, and marathon).

Elite Athlete: The former athlete has competed at the Finnish track & field championships, represented the country as a member of the national team, participated at the track and field World Championships/Olympic Games/European Championships, and/or qualified for the track and field World Championships/Olympic Games/European Championships.

Finnish: A citizen or dual-citizen of Finland.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Is there life after sports? This perplexing question is often asked, not only by athletes, but also by coaches and sport psychologists. However, because there are numerous athletes who have had successful careers and lives after they retired from athletics, perhaps the more appropriate question would be “how well have they adapted?” As the emphasis of coaches, sports administrators, and psychologists is mainly in assisting athletes during their active career, athlete well-being is often neglected after the athletic career is over (Taylor & Lavallee, 2010). Most of the earlier research focusing on athlete transition out of sport concludes that athletes encounter difficulties when facing retirement (Taylor & Lavallee, 2010). Finnish heptathlete Tiia Hautala, who ended her career after tearing her Achilles tendon, thought that in the beginning the retirement process seemed easy. She started as a sportswriter at a newspaper, and life seemed fine. However, soon the reality hit, and she felt confused; she had been an athlete since she was a little girl, athletics regulating her life completely, and all of a sudden there was nothing. Having to face unemployment later did not make the transition easier (Iisalo & Mustranta, 2006).

Part I: Conceptual and Theoretical Background

Athletic career retirement was discussed in 1952 by Weinberg and Arond in their study “The occupational culture of a boxer.” Weinberg and Arond (1952) concluded that the boxers had premature feelings of being old due to a decline in physical capabilities, reinforced by younger athletes in the sport who called the more mature boxers “old men.” Other issues connected to career termination were decline of socio-economic status, accompanied by boxers’ prolonged emotional difficulties in readjusting to the new occupational roles (Weinberg & Arond, 1952). However, the issue of career transition and athletic career termination started to truly gain the attention of sport psychologists approximately four decades ago (Taylor & Lavalley, 2010).

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the earlier studies of athletic retirement. First, the theoretical perspectives used to understand the athletic retirement process will be discussed. Second, an overview of reasons for athletic retirement is provided. Third, factors related to adaptation to career transition, available resources for adaption to career transition, and quality of career transition will be explored. The final portion of the literature review focuses on studies conducted on the Finnish sport system and Finnish athletes.

Gerontological Theories

In order to understand the processes athletes encounter at the time of retirement, numerous social gerontology theories have been employed: activity theory, subculture theory, continuity theory, disengagement theory, social breakdown theory, and exchange theory (Lavalley, 2007). Activity theory, the pioneering conceptualization of aging, proposes that individuals have a tendency to maintain a stable equilibrium between

activities (Lavalley, 2007). According to and Albrecht (1953), in order for the adjustment process to be successful, the active roles that were lost upon retirement need to be replaced with new ones. However, activity theory may not be applicable to all athletic career transitions, because in most cases athletes do not retire from sport participation completely (Lavalley, 2007).

Subculture theory offers an alternative to activity theory. According to subculture theory, it is possible for people to adjust to retirement with less active roles (Rose, 1962 in Lavalley, 2007). This theory assumes that people can be less active yet well-adjusted during retirement, even if the situation differs from social norms. Subculture theory has been criticized in the sports literature, because the athlete is moving out of the subculture instead of moving into one (Gordon 1995, as cited in Lavalley, 2007). However, even though this theory may not thoroughly explain athletic career termination, it does expose some of the sources of the problems experienced by athletes in transition (Lavalley, 2007).

Continuity theory, developed by Atchley (1989), focuses on the evolution of individual adaptation to normal aging (Lavalley, 2007). According to Atchley (1989), a central premise of continuity theory is that in making adaptive choices, middle-aged and older adults attempt to preserve and maintain existing internal and external structures, and they prefer to accomplish these objectives by using continuity (i.e., applying familiar strategies in familiar arenas of life). To reach the state of optimum continuity, an individual realizes the pace and degree of change coinciding with personal preferences, social demands, and to be within his/her coping capacity. Too little continuity makes life seem uncertain, and too much continuity means an individual feels as he/she was in a rut

and life does not have enough change (Atchley, 1989). Continuity theory has been utilized to study athlete's adjustment to retirement. For example, a study by Lerch (1981) was conducted among male baseball players using continuity theory to predict retired baseball players' life satisfaction. However, Lerch concluded that no continuity variables were significantly related to adjustment to athletic career retirement (Lavalley, 2007).

Cummings, Dean, Newell, and McCaffrey (1960) studied an elderly population in Kansas City, and developed disengagement theory based on the findings of the study. According to Cummings et al. (1960), the individual and society mutually withdraw, which results in the desired equilibrium; younger workers enter the workforce, as the aging population retires and spends remaining years in leisure (Lavalley, 2007).

However, disengagement theory does not seem like a sound explanation to athletic career retirement. For example, most athletes end just their athletic careers and continue to be part of the workforce. Additionally, very few athletes withdraw from sport; they are rather forced out after trying to hang on (Rosenberg, 1981, as cited in Baillie & Danish, 1992).

Another theory adapted to explain athletic career retirement is the social breakdown theory. This theory was adapted to gerontology by Kuypers and Bengtson to help explain the origin of mental disorder in a general population (Kuypers & Bengtson, 1973). According to this conceptualization, individuals become increasingly susceptible to external labeling following a role loss (Lavalley, 2007). If the labeling is unfavorable, the social evaluation leads to a gradual reduction in one's involvement in certain activities until the role is eliminated (Baillie & Danish, 1992). According to Baillie and Danish (1992), the social breakdown theory has a clear application to athletic career

retirement: retirement demonstrates the athlete that his/her strongest skill is not available anymore. It also shows the athlete's possible social shortfall, which causes the likelihood of negative labeling to increase (Baillie & Danish, 1992). To avoid such a decline, Baillie and Danish (1992) suggest preretirement seminars and social restructuring through individual counseling to provide preparation and redefinition before the actual retirement out of sport.

Rosenberg (1981) believes that exchange theory, developed by Homans, is an adequate introduction to a discussion of the aforementioned social breakdown theory (as cited in Lavalley, 2007). Exchange theory explains how aging individuals rearrange their activities so that their existing energy generates maximum returns. This particular theory divides opinions among researchers. Whereas Rosenberg (1981) argues that exchange theory is one of the most noteworthy gerontological theories applicable to athletic retirement, Koukouris (1991) claims that the processes associated with exchange theory are not plausible because they reject the possibility of the development of a career after sport.

Even though gerontological theories are appealing, there are several discrepancies when they are applied to athletic career retirement, or career transitions in sports. First of all, it can be questioned to which extent the analogy to old age retirement can be drawn (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). Retiring athletes are at least 20 years younger than retiring workers, and therefore have most of their working years ahead of them after their active athletic careers are over. Additionally, it must be considered that the term "retirement" is primarily concerned with relinquishing formal roles (Blinde &

Greendorfer, 1985). Athletes who are leaving sport must focus on developing new skills and gaining new roles.

Thanatological Models

Another conceptual approach applied to study athletic retirement is thanatology, the study of death and dying, introduced by Park in 1912 (Lavalley, 2007). Three thanatological models have been applied to study athletic career retirement: social death by Kalish, social awareness by Glaser and Strauss, and stages of death by Kübler-Ross (Lavalley, 2007). Social death occurs when an individual is treated as dead, even though he/she is biologically alive (Kalish, 1966). This brings about the loss of social functioning, isolation and even ostracism. However, the social death approach is not valid when examining athletic career retirement due to the obvious fact that athletes continue functioning in society after their athletic career termination, although in a different role (Wylleman et al., 2004).

A more plausible thanatological model in describing retirement from sport is the series of stages of death by Kübler-Ross (1969). This conceptual approach was developed when a group of theology students wanted to study terminal hospital patients (Kübler-Ross, 1969). The five stages of dying encompass denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Blinde and Stratta (1992) used this theory as a framework to study social psychological processes illustrating the experiences of college athletes following an unanticipated and involuntary exit from college sports. The results of the study revealed that during stage one (shock and denial) athletes could not believe that their career had come to an end. During this stage athletes also attempted to deny that their career was over and often assumed that the decision to

cut them from a team was a mistake (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). However, athletes' feelings of shock and denial were brief compared to the other subsequent stages (Blinde & Stratta, 1992).

During the second stage (anger), the majority of the athletes were angry, felt betrayed, and directed their anger at a single individual, whomever they felt was responsible for the career termination (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). In stage three (bargaining), athletes tried to negotiate with coaches and administrators to be able to continue their sport, although they quickly came to the realization that they lacked the power to challenge the system. However, athletes who were cut from the team rarely resorted to bargaining techniques, citing personal pride as the major reason for their unwillingness to approach the coach (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). Stage four (depression) appeared to be the most prolonged stage, characterized by unproductiveness (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). However, athletes who were cut from the team were able to direct their energy into their studies, attempting to experience success in another realm of their lives (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). Because the majority of the athletes had not yet accepted the termination of their athletic career, Blinde and Stratta (1992) conducted follow-up interviews to determine athletes' reactions during stage five (acceptance). These interviews revealed that the athletes had not yet accepted the career termination, but agreed that their ability to overcome difficulties in other domains of life had improved (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). Additionally, rather than avoid the topic, the athletes were able to talk and even joke about the situation (Blinde & Stratta, 1992).

Additionally, stages of death and dying theory in sport settings has been employed by several theorists, to describe for example the psychological pattern

experienced by athletes during rehabilitation from injury (Lavalley, 2007). However, the stages of death and dying represent a descriptive rather than normative aspect of the stages of the terminally ill, and those experiences may differ from the experiences of athletes in transition (Lavalley, 2007). Overall, the models of gerontology and thanatology have been instrumental in stimulating research on career termination. However, all of these perspectives possess limitations. For example, the focus has been on non-sport populations and limited on lifespan development of athletes, with the presumption that the athletic career termination process is an inherently negative, single event (Lavalley, 2007). Additionally, much of the earlier athletic career termination research assumes that adjustment difficulties are innately related to the sport experience itself. According to Blinde and Greendorfer (1985), viewing sport as the sole reason for difficulties athletes face automatically limits the range and nature of factors to be considered, such as social structural factors.

Even though earlier studies suggested that athletic career termination is a traumatic experience for most athletes, more recent studies have concluded that a significantly smaller percentage of athletes actually face adjustment difficulties during their career transition. This lead to a suggestion that athletic career termination could serve as a “social rebirth” (Coakley, 1983). Because models of thanatology and gerontology were unable to adequately explain the complex nature of athletic career transitions, theorists proposed that athletic career termination should be seen as a transitional process rather than a singular event (Wylleman et al., 2004).

Transition Frameworks/models

Instead of focusing on athletic career retirement as a single, negative, and abrupt event, researchers suggested that sport retirement may be a transition, and that the athlete may discover alternative ways to maintain identification with sport (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). Therefore, athletic retirement should not be viewed as an end to the sport role. Additionally, Blinde and Greendorfer (1985) propose that “retirement” may simply be a system-induced mechanism, where athletes leave a formal or institutionalized level of sport. Nevertheless, separation from a particular organization is not necessarily followed by simultaneous withdrawal from the realm of sport itself (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985).

Several transition frameworks have been used to explain the interaction of the retiring athlete and environment, for example Sussman’s analytic model of retirement from workforce, and Schlossberg’s model of human adaptation to transition (Lavallee, 2007). Hill and Lowe (1974) used Sussman’s analytic model to explain the process of sport retirement, and demonstrated in their study that athletic retirement is a multidimensional conceptualization (Lavallee, 2007). Additionally, Hill and Lowe (1974) took into consideration factors depicted in Sussman’s model, such as situational and structural variables, utilization of linking systems, perception of situation, individual variables, and within boundary constraints.

The most frequently used theory of transition within a sport setting has been Schlossberg’s (1981) model for human adaptation to transition. Schlossberg (1981) pointed out that people move through life continually experiencing changes, and cope differently with different situations. For example, loss of a job can be detrimental for one

person, while another sees job loss as an opportunity to explore new activities and gain new skills (Schlossberg, 1981). However, if an individual is able to adapt to a situation successfully, it does not mean that she/he will automatically be successful when the same type of change occurs at different times in life. Additionally, an individual may react differently to different types of changes (Schlossberg, 1981). Therefore, Schlossberg (1981) developed the model for human adaptation to transition to examine why people adjust to transitions differently, what determines whether an individual grows or deteriorates as a result of a transition, and to be able to understand and help those individuals who are facing inevitable but non-predictable transitions in life (Schlossberg, 1981).

According to Schlossberg, “a transition can be said to occur if an event or nonevent results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 4). Three major sets of factors are presented in Schlossberg’s (1981) model: characteristics of pretransition and posttransition environments, perception of the particular transition, and characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition. Characteristics of pretransition and posttransition environments emphasize the importance of evaluating the internal support system, institutional supports, and physical setting. The second component of the model, perception of the particular transition, includes factors such as role change, affect, source timing, onset, duration, and degree of stress. The third component, characteristics of the individual, includes attributes such as psychological competence, sex, age, state of health, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, value

orientation, and previous experience with a transition of a similar nature (Schlossberg, 1981).

A study by Swain (1991) supports the use of Schlossberg's (1981) model to examine athletes transitioning out of sport. According to Swain (1991), the model for human adaptation to transition strives to take diversity into account in the experience of transitions. Three coping resources in Swain's (1991) study were particularly significant to the athletes: source of transition, concurrent stress, and commitment and values. Additionally, an important discovery was that internal shifts in the athletes' personal values caused the athletes to develop other interests. This resulted in an internal incentive for change, which then facilitated the transition experience (Swain, 1991). Swain (1991) also suggested that the list of coping resources in Schlossberg's model could be expanded by adding factors such as the individual variables of education, skills, activities, and interests. According to Swain (1991), these factors were significant to the athletes in his study, and are likely to be significant to people facing other transitions. Other studies similar to Swain's and supporting Schlossberg's model are Coakley's (1983) study of leaving competitive sport, and Sinclair and Orlick's (1993) study examining positive transitions from high performance sport.

However, even though models from gerontology, thanatology, and transitions have been instrumental in examining issues in athletic career transitions, each of these approaches has limitations. For example, according to Grove et al. (1998), career transition research makes generalizations about athletes, and does not provide examples of how to individualize approaches. Therefore, researchers concluded there is a need for a new conceptualization specific to sports that would include previous theoretical and

conceptual explanations (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). According to Stambulova (2003), two major theoretical frameworks have evolved in sports career transition topic: sports career models that predict what normative transitions athletes may experience, and sports career transition models which concentrate on causes, process, outcomes, and consequences of a transition. This study focuses on interpreting the former athletes' retirement experiences through sport career transition models, mainly because these models look at the athletic career transitions holistically, and include both the possibility of positive transition and crisis transition outcomes.

Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) developed the 5-step Conceptual Model of Athletic Retirement to provide a detailed and comprehensive model that addresses the entire athletic retirement process. Step one of the model identifies four causes of athletic retirement: age, deselection, injury, and free choice. Step two includes factors related to adaptation to retirement, such as developmental contributors, self-identity, perceptions of control, social identity, and tertiary contributors. These attributes are important, as athletes have to deal with psychological, social, financial and occupational changes when facing retirement from sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Athletes' ability to adapt to retirement depends strongly on the resources available as they go through the transition, which is the focus of step three, available resources for retirement adaptation. Step three includes the following attributes: coping skills, social support, and pre-retirement planning (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Furthermore, retirement may not necessarily be a traumatizing event. Rather, step four, quality of adaptation to athletic retirement, depends on the previous steps of the retirement process, which can result in healthy career transition. However, if the athlete does not respond well to the transition, the

distress caused by the retirement may manifest itself in a wide variety of dysfunctional ways, such as alcoholism, drug use, and criminal activities (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). This leads to step five of the model, intervention for athletic retirement difficulties (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Another model of athletic retirement was developed by Stambulova (Stambulova, 2003). The Analytical Sports Career Model was created on the basis of four different periodizations of the sports career and predicts seven normative transitions of an elite sports career: 1) the beginning of sport specialization; 2) the transition to more intensive training in chosen sport; 3) the transition to high achievement sports; 4) the transition to senior sports; 5) the transition from amateur sports to professional sports; 6) the transition from the peak to the end of sport career; and 7) athletic career termination (Stambulova, 2003). However, after testing the model, it was concluded that steps three and four often overlap in real life (Stambulova, 2003). These results lead to the formation of the sport career transition model (Stambulova, 2003).

As the first step of Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) Conceptual Model of Athletic Retirement is the causes of career termination, Stambulova's sports career transition model begins with transition demands. According to Stambulova (2003), transition demands create a developmental conflict, which stimulates the athlete to activate resources and figure out ways to cope. Similar to a Conceptual Model of Athletic Retirement, Stambulova's model considers the athletic career transition as a process, not a single event. In this model, coping is a key point, dividing the model into two parts. The first part focuses on the transition demands to cope with and the factors influencing coping, and the second part outlines two possible outcomes and consequences of a career

transition. The two possible outcomes are positive-transition and crisis-transition, positive-transition leading to effective coping, as the athlete is able to utilize his/her resources and overcome transition obstacles. Crisis-transition results in athlete's inability to cope with the transition demands on his/her own (Stambulova, 2003).

The earlier studies (e.g., Hill & Lowe, 1974; Mihovilovic, 1968; Weinberg & Arond, 1952) concluded that majority of athletes have difficulties to adjust to their new life outside of sports. The athletes studied by Weinberg and Arond (1952) admitted that quitting sport was difficult. They started feeling old prematurely, and realized a sharp decline in status due to the fact that they had no other skills than the ones they had acquired in participating in sports (Weinberg & Arond, 1952). Additionally, issues such as alcoholism, increase in smoking, and feelings of insecurity were recorded in studies by Hill and Lowe (1974) and Mihovilovic (1968). However, these studies were conducted on professional male athletes and, according to Coakley (1983), data in Mihovilovic's study show that the athletes' problems during and after retirement were not as pervasive as it was concluded.

In the case of interscholastic athletes, Coakley (1983) implied that it is difficult to determine whether the cause of distress is athletic retirement, or the other significant events in a collegiate athlete's life such as graduating, trying to find a job, and coping with developmental tasks encountered with early adulthood. More recent studies have continued the debate whether athletic retirement causes a tremendous amount of anguish to athletes or not. Allison and Meyer (1988) studied former female professional tennis players and discovered that half of the athletes experienced relief after leaving competitive sport, and 30% of the athletes felt isolated and lost. Additionally, most of the

participants in the study saw athletic retirement as an opportunity to explore other possibilities in life (Allison & Meyer, 1988). This notion supports Coakley's (1983) argument that sport retirement should be seen as a "rebirth" rather than as a traumatic end.

Another study focusing on former female athletes was conducted by Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000), who explored the retirement experiences of former female elite gymnasts. This qualitative study revealed that the majority of the former gymnasts experienced difficult transitions (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). Additionally, Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) concluded that distinction between voluntary and involuntary retirement was unclear, and that volition to retire does not necessarily result in effortless transition.

As these aforementioned studies demonstrate, athletic retirement is a complex process, and the athletic career transition experiences vary substantially. However, each of the studies concluded that there were a significant number of athletes facing difficult and traumatic transitions out of sport. These athletes need the help and attention of professionals in order to complete their retirement process.

Reasons for Career Termination

Athletes have numerous reasons for leaving sport. These reasons may be sport related or, in some instances, retirement is induced by factors that occur naturally, such as age, and have a strong effect on one's athletic career. Athletic career transition adjustment can be financial, occupational, emotional, and/or social in nature (Lavalley, 2007). In this section, reasons for athletic career termination will be examined, following the causes discussed in the conceptual model of athletic retirement by Taylor and Ogilvie

(1994). Four main factors were determined as the reasons for athletic career termination: age, deselection, injury, and free choice (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Chronological Age

Age is typically considered to be the primary cause of athletic retirement; age has physiological and social effects, physiological effects perhaps being the most significant (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). A substantial amount of research has been done on athletes and the ramifications of aging on physical abilities. However, sports differ significantly in this aspect: in gymnastics, athletes start systematic training at a very young age, and also peak earlier than athletes, for example, in distance events. Additionally, small decreases in physical abilities caused by aging may result in substantial decreases in athletic performance, which can then cause a decline in motivation.

As noted earlier, age has also psychological effects on an athlete. As athletes age, their values may change, and desire to spend more time with family or focus on another career increases. In Allison and Meyer (1988), many athletes grew tired of the constant traveling, loneliness during competition trips and tournaments, and inability to relate to younger players. In addition to psychological effects, age possesses a social element (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Aging athletes are often devalued by fans, media, and other athletes (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). However, this varies between different sports: what is considered as a “mature athlete” in gymnastics, may be treated as a “rookie” in distance events.

Deselection

Deselection is another major factor causing athletes to retire, and impacts athletes in most sports across the different levels. In high school, new incoming freshmen may

force a senior player to spend more time off the court than on the court, which sometimes leads to dropping out of the team. Also, at times, if a professional athlete is not selected to be part of a team, her/his choices are to either keep trying to qualify or retire from sport, the latter often being the only option. In a team setting, fear of losing their spot on the team may result in players resorting to maladaptive behavior. In Mihovilovic's (1968) study of soccer players, the older athletes engaged in the following activities in order to stay on the team: they trained regularly and more intensively; sabotaged the younger players and obstructed their play; stayed on the team thanks to connections and friendships with team coaches and managers; emphasized their experience, skills, merits, and influence. The collective opinion in the study was that the older players stayed on the team by employing distasteful methods, such as sabotage against the young players (Mihovilovic, 1968).

Injury

Injury is probably the most abrupt way to end an athlete's career. According to Danish (1986), some potential effects of athletic injury are impairment of the self-concept, disconfirmation of deeply held values, disruption of social and occupational functioning, and loss of emotional equilibrium (as cited in Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). In Allison and Meyer (1988), 15% of the former athletes studied retired due to an injury, in Hill and Lowe (1974) 31.8%, and Mihovilovic (1968) also 31.8%. However, in Sinclair and Orlick's (1993) study of Canadian high performance athletes, injury was found to be an insignificant factor within the retirement decision. Furthermore, an injury does not have to be a serious one in order to end an athlete's career. As was discussed earlier, a

small reduction in physical ability may be enough to decrease an athlete's competitive level and force her/him to retire from sports.

Free Choice

Leaving sport voluntarily is probably the goal of every athlete and most desirable of the causal factors to retire from sport, yet a difficult task to accomplish. Athletes may want to spend more time with family, or they may have achieved their athletic goals (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Also, some athletes no longer enjoy the sport, and decide to retire (Allison & Meyer, 1988). However, as mentioned earlier, Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) suggest that choosing to retire does not necessarily eliminate difficulties during the adjustment to retirement.

In addition to the four discussed reasons to retire from sport, several studies have recognized the following reasons to retire from sport: difficulties with coaching staff, lack of finances, and difficulties with national sport organization (Dacyshyn & Kerr, 2000; Hill & Lowe, 1974; Mihovilovic, 1968; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). However, it should be emphasized that career termination is rarely caused by a single factor (Alfermann, 2007).

Factors Affecting the Quality of Adjustment to Career Termination

Athletes may go through several transitions during their athletic career, and all of these transitions require some degree of adjustment. As has been discussed, some athletes go through transitions without major difficulties, while others cannot adapt to change without help. Therefore, it is important to examine factors affecting the quality of adaptation to athletic career transitions (Lavallee, 2007). The quality of adjustment to athletic career transitions seems to be determined by a range of developmental attributes

(Lavallee, 2007). Many of these factors are psychological in nature, accompanied by developmental experiences that occur during the athletic career (Lavallee, 2007).

Social Identity

The popularity of sports and heroism of athletes are undeniable. Athletes are considered as role models, and children are emphasized from an early age that being an athlete is something extraordinary, which makes the role of an athlete seem desirable. The manner with which athletes cope with career transitions seems to be dependent upon the social identification with sport (Lavallee, 2007). Additionally, it has been shown that individuals whose socialization process is a strict athletic environment may adopt a narrow social identity, which results in role restriction (Brewer et al., 1993 as cited in Lavallee, 2007). For example, athletes who have learned to adopt roles only from the athletic setting are often able to interact only with people within the context of sport (Taylor & Lavallee, 2010). Additionally, according to Taylor and Lavallee (2010), McPherson has also proposed that many athletes define themselves in terms of their social status, even though this validation is often short lived.

Athletic Identity

Athletic identity has been defined as the degree to which an individual identifies her/himself with the athlete role (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993, as cited in Brewer et al., 2007). According to Baillie and Danish (1992), the process of considering oneself as an athlete may begin early. Sport participation improves children's physical abilities, and athletic children are considered often as good leaders (Baillie & Danish, 1992). Focusing on sports also provides the successful young athlete with a sense of accomplishment. However, it has been suggested that exclusive commitment to a sport

role early on prevents an individual from engaging in exploratory behavior, which leads to identity foreclosure (Murphy et al., 1996). Additionally, labeling oneself as an athlete may become a major source of difficulties that occur, especially upon retirement from sport (Baillie & Danish, 1992). Loss of identity as a consequence of athletic retirement has also been reported (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). This supports the notion from the sport retirement literature that athletes who identify exclusively with the social role of athlete may face retirement difficulties (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000).

Even though athletic identity is a relatively recent topic of scientific study, a number of personal factors contributing to adjustment to athletic career transitions have been documented (Brewer et al., 2007). These factors are gender, age, race/ethnicity, and personality. In numerous studies, men have been found to have higher athletic identity scores than women (Brewer et al., 2007). However, the data inspected from the previous studies reveal that the athletes studied have varied in level of sport involvement. Studies investigating gender differences within athletic identity have concluded that the magnitude of gender difference has been greater in lower levels of sport involvement (Brewer et al., 2007). Additionally, a study by van Raalte and Cook (1991) concluded that the athlete role may not be as significant for women as it is for men outside of the sport context (as cited in Brewer et al., 2007).

Research on athletic identity across the lifespan is scarce, as just few studies have examined the relationship between age and athletic identity (Brewer et al., 2007). However, results from these few studies suggest that there is a pattern of decreasing identification with the athlete role as the individual matures and discovers other activities and interests (Brewer et al., 2007). Similarly, relationships between race/ethnicity and

athletic identity, and personality and athletic identity, have not been extensively researched (Brewer et al., 1993, as cited in Lavalley & Wylleman, 2007). According to Brewer et al. (2007), further research needs to be done to confirm the speculative nature of the current studies.

Perceived Control

It is often discussed if there is such a thing as voluntary athletic retirement. Athletes may often want to continue their sport, but realize that given the circumstances, the cost of “sticking with it” is too high. Within the four main causes of athletic retirement discussed earlier (age, deselection, injury, and free choice), the first three are predominantly out of the athletes’ control (Grove et al., 1997). This absence of control combined with strong athletic identity may cause athletes to have difficult transitions out of sport. Additionally, perception of lack of control may cause an individual to feel helpless, unmotivated, have physiological challenges, and decreases in self-confidence (Taylor & Lavalley, 2010). Loss of control has also been connected to numerous pathologies such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and dissociate disorders (Taylor & Lavalley, 2010).

Coping Methods and Resources

As athletes face retirement, they have various means to cope with the transition. Additionally, transitions themselves may vary substantially, considering their material and objective characteristics, as well as subjective and idiosyncratic dimensions (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Contemporary scholars outside of sports have defined coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person”

(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141, as cited in Lavalley, 2007). More recent studies have focused on the actual coping processes that people utilize when facing stressful situations (Lavalley, 2007). Some of these processes are problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance-oriented strategies (Lavalley, 2007).

Athletes have utilized problem-focused strategies, for example resorting to alcohol (Mihovilovic, 1968), or aggressive behavior (Blinde & Stratta, 1993). However, not all athletes have maladaptive transition strategies, as they find other interests, diminish the prominence of their athletic identities, and start committing to other identities (Lally, 2007). Sinclair and Orlick (1993) had similar results in their study as they discovered the following coping strategies: another focus, keeping busy, training/exercising, talking with someone who listens, and staying in touch with sport and/or friends obtained through sport. Other strategies athletes may use to cope with transitions and overcome behavioral difficulties are cognitive restructuring and mental imagery, goal setting, and skill assessment development (Taylor & Lavalley, 2010).

An important resource in adjusting to athletic retirement is social support. However, receiving support may be difficult, as most of the athletes' friends and relationships are within the sport environment. This may cause athletes to become socially isolated and lonely (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985). Additionally, an athlete may miss the camaraderie with former training partners, teammates, and coaches. Furthermore, the coping strategy that appears to be most effective in the career transition process is pre-retirement planning (Taylor & Lavalley, 2007). Pre-retirement planning may include factors such as education, occupational opportunities, and social networking. According to Sinclair and Orlick (1993), athletes who have options to focus on after

retirement have higher life satisfaction than those who have no interests outside of sports. Athletes in Sinclair and Orlick's (1993) study indicated that if they had difficulties with the adjustment to athletic retirement, they would rather consult a sport psychologist than a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist.

Frameworks for Interventions and Retirement Service Programs

Several models and frameworks have been developed to assist athletes in adapting to career transitions. The life development intervention (LDI) model provides an appropriate perspective for viewing athletic retirement from competitive sport as a platform in the overall development across the lifespan of an athlete (Baillie, 1993). This model helps professionals who counsel retiring athletes in providing assistance (Baillie, 1993). According to Baillie (1993), a transition must be viewed within the context of other life events, which makes the LDI model suitable for this undertaking. Baillie (1992), Pearson and Petitpas (1990), and Werthner and Orlick (1982) have proposed that the intervention would be most effective prior to the actual retirement of an athlete (Baillie, 1993). During the preretirement phase, the focus should be on the development of new career options, promoting the opportunities of the retirement instead of allowing the athlete to focus on loss-oriented issues (Baillie, 1993). The postretirement interventions should emphasize affective concerns, as the athlete may experience grief, depression, and loneliness (Baillie, 1993). However, one of the reoccurring themes within the sport career transition literature has been athletes' unwillingness to think about their life or develop a plan for their life after sports (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Another model that has been used in sports settings to help athletes cope with distressful reactions during retirement is the account-making model by Harvey, Weber,

and Orbuch (1990). This model was adapted from Horowitz's model of coping with loss to develop a general framework to understand how people cope with extremely stressful experiences (Grove et al., 1998). The central idea in account-making is the construction of a story about the traumatic event (Grove et al., 1998). This account, or story, represents the people's understanding of their situation at a particular moment, which later will be elaborated as the individual gains perspective on their state (Grove et al., 1998).

According to the account-making model, after the traumatic event happens, the individual enters the first stage, which is divided into two phases: outcry and denial (Grove et al., 1998). During this phase, an athlete may feel shocked and overwhelmed and, in severe cases, a sense of hopelessness and despair (Grove et al., 1998). Next follows the working-through phase when the athlete engages in account-making activities and confronts the reality of the transition repeatedly (Grove et al., 1998). During the last stage, the athlete completes his/her story, accepts the situation, and goes through an identity change (Grove et al., 1998). However, Harvey and colleagues argue that people react to traumatic stress in a series of steps that may involve back and forth movement over time (Grove et al., 1998). Additionally, the account-making model includes possible negative consequences of failure to engage in account-making during later stages of sequence, resulting in pathological outcomes such as prolonged grief and anxiety (Harvey et al., 1990). The account-making model was successfully used as an intervention for Shane Gould, a 5-time Olympic medalist, whose adaptation to athletic retirement lasted approximately 17 years (Grove et al., 1998).

The third framework for helping athletes with career transitions is the 5-step career planning strategy (5-SPC), developed by Stambulova (2010). This framework has a holistic lifespan perspective similar to the life development intervention model, as it sees an athletic career as an integral part of a life-long career (Stambulova, 2010). Additionally, in the 5-SPC a transition is envisioned as a process of coping with a set of transition demands (Stambulova, 2010). As this framework's theoretical background is based on Stambulova's (2003) athletic career transition model, it entails two primary transition outcomes: successful transition and crisis-transition (Stambulova, 2010). The aim of the 5-SPC is to inform athletes of the approaching transition demands and stimulate the development of necessary coping resources (Stambulova, 2010). The five steps included in the model are: "create a framework," "structure your past," "structure your present," "structure your future," and "bridge your past, present, and future" (Stambulova, 2010). This framework may be more appropriate for more mature athletes, who have the ability to think holistically about their life careers (Stambulova, 2010).

Athletic Career Assistance Programs

In addition to frameworks helping athletes to cope with retirement, several programs have been developed and launched to assist athletes with career transitions. Athletic career assistance programs, also called athlete life-skill programs, are designed to develop athletes' educational and work-related skills (Anderson & Morris, 2007). These programs can also help athletes with developing generic social and interpersonal skills, and teach athletes to transfer the skills they have obtained by participating in sports into other areas of life (Anderson & Morris, 2007). Many athletes lack these skills as they have spent most of their lives focusing on sports, starting from early childhood or

even infancy. For some athletes, reality hits hard when they realize they are no longer involved in their sport at an elite level (Anderson & Morris, 2007). Life-skill programs for athletes early in their careers may protect athletes from anxiety about the future. These programs may provide assistance to athletes preparing for a smooth transition from sports (Anderson & Morris, 2007).

Part 2: Finnish Sport System

Sports and active lifestyle have always been an important and integral part of the Finnish society. Even before the country became an independent nation, the importance of exercising was emphasized at all levels of society (Heikkala et al., 2003). Sporting events were included in various national celebrations, promoting nationalism and unifying people. The first step towards organized and modern sports had been taken (Heikkala et al., 2003). By the end of the 19th century, 341 sports clubs and societies had been founded, and the sports participated in included shooting, skiing, sailing, ice skating, gymnastics, and biking (Heikkala et al., 2003). In the beginning of the 20th century, Finland joined the more organized and competitive international sport system. At the same time, the modern Olympic movement was well on its way with the vision of Pierre de Coubertin to make the Olympics an international event (Miller, 2012).

Before and after the great wars, Finnish athletes, especially track and field athletes and distance runners, were dominating the international sports scene. The expression “flying Finns,” initiated by runners such as Hannes Kolehmainen, Ville Ritola, and Paavo Nurmi, became a household term within the sports world. Mass participation in sports and exercise was promoted in Finland, as well as other healthy lifestyle habits. However, the world has changed significantly since the golden days of Finnish distance running, the

athletics world included. The concept of professional athlete has especially reached a different level, and amateur athlete is merely a term used in the names of different associations to reminiscence times when amateurism was required in order to participate in the modern Olympics.

During the 1980s, the Finnish sport culture experienced major changes (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2010). Different sport events and interests gained ground and the Finnish sport community expanded (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2010). Additionally, national sports organizations became more professionalized. During the 1990s, Finnish sports continued developing and structural changes were implemented. The goal was to create a less hierarchical system, where the grass roots activities would not be controlled from above and where sports clubs had a central role (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2010). In competitive and high performance sports the governing bodies of each sport gained a central role, and their objective was developing competitive and high performance sports together with sports clubs. Additionally, the Finnish Olympic Committee has several roles in supervising the development of high performance sports.

Even though the structural changes were significant, according to the report by Finnish Ministry of Education (2010), competitive and high performance sports lost ground when these changes took place. The focus shifted from high performance sports to mass-participation sports in order to promote active and healthy life-style. Following poor performance at the international level, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture set a working group with an aim to re-establish the strategic and functional responsibilities of high performance sports to gain international success (Huippu-urheilun Muutosryhmä (Humu), 2011). The working group suggested following new methods of

action: athlete has a central role within the sports system, competence must be developed and transferred to coaching in practice, and cooperation must be strengthened between organizations within high performance sports (Humu, 2011).

The foundation of the Finnish sports system is constructed of sports clubs combined with national sports federations, central organizations, municipalities, and the state (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2010). Children and adolescents have possibilities to engage in sports and physical activities at school in physical education classes, and those who are interested in competitive sports can join sports clubs, mostly supported by cities, towns, and municipalities. Additionally, sport clubs rely strongly on volunteer work. Schools, colleges, and universities do not sponsor sports. However, talented young athletes have a choice to attend sport-oriented high schools, where combining education and sports is more manageable (Metsä-Tokila, 2002). The student-athletes can deviate from the established high school curriculum, receive professional coaching, and participation in sport is taken into consideration in the overall amount of required studies (Gröhn & Riihivuori, 2008).

Sport-oriented high schools are located in several locations in Finland and offer coaching services in several different sports (Gröhn & Riihivuori, 2008). Following sports-oriented high schools, Finnish athletes are able to attend sport-academies to combine higher education and sports (Gröhn & Riihivuori, 2008). In these academies athletes are provided services such as coaching, physical therapy, and medical doctors, just to name a few. However, according to a report by a working group appointed by the Finnish Olympic Committee (2007), the academies differ considerably as far the supporting services to athletes are concerned. Therefore, improvement of the support

services is one of the major tasks upon which the academies focus. Athletes are not responsible for financing their studies, as attending institutions of higher learning in Finland is funded by the government, as long as the athlete is accepted as a student at a given institution. Additionally, students are able to receive student and housing allowance from the government (Kansaneläkelaitos (Kela), 2013). Lastly, the Finnish government and the Olympic Committee grant stipends to athletes. However, these funds are distributed only to a small group of the most successful athletes (Gröhn & Riihivuori, 2008).

Studies Conducted on Finnish Athletes' Athletic Career Retirement

Several studies examining Finnish athletes' reasons for leaving competitive sports have been conducted. However, most of the studies (e.g., Lämsä & Mäenpää, 2002; Toiviainen, 2011) focus on youth athletes and the reasons why they discontinue participation in sports. Additionally, Malvela (2003) focused on examining the factors why some athletes continue to have a successful athletic career when others decide to leave the sport prematurely. In this study, most of the retired athletes declared lack of motivation as the main reason to retire from competitive sports (Malvela, 2003). Another study conducted in Finland concluded that injuries are the main cause of sport career termination among Finnish top-level athletes (Ristolainen et al., 2012). However, as the researchers of this study theorized, because the reasons for athletic retirement were subjective opinions of the athletes themselves and numerous factors affect the decision to retire, the results of the study may not be accurate (Ristolainen et al., 2012). Moreover, these studies have either a narrow focus or they have not examined the retirement processes and the former athletes' life after retirement.

One of the leading researchers of sports in Finland is Pauli Vuolle. During the 1970s and 1980s Vuolle focused on examining the Finnish male athletes' sports career life transitions and the difficulties the athletes faced trying to balance their life between competitive athletic career and other aspects of life (Tikkanen, 2007). The frame of reference for Vuolle's (1978) study was Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. According to Vuolle (1978), high performance athletes' experiences of dissonance can be interpreted as situations where the athlete has been forced to abstain from aspirations in other fields of life in order to attain the goals he/she has set for him/herself in sport. Later, Vuolle did extensive studies focusing on athletes' lifespan, examining athletic career retirement (Laine, 1997). Additionally, Vuolle included female athletes in his later studies (Tikkanen, 2007).

Another study conducted in Finland that can be compared to athletic career retirement examined Finnish dancers, focusing on dancers' life and identity after their career was ended abruptly by an injury (Pohjola, 2012). This qualitative study involves three theoretical frameworks: narrative, social-psychological concepts of identity, and dance research (Pohjola, 2012). The objective of the study was to produce data on career termination due to injury by interpreting the narratives of three Finnish former contemporary dancers, and how it influenced the dancers' identity (Pohjola, 2012). According to Pohjola (2012), the identity of the dancer is transformative and socially negotiated. Additionally, the factor that predicts the course of transition is the dancer's attachment to the dancer identity (Pohjola, 2012).

A recent study by Ronkainen and Ryba (2012) focused on exploring the spiritual dimensions of endurance running in Finland. This study is a reflexive narrative and a

discourse analysis of a Finnish runner's magazine, *Juoksija*, and the researchers' goal was to gain a deeper understanding of how distance runners negotiate dominant discourses on sport while making running existentially meaningful to them (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2012). The participants in the study were a group of Finnish males, some who were still competing, and some former athletes with a background in distance running, orienteering, or being a lifestyle runner. One participant was not a runner, but a sport journalist. The central finding of the study was that there is a connection between discovering existential aspects in running and a decline from peak competitive performance (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2012). Also, the former runners who shared their stories about discovering spirituality in running had a strong athletic identity even after the retirement, and they continued running despite their declining competitive abilities (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2012). To them, running included a value in itself, beyond the outcomes usually connected to running in dominant sport culture, such as health and appearance (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2012). The research suggests that the spiritual aspect helps to understand how the runners in the study coped with their athletic retirement (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2012). Additionally, the researchers suggest that the existential perspective is a noteworthy framework for examining athletic career transitions (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2012).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to examine the athletic retirement process of Finnish female distance runners from a holistic point-of-view by examining their athletic career and experiences before, during and after the athletic retirement.

Research Design

Qualitative research methods have been used in the field of sport psychology since the 1980's and 1990's, when Martens (1987) and Dewar and Horn (1992) questioned traditional scientific methods as the most appropriate method of understanding human behavior (Côté et al., 1993). Even though not considered the opposite of quantitative research methods, qualitative research focuses on humans and provides an in-depth understanding of the human experience (Litchman, 2013). According to Litchman (2013, p. 17), “the purpose of qualitative research method is to describe, understand and interpret human phenomena, human interactions, or human discourse.” In addition, usually qualitative researchers do not focus on generating and testing hypotheses, as they are interested in meaning and interpretation, without the intent to generalize their study to other populations (Litchman, 2013).

Qualitative research methodology was losing ground in the field of sociology during the 1960s until Glaser and Strauss entered the methodological arena by introducing grounded theory in their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967)

(Charmaz, 2006). The purpose of grounded theory is to discover theories that emerge from data (Litchman, 2013). However, in her book *Constructing Grounded Theory*, Charmaz (2006) continues the discussion on grounded theory method. According to Charmaz (2006, p. 10), “Grounded theory serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them.” Unlike Glaser and Strauss, Charmaz (2006) assumes that neither data nor theories are discovered. Instead, she declares that we are part of the world and the data we collect, and that we construct our grounded theories through our experiences, involvements, and interactions. Finally, Charmaz (2006) concludes that any theoretical rendering offers interpretive depiction of the world that is being studied, not an exact portrayal of it. As the purpose of the study was to examine the athletic retirement process of Finnish female distance runners, and understand and describe their experiences without the intent of generalization or generating theories, qualitative research methods were chosen for the study.

Participants

Criteria to be eligible for the study were determined as following: the participants must be female, citizens of Finland, distance runners (800m, 1500m, 3000m steeplechase, 5000m, 10000m, marathon), and must have competed at least at the Finnish track and field national championships (highest level of competition at the national level). The study restricted the time elapsed since the initial retirement from a minimum of one year to a maximum of 10 years to avoid romanticizing the event. The length of time to adjust to retirement varies substantially. For example, 23% of athletes in a study by Sinclair and Orlick (1993) reported that they adapted in just 1 to 2 months to life beyond competitive sport, whereas 32% felt it took them 6 months to 1 year to fully adapt. The

remainder of athletes said it took them more than two years and, as in the case of Shane Gould, it took 17 years before she adapted to the transition (Sinclair & Orlick, 1998). Therefore, 1 to 10 years seemed to be an appropriate time span to use for the study. Also, time elapsed since retirement may have an impact on how interview questions are answered, so it is imperative to recognize that the participant experiences may vary due to the time elapsed since retirement. Therefore, this group was not homogenous in this sense.

The participants were a group of nine Finnish female elite athletes (distance runners) who had retired from competitive sports. All nine individuals volunteered to participate in an in-depth, semi-structured interview. Each participant chose the location and time where the interview took place. Six of the interviews took place at the interviewee's home, one at a café, and two of the individuals who were not able to conduct a face-to-face interview were interviewed via Skype and telephone. The average age of the participants was 31.78 (SD = 2.48). The length of time elapsed since retirement varied from 2 years to 10 years, and the average length of the competitive career was approximately 10 years. All of the former athletes had competed at the Finnish track and field national championships, eight had been members of the national team either at the youth or adult level, and some had reached the international level in their event.

Procedure and Interviews

Seventeen potential participants were identified by reviewing results from the past 10 Finnish track and field championships. Each athlete's athletic career information was also collected from a Finnish database, Tilastopaja, which lists results for each individual

athlete from every competition in which they have competed (Tilastopaja.fi). The possible participants were initially contacted by email/social media, asked if they were interested in participating in the study, and a short description of the study was provided. Additionally, the participants were asked if they had officially retired from competitive sport. Those who agreed to participate were provided a more detailed description of the study and the uses of the data collected. Additionally, participants were sent an electronic version of the consent form and a separate electronic consent form allowing the author to record the interviews. The forms were in English as all the participants are proficient in English. However, a Finnish translation of the consent form translated by a certified translator was also provided to avoid any misunderstandings. Lastly, the participants were requested to email the signed consent forms to the author.

As confidentiality is always a concern when the pool is small, the identity of the participants was protected by changing their names to pseudonyms. Identifying information was also changed. These topics were discussed with the participants before the interview. The study was conducted as a qualitative, narrative research by interviewing the participants. Seven of the in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face and the rest (two) via Skype/phone as the interviewer was not able to travel to meet all the participants due to time constraints and long distances between the cities in which the participants live. The interviewees were asked to talk about their athletic careers, the time leading up to the retirement, and time during the transition and after transition. In addition, they were asked to describe their retirement coping strategies and their current life status.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish, as it is the native language of the interviewer and the interviewees. Additionally, each interview was recorded and then transcribed verbatim, resulting in 145 pages of single spaced text. Interviews lasted on average of 70 minutes, ranging from 54 to 137 minutes.

Instrumentation

An interview framework was created by using Kadlcik and Flemr's (2008) interview guide as a template (see Appendix A). Kadlcik and Flemr's (2008) interview guide is based on the theoretical frameworks by Stambulova (1997, 2003), Taylor and Ogilvie (1994, 2001), and is organized into four interrelated sections: a) introductory remarks and demographics, b) career-retirement pre-conditions, c) transition period, and d) current life status. Kadlcik and Flemr (2008) developed the interview guide to assess former athletes' perceived experience of athletic career termination retrospectively (2008). According to Litchman (2013), although a guided interview or semistructured interview has a general structure, the interviewer can modify the questions as the situation requires. This way a certain degree of flexibility is maintained during the interview without steering off the topic too much. The questions were translated to Finnish by the interviewer (see Appendix B), and the interviews were conducted in Finnish.

Data Analysis and Coding

The raw data were coded and organized to sub-themes, and to themes by utilizing grounded theory line-by-line and focused coding as described in Charmaz (2006). According to Charmaz (2006), line-by-line coding helps the researcher to remain open to the data and identify nuances in it. Additionally, the line-by-line coding method allows

the researcher to take a closer look at what the participants say and struggle with (Charmaz, 2006). The initial codes were descriptive to help organizing the introductory concepts. The second phase of coding was the focused coding during which the initial codes were studied carefully in order to merge the data into more general codes.

The codes were written in English, and the direct quotes in this study were translated from Finnish to English by the researcher. The coding process was checked by a Finnish social psychology doctoral student who is familiar with the method. The researcher was advised to keep the raw data codes more concise to attain the meaning of what was said by the interviewee.

Personal Bias – statement

This study examines the athletic retirement processes of Finnish female elite distance runners. As a Finnish female distance runner, I have extensive knowledge of the Finnish running culture and what is it like to be a female athlete in Finland. As this knowledge gives me a unique perspective as a researcher, it may skew my ability to be objective as I study the different experiences of the former athletes. Moreover, I recently decided to take a break from competitive running and think about the direction of my running career, which may cause me to have emotions that bias the outcomes. Additionally, some of the participants are acquaintances and former competitors of mine, which may have affected their behavior towards me as a researcher. However, many of the former athletes do not know me as I have lived in the United States for over 10 years. This enables me to have an outside perspective on the Finnish running culture and sport system.

As I have been an athlete for most of my life, athletic career transitions and athletic retirement are an interest of mine. From early on, running was something I was good at and I joined my hometown's track and field team at the age of 10. I participated in several track and field events until I entered high school and I also played a Finnish version of baseball. I had never considered participating in long distance running events, as I loved the long jump and sprints and, in my opinion, most coaches thought my body type was not considered ideal for running longer distances. However, as I entered my late adolescent years, many of my friends on the team quit the sport and I had no interest to continue training alone. Also, not being very successful in sprints or in the long jump caused my motivation to decline tremendously since my childhood years.

After I stopped competing in sprints, I started running on my own to stay in shape and continued participating in track and field by coaching children after school. My running was an experiment of my own, and soon I was able to run continuously for 12 to 14 miles. I really enjoyed the feeling of just being able to keep going and run around the entire city. At that point, running became a form of therapy, as I was 17 years old and at times the entire world felt like it was falling apart. In the beginning of my final year of high school, I was approached by a distance running coach in my hometown and he thought it would be a good idea to train for the 800 and 1500 meters. At that point I was running every day, so beginning to train systematically was not an issue for me. I trained under the guidance of my coach for nine months and during that time period we discovered that I had substantial talent for middle distance and distance running. The summer after my senior year of high school, I excelled in competition in both the 800 and

1500 meters and later earned a scholarship to study at a university in the United States. However, the rest of my running career was a struggle.

Numerous injuries put running to a halt more than a few times, and trying to balance a running career, studying, and life between two countries was not easy. Competing for a university as a member of the track and field and cross country teams was difficult to get accustomed to, as the collegiate system is completely different from the system in Finland. After I graduated, I decided to continue my competitive running career. I had finally succeeded to train a few years without major injuries and felt that with the help of a good coach and training partners I could reach the next level of athletics. However, life as a post-collegiate runner was not glamorous. I moved to Indianapolis, IN, to train with a track and field team and lived with four other athletes in an old, rugged house. The team did not offer financial help and finding a job that allowed full-time training was very difficult. Also, getting sponsorships was arduous, as most sponsors required performances at the United States national level and were not willing to sponsor a foreign athlete. Later, more injuries followed and the already thin support system faded away.

Why do I continue to run despite all these difficulties? Because, in my opinion, there are very few things in this world that feel as good as running fast, everything coming together in a race, and leaving everything you have on the track. Even though I knew all along that not having much support makes running competitively difficult, I did not want to give up. Moreover, I always knew it was not going to last forever, so I wanted to keep trying as long as my body allowed. Therefore, whenever I encounter a young, talented athlete who has made the decision to retire from competitive sports, I

cannot help but think that they are giving up too soon. Now, as a more mature 35 year-old athlete, as my physical abilities are not the same as when I was 20 years old, it is easier to accept that my athletic career is coming to an end and it is time to focus on other life endeavors.

As I will continue running, just at a different level and with different goals in mind, running will continue to be part of my identity. Being a female runner gives me a unique perspective to examine the different athletic retirement processes of former Finnish female runners. However, at the same time my personal experiences as a runner may bias the outcomes of the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presentation of Results

The purpose of the study was to examine the athletic retirement process of Finnish female distance runners, study the reasons why they retired from competitive sports, and understand and describe their experiences before, during and after the retirement process. All participants considered themselves retired and most of them had not competed in any sport since the retirement. One participant is considering competing in track and field meets in the future and two others said that they would like to compete in other sports, but the rest did not have a desire to compete in any sport. Additionally, one of the participants was not exactly sure what was the moment of retirement for her. Most of the participants called themselves “recreational exercisers” [Finnish: *kuntoliikkuja, kuntoilija*], even though they still run and exercise on average 3-6 days a week.

Each former elite runner participated in a semi-structured in-depth interview, and a total of seven themes with 25 subthemes emerged from the data. The themes were (1) avenues to become a distance runner, (2) meaning of running, (3) pre-retirement conditions, (4) retirement, (5) factors affecting quality of retirement, (6) major effects of retirement, and (7) current life. Summaries of themes, sub themes and raw data examples are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Results

Theme	Subtheme	Raw Data
Avenues to become a distance runner	<p data-bbox="686 310 914 338">Active childhood</p> <p data-bbox="686 709 987 779">Focus on long distance running</p> <p data-bbox="686 930 1032 1031">Combining competitive running with other aspects of life</p>	<p data-bbox="1076 310 1425 411">I exercised and ran around all the time, but it was nothing serious as a child.</p> <p data-bbox="1076 457 1406 663">I have been very active since I was a child, but it was more like everyday exercising, for example, biking or running to school.</p> <p data-bbox="1076 709 1414 888">At the age of 16, I was chosen to be part of a national youth training group and started training more systematically.</p> <p data-bbox="1076 930 1433 1178">I was studying, but running was always number one. I studied because everybody told me to do so... they said I should have something else besides running.</p>
Meaning of Running	Running and self	I loved running. For me it was a way to relieve stress and a way to feel like me.
Pre-retirement conditions	Injury/health issues	<p data-bbox="1076 1339 1430 1734">I was training in Portugal, and my motivation was sort of low. At the same time I had an injury, but I was still given a training program and told that it will be all right... but it got worse during the training camp, and I had to take a long break from running.</p> <p data-bbox="1076 1780 1414 1875">Finally I was able to train consistently almost a year straight, and everything</p>

<p>Pre-retirement conditions (Continued)</p>	<p>Injury/health issues (continued)</p> <p>Lack of support/loneliness</p> <p>Interest in other things</p> <p>Coaching matters</p>	<p>started to look brighter after suffering from all those injuries... but then I ended up overtraining.</p> <p>I just couldn't handle it mentally, but if I had some kind of support, I could have thought about it and somehow persist, change my attitude, and continue... and I mean all kinds of support, not just financial.</p> <p>I was studying at a university, and through a summer job I was offered a permanent job. So I had other things in my life besides running.</p> <p>My coach lived in another city, and we saw each other only once in two months.</p>
<p>Retirement</p>	<p>Retirement planning: plan vs. no plan</p> <p>Reasons to retire</p>	<p>During the spring I thought that if the summer season won't go well, I might retire. It felt like, well, I lost motivation when I could never do consistent and full running trainings.</p> <p>I think it would have been good to have a plan... especially when I had sponsorships and my home municipality was supporting me a little financially, so I could have been smarter and take care of those things.</p> <p>[the reason to retire] was exactly the fact that there</p>

Retirement (continued)	<p>Reasons to retire (continued)</p> <p>Reactions to retirement</p>	<p>was no progress or success anymore. Athletics was everything to me and I was longing for success.</p> <p>I felt relief and joy, and I thought that I got my own life back, and there was no more that burden on my shoulders.</p>
Factors affecting quality of transition	<p>Coping methods</p> <p>Athletic identity</p> <p>Personality</p> <p>Social support</p> <p>Perceived control</p>	<p>It helped that my career did not end because of an injury, and I could keep running... that I did not have to quit running abruptly.</p> <p>During my career I had a very strong athletic identity, running was everything, and set the pace for life.</p> <p>I think it helped [with the transition] that I am so determined. I thought that I have gone through so many worse things, so why wouldn't I survive this one.</p> <p>I cried, and I discussed and pondered things with my husband many times, and I am very thankful for his support.</p> <p>I think that when you go through such a huge life change it is impossible to say that you are in control of the situation 100 percent, because change is always scary, and brings uncertainties.</p>

Major effects of retirement	<p>Time management</p> <p>Lifestyle</p> <p>Health/Physique</p> <p>Financial situation</p> <p>Self-perception</p> <p>Social life</p>	<p>I did not have to try to juggle between my studies and running anymore, as training did not take most of my days after the retirement.</p> <p>After the retirement I did not have to worry about things, such as what is going on next week, or even tomorrow. Life became more spontaneous and relaxed.</p> <p>I gained a little bit of weight after I retired from competitive running, but I think it was just a positive thing as I think I was too thin sometimes during my running career.</p> <p>Financial situation improved, because I started working and actually had a payday, and did not fill out a form to get reimbursements for all my expenses.</p> <p>After my athletic retirement I realized I was really ambitious at school as well, which was a huge surprise to me.</p> <p>After retirement I became more social, as before I felt I had to hide this side of myself.</p>
Current life	What is important now	Children are important... as a mother I put the needs of my children first and think constantly how I could make them even

Current life (continued)	<p>What is important now (continued)</p> <p>Satisfaction with athletic career</p> <p>Recommendations to retiring and currently competing athletes</p>	<p>happier than they are.</p> <p>Truthfully speaking, I don't value my athletic career very highly, especially when I did not reach my goals. I don't think my goals were too ambitious, but I was pursuing perfection, and when I did not achieve, well, I can't be happy with it.</p> <p>It would be important to have something afterwards, a plan to do something else after the transition, that there would be another identity, something else to be passionate about.</p>
--------------------------	---	---

Theme #1: Avenues to Become a Distance Runner

Active Childhood

First the participants were asked to talk about their athletic career and how it all started. All nine participants had been very active since early childhood, participating in many different sports, including cross country skiing, orienteering, Finnish baseball, volleyball, ice skating, soccer, basketball, and track and field. Being generally an active child was also mentioned by most of the former athletes, with playing outside being the most common way to pass time, and biking and running everywhere. Elina's first choice of sport as a child was soccer. She said, "I played soccer a lot, all summer long. I was not part of a team or anything, but played with boys in our neighborhood." Another participant (Siiri) recalled being too impatient to walk as a child, so she would run everywhere. Later on she tried several sports, both individual and team sports, and one of the sports was cross country skiing. However, skiing did not interest her, as she did not care for sports that included equipment.

The participants were introduced to track and field by parents, siblings, friends, or cousins. Additionally, six of the nine participants had competed at a track and field race organized by their hometown's club, and that led to joining a track and field team. However, even though all the participants joined a track and field team, they also participated in other sports and trained for several different track and field events. This also included events at which the participants were not very good at. Regina, who has been crazy about sports since she was a child said,

I trained for every track and field event as a child, and I never took anything too seriously. During the summers I competed in all track and field events, I threw javelin, discus, and I ran and I did all the jumps. I was not very good at sprints,

but I was better at all the other events, and during the winter I played ringette and cross country skied till I was a teenager.

Focus on Distance Running

The participants had quite diverse avenues to become distance runners as they started to focus on one sport at different ages. Seven of the athletes recalled having a hunch early on that distance running was going to be the sport of choice for them, even though they were simultaneously participating in other sports. For example Pirkko recalls that she considered distance running as her number one choice, as she said:

When I was young I played [Finnish] baseball, participated in gymnastics, and at times competed in local cross country skiing races. But it was clear what was my choice of sport [distance running]... I did not really take the other sports that seriously.

Additionally, Elina recalls that no-one really said it out loud that she was a distance runner, but she was always chosen to run the longer distances at competitions, as she had won some cross country races early on. Sylvi had similar experiences - she was successful in cross country running races, and felt that she had the most talent for distance running. She stated that “distance running was her destiny.” Regina said she was not very good at distance running when she was young, but she wanted to become better at it:

At some point I became really excited about running and got this desire to be good. I was not naturally very good at longer distances, but I just wanted to run as fast as the best runners. Then I started to train and go for runs on my own.

Ingrid was not sure how she started running longer distances but, as she put it, “somehow she just drifted to run middle and long distances.” However, for two out of the nine participants, distance running was not the focus until later, closer to early adulthood.

Emmi considered the team sport she played her number one choice. However, the local

team Emmi played for dissolved, and she started to focus more on running. Additionally, Hillevi focused on other track and field events and did not start running distance events until she had reached adulthood.

Even though the participants started to focus on distance running at different ages, some of them at the age of 12 and some as late as in their early adulthood, there were two clear indications when the participants said they focused on distance running: they started to train with their own personal coach, and the training became more structured and systematic. Also, at this point other sports usually faded away. In addition, three of the participants mentioned that they became members of special distance running training groups. One of the participants [Siiri] felt she was not very focused on running at all until she ran at an international youth competition and realized that she could actually be really good, and maybe even run at the Olympics.

Combining Competitive Running with other Aspects of Life

As was mentioned in a previous chapter, education and athletics are not combined in Finland in the same manner as in the United States. Schools do not have official sports teams or sponsor athletics. Universities and other institutions of higher learning are funded by the government, and students who are officially accepted to study do not pay for tuition and fees, and receive a student allowance and housing allowance. All the participants have obtained a degree from an institution of higher learning, either from a university or polytechnic. Additionally, three of the participants attended a sports high school, where combining studying and athletics is easier, as the curriculum differs from the regular high school, and the athletes have easy access to services such as nutrition guidance and coaching.

The participants' opinions about combining higher education and athletics varied slightly. Ansa had attended several institutions of higher learning, and thinks that studying at a university is easy to combine with athletics. However, Regina's opinion was the opposite. She said,

You can make it [combining studies and athletics] easy for yourself, it is a fairly flexible system, but no one is there to support you... here in Finland at the university no one cares how your training is going, you just take less courses and try to fit your trainings somewhere there... here [in Finland] it is your own chore to organize your life.

Regina also added that while studying at the university she trained alone, as there were no running partners, and her coach lived in another city, and they met only once in two months.

For many of the participants, their running career determined the choice of location for attending a university or another institution of higher learning. For example, Elina chose a school that did not offer exactly what she wanted to study. She also primarily studied so that she could move away from her hometown to study and train in another city where there were better training facilities. Elina said,

Running set the pace for life. I did study, but studying was not the priority. I did obtain a degree, and I did it mainly because everybody was telling me to get a degree, and that it would be good to have other things beside athletics, so that I have other things when running is over... so, by the end of the day I did have a degree, but I do not agree with the notion that it is good to have other things...

Pirkko also chose the school she attended based on better training facilities. She was able to study with the same pace with her classmates till her last year of studies, when she decided to focus more on running and attended fewer courses. Emmi, who also considered herself primarily as an athlete while studying, thought that combining athletics and studying in Finland is a bad combination:

Yes, in a way [financially] student-athlete combination is a fairly bad arrangement in Finland, because you really cannot make money. Even if you wanted to have a summer job, you had to be cautious. For example, all the multiple-shift jobs my classmates worked at and earned nice sums of money, for example at a paper factory, I could not even apply for because working at night would have ruined my summer season.

Later she added that she was not sure after high school what she wanted to study, and just picked something.

Many of the participants have become mothers, they have careers and work, and some continue their studies. The common consensus within the group was that combining working or family life and training intensely was an impossible combination. Regina was not willing to train if she could not put 100 percent effort into her training. She also felt bad not to focus on her career, as running restricted her schedule and prohibited her from studying more. Helena stated that continuing athletics after entering the work force or having a family depends on what the athlete wants. She said,

You need to see what is the... and what is enough for you. Is it enough that you can run and race, and it does not matter what your results are. Is just doing it [running] more important, or success?

She later continued that her motivation would not be enough to continue training after starting a career outside sports and having a family.

Theme #2: Meaning of Running

It is natural that the role of athletics changes during the athlete's career. As a child it is something fun to do with friends and family, learn new things, and try your limits. The following section reviews what running meant to the participants.

Running and Self

The participants were asked questions about their athletic identity and how it changed during their career, during the retirement process and after the retirement. The

answers varied greatly, as five of the participants recalled having a strong athletic identity during their career, while the rest stated it was not very strong and not their entire identity, although an important part of their identity. Ansa recalled that even when she was running her best times, athletic identity was not everything. She also continued that she thinks her athletic identity would have been stronger if she had run at a higher level, and contemplated if not having a strong athletic identity would be bad for an athlete's career. For Siiri, athletic identity was the most important thing during the peak of her career, and she thinks it was perhaps even too strong, as she was very stringent. Emmi thought athletic identity was a major part of her identity, and she explained:

In a way you have built your identity around your athletic identity, that you are an athlete, and it was a weird feeling to start thinking [after the retirement] that what is my identity. I remember it was a bit confusing... I was asking that who and what am I? Maybe people have a basic need to label themselves. Going from athlete to student did not fit me very well, and I did not know how to label myself.

All the participants stated that they loved running, and it was natural for them. For Regina, running was something that made her feel like herself:

I loved running, and for me it was a way to relieve stress, and a way to feel like me. It is difficult to explain, maybe you know what I am talking about... while running you feel like yourself, it is time to meditate, gain positive mood and energy.

Theme #3: Pre-retirement Conditions

One of the questions asked was when and how did they start to think about retiring from competitive sports. All but one participant were either battling injuries, sickness, or dealing with other health issues before they retired. However, injury was just one of the many things that made the participants consider retiring. Four of the participants retired soon after their best season, and many had not had progress in a few years. The following section reviews the pre-retirement conditions of the participants.

Injury/Health Issues

As noted earlier, injury and health issues are one of the factors that made the participants think about retiring from competitive running. Hillevi had suffered from injuries for two to three years, and trained as much as the injuries would allow her to train. It was a frustrating time for her, as at times she could not run at all and had to miss one entire summer of racing. During that summer the idea of retirement evolved, and she made the decision to retire. Emmi had a similar experience, although she did not suffer from injuries as long. She explained:

I was training in Portugal, and my motivation was sort of low. At the same time I had an injury, but I was still given a training program and told that it will be alright... but it got worse during the training camp, and a long break from running followed... and I remember the long break felt really good... I thought that finally I have a chance to take a breather...

Helena was training with a full intention to keep competing when she got sick, and it took a long time to get healthy. The sickness also came at a critical time, close to a race season, which made the situation worse, and her motivation plummeted. Regina had a similar situation as Helena; she was motivated to run, especially when she had run her personal best during the race season. However, a nagging injury had been bothering her during the track season, and it required her to have surgery. The recovery also took longer than expected, and while waiting she put her energy into other things, such as studying.

Ansa had a slightly different situation. She recalls that first her motivation had started to go down, and as injuries occurred, she decided that there was no point to try to keep struggling with the injury. Unlike Ansa, Pirkko was highly motivated to run but severe injuries kept occurring. For several years she tried to get back to the level at

which she was before the injuries started, but her body just did not cooperate. Finally, it seemed that recovering to a level where she could train again would take a lot of physical therapy sessions, treatments, money, and time, which made full recovery seem impossible. Elina also had been struggling with several injuries as well for quite a few years, when finally she was healthy and was able to train for one year consistently. However, she overtrained and was forced to take yet another break.

Loneliness and Lack of Support

As two of the participants were discussing their injuries, they also talked about the loneliness and lack of support. Regina, who had been training alone, said,

It was so unbelievably lonely [training and running], I believe that if I had had more support here in Finland during my last years as a competitive runner, just someone who had been interested and motivated me somehow and been there with me, I believe I could have gotten so much more out of myself... but it was so lonely and sort of banging my head against the wall.

Elina felt like she could have used more support. Due to injuries and not improving her results, she had lost the majority of her sponsors. However, financial support was not the only thing Elina longed for:

I had pressure because I had lost all my sponsors and the success just never came, and somehow I could not handle it and continue, when I think it afterwards... I just couldn't handle it mentally, but if I had had some kind of support, I could have thought about it and somehow persist, change my attitude, and continue... and I mean all kinds of support, not just financial.

Interest in other Things

As all participants were studying at some point of their athletic career, some of them almost the entire length of their career, it is rather natural to want to start utilizing the education one has obtained. During her long break due to an injury, Emmi realized

that she could finish school, start working, travel and look for jobs abroad instead of running. She said,

There was the thing too that I was a very diligent athlete and could not really have anything else... well, a little bit of student life, but anyway. So then I thought I would like to live a little, take back, in a way. The so-called athlete's life was little too ascetic to my taste.

Ansa had similar kinds of feelings as Emmi, as she had graduated from a university and started to think if it was even possible to work and train simultaneously. Pirkko was also graduating and started to dream about her own house and family, and planned on continuing her studies.

Coaching Matters

Coaches are in a central role and often a big part of athletes' everyday lives.

During the pre-retirement time, three of the athletes were having issues with their coaches, or did not have a coach. As was mentioned earlier, Regina saw her coach rarely, which made training challenging. She said,

I had a very good coach, but I did not have a chance to see him very often [as the coach lived in another city]. He sent me training programs via email, and often called after the workout to see how did it go, but there was no one with me in that athlete's everyday life, and it felt like that I had gotten to that point all alone, and still nobody helped and cared, and I was not included in any training groups.

Emmi on the other hand had recently entered a new coaching relationship. The cooperation with her old coach ended mainly due to fundamental differences. The new coach was more demanding, and Emmi felt she was not recovering from training at all, and for some reason did not react and communicate this to her new coach. The frustration grew when her results did not improve and her body felt like it was overtrained.

Siiri's coaching issue was that she did not have a coach during her last year of competing. Her most recent coach wanted her to move to where he lived, but Siiri was not willing to change locations. She recalls:

He said I should move to the town where he lived, away from the distractions, like I could not have other things in life than running. At that point I said "no"... But it was more like an experiment with that coach, to see if I could progress at all...

Later on the coach abandoned Siiri at an important moment, and she started to train without a coach.

Two participants talked about their athletic career goals, and mentioned how they had different goals than what their coach had set for them. Regina said her coach thought she would run at the Olympics while she had more realistic goals for herself: she just wanted to develop as an athlete and run faster, and the goals her coach had set for her were external and she could not envision herself achieving those goals. However, she added that she did not have abundant amounts of self-confidence as a young girl, which could have affected her way of thinking. Elina also had different goals than what her coach had set for her. She thought that realistically she could have made it to the final at the world track and field championships, or succeed at the European track and field championships. Her coach, on the other hand set the bar higher and said she would be an Olympic winner.

Theme #4: Retirement

Distance athletes typically peak later in their career, and it is not uncommon for an elite female distance runner to be in her thirties while still competing at a high level. A good example of this is Constantina Dita, who was 38 years old when she won the women's Olympic marathon in 2008 (IAAF, 2014). However, the participants in the

study were, on average, relatively young when they retired from competitive sports. The average age at the moment of retirement was 26. Some of the athletes had run their personal best results at the age of 18, and some reached their peak at a later point in their athletic career - the oldest age when a participant ran her personal best was 29.

The main reason for retirement from sport was lack of motivation. Additionally, the participants all have experience in higher education, and many of them have a master's degree. Therefore, as they were graduating, a career outside of sports, job opportunities and future studies became a priority. All of the participants thought they had retired at the right time, although a few of them debated that they could have retired a few years earlier. This theme was divided into three sub themes: plan to retire: no plan vs. had a plan, reasons to retire, and reactions to retirement.

Retirement Planning: plan vs. no plan

One of the questions asked of the participants was if they had a plan to retire, and for some the question seemed a bit confusing. Six out of nine participants stated they did not really plan their retirement. However, eight out of nine participants took several months to think about retirement, in most cases during the time when they were not able to train or compete due to an injury. For example, before her last race season Hillevi thought that if the season did not go well, she might be done with competitive running. She said:

During the spring [I started to think about retirement], when I had had injuries for several years and I had to train with those terms... actually, over three years had gone by. So, during the spring I thought that if the summer season won't go well, I might retire. It felt like, well, I lost motivation when I could never do consistent and full running trainings. Then early that summer I could not run at all, and I made the decision not to race that summer. During the summer the decision evolved. That it was over for real. And I never ran that last season.

Elina, Pirkko, and Emmi had similar experiences, as injuries prevailed and they took months to weigh their options. Siiri gave herself an ultimatum, and decided that she would try one more year with a new coach, and if that did not work out, she thought she would hang up her spikes. As things were not going well, she thought about retirement for several months, and then decided to focus on other things.

As mentioned earlier, six of the participants said they really did not have a plan to retire. As Regina had full intention to return to training and competing after the injury, the whole idea of retirement took her by surprise. After weighing her options for several months, she decided that it was time to move on. Additionally, she had always been very invested in her academic career, which filled the void after retirement. Helena, Hillevi, Ansa, and Sylvi had similar experiences, as they had work or family to fill the void after leaving competitive running. Sylvi, who started a family, stated,

Think I would have been in total crisis if I had to retire from competitive running for any other reason than an occasion this happy [having a child]. It took me completely elsewhere, and I did not handle my aches, pains and issues until later.

Helena took several months to think about her decision, but claims that there was no other planning involved and she did not think about athletics for a while. During the interview she was thinking retrospectively:

I think it would have been good to have a plan... especially when I had sponsorships and my home municipality was supporting me a little, so I could have been smarter and take care of those things. But no, it was probably such a difficult decision that I could not call, or did even think about calling, for example, to tell to the local officials and track and field club directors that I am done with running... So I kind of just let it be, and took care of it later, in some other manner. So, I would not say that I had a plan.

Three out of nine participants stated that they had a plan to retire. After the ultimatum for herself and the decision to retire, Siiri started focusing on finishing her

studies and gaining work experience. She realized that she was very ambitious as a student, and was able to focus her determination on her education. Pirkko started to focus on her studies as well, and as she had always worked part-time, the transition to working life was fairly painless. Elina also had finished her studies, and started working. She took several months to think about retirement and stated that it was not a quick decision. She said,

I thought that... it would not be a one-day decision; I think about six months went by and then I realized that this is not what I wanted anymore. I just did not have the energy, and I was not in it wholeheartedly anymore like I should have been. It was like I had to... and it was like... It was more like I was just seeing what others thought about it, mainly my parents and my coach, to see what their take on it was.

Reasons to Retire

The participants were asked what they considered as the main reasons for retirement from competitive running. Most participants listed several reasons, loss of motivation, interest in other things and injuries being the most common ones. Lack of time, age, starting a family, and not having progress/success were mentioned as well. In this section, reasons to retire are not clearly separated due to the fact that each participant had more than just one reason to retire, and in order to get a clear picture of the different situations, separation of the different factors was not sufficient.

Ansa had started to work after graduating from a university, and continued training alongside working. She felt that working and running was not a possible combination, especially when she was battling injuries at the same time. She also thought it was time to retire. She said,

...then I started to have a feeling that it is starting – that I have tried it all, and I was ready to take the next step... and of course the financial situation effects as

well, I was not ready to be without work at that point, because I thought I should have been better [in running] in order to do that.

She continued,

... it wasn't that I had to go to work, I am certain I would have been able to find money to continue running if I just wanted to, it wasn't that... but I just had a feeling that I didn't have motivation to continue because I had gotten to that point with all those resources I got... I needed to be much more if I had any intentions to continue... and even then I am not sure if I wanted to continue, I started to feel my biological clock ticking and feel old among all the young runners... Finland has a lot of youngsters out there...

She also added that no one really talked about age to her, but she got the feeling, whether it came from society or not, that by the age of 30 "you should have been there and done that." Two other participants, Pirkko and Helena also mentioned the 30-year mark and how it is the signal to start thinking about other things, such as starting a family.

Regina, Helena, and Emmi had similar sentiments as Ansa. Their motivation was low, and they felt it was time to do other things. Emmi recalls how she was unmotivated, and thought also that working and running seemed like a complicated combination. She was also debating if the overall environment was the reason for the loss of motivation.

She said,

I was bored. Actually, I felt that the endurance running family was quite boring, that there were, like we talked, so many lonely wolves, and it was nothing grand to me anymore... I felt it was boring and I thought that the people were boring too. Sometimes I was wondering that "don't they have anything better to do than run races?" So I got an opposite reaction, and wanted to do something else.

Regina felt that she needed to put even more time into running in order to be faster, and she was not ready to take more time from her studies to focus on running. She also mentioned the long break due to injury and how she had time to think about what she wanted from life. Additionally, she stated that even if she had run her event few seconds faster, she would have not gotten to a level that had allowed her to compete

internationally, or made her any more satisfied with her athletic career. Helena, on the other hand, had motivation to train, but somehow she had lost the enthusiasm to compete. She recalls that the transition was easy as she found a job she likes that filled the void left by competitive running.

Two participants reminisced that the main reason to retire from competitive running was the lack of success and progress. Elina said,

[the reason to retire] was exactly the fact that there was no progress or success anymore. Athletics was everything to me and I was longing for success. And when the success never came, running did not interest me. Additionally, everything became so difficult when I lost all my sponsors and it was mentally tough to be all the time wondering how I could finance training camps and that sort of stuff.

Siiri stated that for her the main reason of retirement from competitive running was her all-or-nothing attitude. When she realized reaching the international level was not possible for her, she lost interest to continue. Also, she was overtrained during that time and wanted to focus on her studies and to get work experience. Additionally, Siiri had similar sentiments about the athlete's life as Emmi: she did not care for it too much, and started to doubt if running competitively was "her thing" after all.

Two participants mentioned that they consider injuries the main reasons for retirement. Pirkko and Hillevi had been battling injuries for several years, and lost motivation to continue. However, for Hillevi loss of motivation was a more significant factor than the injuries, but stated that retirement was caused by both. Pirkko could not recover from her injuries so that she could have reached her previous level, and her priorities started to change.

Reactions to Retirement

Retirement caused the participants to have many different types of reactions, both emotional and physical. Regina recalls she had many different feelings, as she stated, “it was difficult, there were feelings of wistfulness, but I also felt relieved.” She added that feeling relieved was caused by many different factors: she felt relief that she was able to make the decision, that the everyday life was going to be a little less stressful, and that she does not have to stress about performing better, becoming faster, or competing.

Regina also remembered that telling about retirement was difficult – she said,

It was really tough for me to tell the news to my coach, to tell him that I will not start building a new training season. And I found it difficult to tell my parents about it too, even though they never demanded anything from me or pressured on anything, just saying it out loud was difficult, it was just so... I think I cried even few times then, just because it was such an important thing and I was able to say it out loud. It just unraveled like that.

She also added that she was afraid of regretting her decision later.

Five other participants had similar feelings as Regina, and mentioned feeling relief immediately after the retirement decision was made and feeling relieved was caused by many different factors. Siiri was happy to get rid of the pressures she had, and the mental struggle due to the difficult few years at the end of her running career. She recalls starting to be afraid of competing, as racing when you know you are not in good shape can be cumbersome. Emmi also mentioned that during her last race season, racing had become somehow very difficult, even though she had been in good shape. In her opinion, this was caused by pressure and fear of failure. Training, on the other hand, had never been an issue. Emmi and Elina also found telling about retirement difficult, especially to their coaches and parents. Elina later added that she was afraid her parents would be disappointed in her.

Helena remembers feeling relieved after the retirement decision was made, but was not quite sure why. Ansa, on the other hand, felt liberated as she realized she could do anything she wanted, and did not have to go to run according to a training program. Pirkko, Elina, Siiri, and Emmi were happy that they were free to do other things. Elina and Siiri also felt liberated because they could be something else than a runner. Elina said,

I could do what I wanted to do and be who I really was, not just the athlete-Elina but rather could be... And of course through work I had met people that did not know me as an athlete or so called elite athlete, they knew me just as me, Elina...

Siiri had similar feelings about her runner-self as Elina during the retirement process.

She stated,

I felt relief and joy, and I thought that I got my own life back, and there was no more that burden on my shoulders. Until then everything in my life was about running, and everywhere I went I was the runner. It aggravated me a lot, and I remember thinking that I was so much more than a runner. I am so much more than just a runner.

Pirkko remembers that being considered as an athlete was difficult and painful after retirement, and like Siiri was purposely trying to get rid of the athlete label.

Two participants mentioned that they felt disappointed initially after retirement. Pirkko, who had been battling injuries for several years was disappointed that she could not run faster, and those were the results that would be recorded in the books. However, she also felt relief because she could finally get rid of struggling with injuries. Hillevi was also disappointed, but even more so she was afraid that she could never run again; after all, it was the form of exercise she liked the most.

Four participants mentioned that after retirement they did not follow track and field for a few years following retirement, especially Finnish track and field. Ansa

mentioned she would watch some international races but had no interest to watch domestic track and field on television or go to races. Regina also stated that it was difficult to go to races as a spectator. She said,

I remember that going to races as a spectator was very difficult to me right after the retirement, especially during the first summer track season, I can remember how I actually said that I can't go, that I don't want to watch others do what I can't do anymore. The first summer [after the retirement] was difficult, but the second summer was already easier.

Emmi had quite the opposite feelings about following Finnish track and field, as she mentioned that she went to watch races immediately after the decision to retire, and that she was interested to see how her former competitors and runner friends were doing.

One of the difficult aspects of retirement for the participants was to find a balance of how much to exercise. Two of the participants kept training even though they did not have any intention to compete anymore. Elina stated that it took her a couple of years until she realized that she did not have to train every day. Regina had similar sentiments, as she remembers that it was very difficult to get used to running less. She said,

It felt so little to run just once a day. And for a long time [after the retirement] I felt that I must run every day. So it was a long process to reduce the amount of training. I could have not even imagined that I had quit running all of a sudden completely.

Later Regina continued that at first she did not feel like herself when she cut back training as she was used to running a lot. She felt like she was missing something, felt irritated and angry, and most of the time did not know what would help.

Four participants said they had no interest in competing at all especially in running after they retired. Years after the retirement Siiri ran one race just for fun with her co-workers. However, people in the running circles realized that she had run a race, and she felt irritated by it and thought that she will never do that again, since she cannot

just go running without someone making a big deal out of it. Now it is not irritating to her, but she said it might be a while until she enters a race again. Ansa stated that she wanted to start exercising for her health without any other goals in mind. She called the attitude as “anti-goal,” as she did not want to be measured in any way. Now she has thought of maybe entering a race in some other sport, but even then she wants to be somewhat well prepared.

Theme #5: Factors Affecting Quality of Transition

All nine participants stated that they had adjusted to life after athletic retirement, and six out of nine participants felt they had a fairly easy athletic retirement process. Participants were asked if they had voluntarily left competitive sports, and seven out of nine participants said they retired voluntarily. The three participants who felt they were forced out of competitive running said it was either due to an injury or circumstances, such as not enough support. Additionally, the length of the adjustment to retirement was difficult to determine for most participants as they were not exactly sure when the full adjustment had happened. However, for two participants the adjustment took just a few months, when others mentioned that it lasted at least a full year to two years as they needed to go through all the different training and racing cycles that happened during one calendar year, and get used to the fact that they were not training for anything in particular anymore.

Coping Methods

Most participants mentioned that what made the transition easier was that they were able to keep running. Emmi stated that after she retired, running became a way to relax, and it made a difference that she did not have to stop running. Siiri kept running,

but considerably less than before due to overtraining, and a year or two after retirement she felt her body had recovered, joy returned to her running, and she said, “Running became my thing again.”

Another coping strategy for some of the participants to adjust to their new life was to focus on studies, work, and family. Siiri remembers that she had never before been an ambitious student, but all of a sudden she started to want to excel at school and continued her studies after she obtained her first degree. Regina also stated that her studies and working took over her life and she really enjoyed it. Sylvi on the other hand had started a family and did not have time to think about anything else for a while. As mentioned earlier, all participants were studying while they were still competing, and some of them had been working as well, so most of them said the transition from competitive running was natural and went smoothly.

Athletic Identity

Once the participants had made the decision to retire, they realized their athletic identity was changing. Regina felt that due to an injury and not running for several months she had been away from the athlete life, which helped her reduce her athletic identity. Six participants stated that soon after retirement they had a decline in their athletic identity, and it became less important to them. For example, Siiri pushed her athletic identity aside immediately, and did not think about running for a while. She actually was aggravated as people often remembered her as an athlete. Helena mentioned that she was able to decrease her athletic identity fairly quickly as she started to construct her working identity. Hillevi also reduced her athletic identity as she made a clear distinction between being an elite athlete and an exerciser. She mentioned that nowadays

she does not have such a strong division between the two roles, but that was the way she reacted initially after retirement.

Three participants mentioned that athletic identity was fairly important to them during the retirement process. Sylvi said she kept comforting herself about her running career, telling herself that she had achieved more than she had expected. Emmi, on the other hand, said she felt odd, as she was not sure what her identity was after retirement. She remembered having difficulties accepting any other identities. For Ansa the transition was different, as her job during the retirement process was in a sports setting, and athletics continued to be big part of her life.

Personality

The participants were asked what characteristics of their personality helped with the transition. Ansa stated that she is very patient and has a calm demeanor, and she thinks about everything logically. Additionally, she said,

I think in a way being calm is a personality trait, and that you do not put all eggs in one basket in your life... of course, for an athlete that may be a negative thing as well... laughs... because you should be able to fully devote yourself, but of course in this situation [during retirement] it helps if you have other plans.

Emmi thinks that being positive and social helps with the transition, as well as listening and being honest with yourself. Regina also mentioned that having a positive outlook on life helps, and being realistic. Sylvi and Pirkko, on the other hand, thought that being persistent helped them during the transition. Pirkko said,

In a way it is the perseverance [what helped with transition] that probably made me an athlete in the first place back in the day, and now I just turned it towards other areas of life.

Hillevi stated that she is very analytical and is able to handle things, and in a way sports have taught her to do that.

Social Support

Participants were asked what kind of support they received during the retirement process. Ansa received support from her coach and family, and Emmi did as well.

Regina remembers having one of close friends as a support, as her coach was not really part of the process and she did not tell her parents until she had made her decision.

Regina said,

I had one good friend who went through it all with me. It was more like she listened and I tried to put my thoughts and the process in my head into words. She listened and agreed with me, and did not effect on my decision, but she was there and helped me to make my decision. I kept talking and talking and so on, and then I finally realized, and my friend also told me that I probably had already answered all my questions myself.

Elina's support was her sibling, although she felt that she really did not need any other support at that point. Sylvi and Siiri received most of their support from their spouses.

Additionally, Sylvi remembered talking to her athlete friends, although the discussions were not very thorough. Pirkko also received peer support from her athlete friends, in addition to her family. She said,

I am not sure if we really talked directly about it [athletic retirement] with anyone, but there was somehow... you could sense it and read between the lines that the others were going through the same kind of process and similar thoughts... and at least if I talked I knew they [athlete friends] would understand, it was important to have the support from other athletes.

Perceived Control

All participants stated that retirement as a situation was completely or somewhat under their control. Regina and Sylvi mentioned that there were some issues: Regina thought that it is impossible to say that the situation is under control 100% when the life change is something significant. She said,

I think that when you go through such a huge life change it is impossible to say that you are in control of the situation 100 percent, because change is always scary, and brings uncertainties. But I can't say that I was completely in control, that it was nothing. I can't say that one day all of a sudden it was over and I can continue my life like nothing had happened.

Pirkko also thought that she was in control of the situation even though the process was long and painful. Helena stated that the situation could have not been more under control, and that it helped to be realistic with oneself. She said,

In a way if you let the situation... or that you admitted to yourself that "okay, I don't have enough motivation anymore", it is easy. I did not have to battle with the matter anymore. In a way you may want to deny the reality and search for the motivation and so on, but when you truly and realistically think about it, then it is easy...

Elina had similar sentiments, as she stated that it was a clear decision, the decision was her own, and she has no regrets.

Participants were asked if they thought they had retired at the right moment. Five participants declared that the timing of the retirement was right, one of the participants was not quite sure, and three said that they could have retired earlier. Emmi was unmotivated when she decided to retire, which irritated her as she had had a good race season. But she knew she could not fake it and continue if she was not motivated. Since then she had wondered if she really had reached her potential, and what would have happened if she had had one amazing performance. However, she has accepted her decision, and has moved on.

Hillevi, who suffered from injuries, thought that if she had retired a few years earlier, it would have been too early. Pirkko had similar sentiments, as she is glad that she struggled with her injuries and did not give up, even though those years battling injuries were very difficult. Elina and Siiri thought that they could have retired earlier,

even though at the moment of retirement Elina thought that she was retiring at the right time. She said,

Now afterwards I have been thinking that maybe I should have retired earlier. But in a way I was still in school and I needed to finish it, and it would take for a while... And earlier I had decided that after I graduate I would either continue running or start working, but now thinking afterwards I think I could have retired few years earlier. But when I retired, I thought it was the right time...

Six participants stated their retirement was voluntary. Additionally, six participants mentioned that retirement was their own decision and that they were not pressured to retire. Three participants said they retired due to the circumstances; for example, Pirkko stated that she was forced to retire due to her injuries, Sylvi started a family, and Elina did not want to continue struggling without sufficient support.

Theme #6: Major Effects of Retirement

The participants went through several different types of changes in other areas of their lives simultaneously with the retirement process. Most participants had either graduated or were finishing their studies, and were transitioning to the work force. Also, several participants had moved to another location. Some of the major effects of retirement the participants mentioned were time management, lifestyle, health/physique, financial situation, and self-perception.

Time Management

Regina talked about how her everyday life became more relaxed after retirement as she finally had an adequate amount of time for her studies. Pirkko, Ansa, and Siiri had similar sentiments, as they were able to devote more time for their studies and in general had more time for other things. Hillevi also mentioned that she has been able to participate in different organizations' events and work more after she retired.

Lifestyle

Five participants stated that they did not have any major changes in lifestyle. For example, Hillevi said she has kept training after she retired, just a little less. She also mentioned that she liked the structured athlete life as it fits her personality. However, Hillevi identified that she has become more relaxed about her diet, although she still maintains a healthy diet for her health. Sylvi also kept training regularly, even though she had started a family, as she felt that it was important to her health and her schedule allowed her to do that.

Four participants felt that athletic retirement caused major changes to their lifestyle. After she decided to retire, Emmi was excited to live a more relaxed and spontaneous life. She remembered how she enjoyed not having to plan her life so much; for example, she could go out with friends without having to think about her morning run or the next day's workout. She also became more impulsive in trying other sports and new forms of exercise. Emmi enjoys traveling, which also became easier as she could just go, without having to look for training facilities and places to run at the destination. Elina had similar experiences as Emmi, as her lifestyle after the retirement changed quite drastically. She had not been exposed to the same things as a teenager as her peers typically had been, so she was exploring a different lifestyle from the structured and often strict athlete life. However, she soon discovered that it was not really for her, although considered the short period as "fun times with friends." Additionally, she mentioned that even during her exploration of her different lifestyle, she still kept running a lot.

Health/Physique

As all participants were battling injuries or other health issues during their competitive career, many of them said their health improved after retirement. Three participants thought they could exercise more, and one felt a little sad that she was not in better shape. However, all participants have continued running, some less and some more. As mentioned earlier, Hillevi said she has kept training approximately six days a week, but nowadays the training is healthier, and everything she does is for her health. Siiri, on the other hand, took a long break from running, as she ran very little for two years after the retirement. She knew she had been overtrained when, after taking the break, the constant feeling of being exhausted went away. Siiri said,

I know I had been overtrained when maybe a year or two running just three times a week I could run really fast and I felt great, my legs were just going so fast and I did not know where that came from, especially when I had not been doing any hard trainings. The exhaustion finally went away, and joy returned to my running.

Three participants talked about physical changes of their body and body image. Elina mentioned that she had gained some weight after retirement, and people actually pointed that out to her. However, she considered the weight gain as a positive change as she had been rather lean as distance runners often are, even though she had been considered heavy by others while she was competing. Sylvi kept training even though she was expecting a child, as she was afraid of gaining weight. Sylvi also mentioned that a few years earlier her coach had told her that she was too heavy, and this statement was still bothering her. Emmi, who had gained some weight after retirement had similar feelings about weight gain as Elina. Emmi thought that she had been too thin at some points of her running career, and considered her current weight healthier.

Financial Situation

The common consensus among the participants was that their financial situation improved significantly after retirement, especially for those who started working. For example, Helena stated that it was a relief not having to request every euro with a special form to get reimbursed for her expenses, and it was nice to actually have an official payday. Two of the participants said the retirement did not impact their finances in any way, as they continued their studies and their main source of income, the student allowance, stayed the same.

Self-perception

One of the participants [Siiri] stated that the retirement had a major impact on her self-perception. She had never considered herself as a very ambitious person, especially when it comes to work career and studies. She said,

I come from an average family, so when I had success in sport, and maybe it was also the environment I was living in, but all of a sudden I realized I was very ambitious, both in school and at work, which was a huge surprise. I just had a need to have a perfect score at school, and I never had been like that before... I just had to gear the ambition [from running] towards something.

Social Life

All participants stated that they had more time for friends and family after they retired from sport. Even though most participants did not really go through changes in their social circle, four of them mentioned that they lost touch with their athlete friends, or did not see them as frequently. Some participants mentioned that after retirement they became more social overall. Elina said that she had always been very social, but for some reason she had to hide this trait while she was running competitively. Additionally, Elina remembered that her relationship with her family improved after she had made the

decision to retire, as she was not constantly arguing about running with her family. She explained,

Situation at home was rather tense, because my parents had sort of started to turn against my running. My family had always been supportive and proud of my running and heavily involved in it, but my parents had started to think that I should retire from competitive sports because it was not going anywhere. Of course, they were worried when they saw that I was constantly hurting, yet trying so hard.

Theme #7: Current Life

The participants were asked about the status of their current life and how satisfied they were with their lives. Many of them had become mothers, and most of them were having careers outside of sports, while few of them still continued their studies. All of them stated being very happy and satisfied with life.

What is Important Now

Participants who had children stated their number one priority was their family and children. Some of them mentioned that they would like to exercise more, but since they have small children they would rather spend their time with their family and focus more on staying in shape once their children are a bit older. Health, well-being, and exercise were also important for the participants, as well as work and studying.

One of the questions asked was if the participants still considered themselves as athletes. Six of the participants stated they did not consider themselves as athletes anymore. Emmi thought of herself as athletic rather than an athlete, and Ansa discussed several terms such as athlete, athletic, and exerciser. She said,

If someone asks me, I say that I am not an athlete anymore but rather I tell them I used to be a competitive athlete. At the moment I consider myself as an exerciser, or competitive exerciser, but even then you have to have a goal, and I don't have anything like that I would try to run the half marathon to a certain time.

Others had similar thoughts, as they were not quite sure how to define themselves nowadays as far as exercise is concerned.

Three participants stated that they still consider themselves as an athlete. Elina thinks it is still her identity, and that it has not changed much. She contemplated if the lifestyle she had learned was the reason for it. Sylvi and Pirkko had similar sentiments as Elina. Pirkko said,

In a way you probably consider yourself as an athlete for the rest of your life... When you have been an athlete from early childhood till adulthood and you live for it [athletics], I don't think it can be erased very easily. I am not sure how it surfaces and when, but I think one will consider her/himself as an athlete for the rest of her/his life.

All participants said they will continue being active in the future, and three of them considered competing, either in running or in some other sports. Additionally, running road races with co-workers was mentioned. Three participants who had children thought they would like to be involved in sports if their children want to participate. However, only three participants thought they would consider coaching in the future. Helena stated that she is not interested in coaching at an elite level at all, and even if she were she would have to obtain a considerable amount of education in coaching. Pirkko mentioned that she would not have time for coaching right now, but thought coaching in the future is possible. Elina has been thinking of being a coach, but said it would be difficult to coach young people who do not understand how much hard work it requires. On the other hand, she thought she could share her experiences and serve as peer support for the next generation by coaching.

Satisfaction with Athletic Career

All participants were asked how satisfied they were with their athletic career. Five participants were either very satisfied or satisfied with their careers and two were fairly satisfied. Ansa thought she received many positive things from running and stated that she should have been running at a much higher level so that she would have gotten more from her athletic career than she did. Sylvi was happy that she went through all the difficulties she had during her career and tried her limits. Emmi and Siiri said that they had lots of positive memories and Emmi thought she learned many skills from running that she has been able to transfer to other aspects of life. Hillevi, Helena, and Regina had no regrets, and Regina thinks she also reached her potential during her career, as she did not consider herself a naturally very talented athlete. Helena thought being an athlete was a great experience and she will cherish those memories for the rest of her life.

Two participants stated that they were not satisfied with their running careers. Pirkko was sad about how her career ended due to an injury, especially when she felt she had not reached her potential. Elina also was disappointed, and said she did not value her running career very highly, as she did not reach her goals.

Recommendations for Retiring and Competing Athletes

The participants were asked if they have any advice for athletes who are about to retire from competitive sports or who are still actively competing. For athletes who are about to retire, Hillevi recommended making sure that it is a well thought decision, and that it would be imperative to have one's coach as part of the retirement process. Elina also mentioned that it is important to consider the decision carefully, as she took six months to weigh her options and is still not sure if it was long enough. Siiri, Regina,

Ansa, and Emmi thought it would be important to have something else to fill the void after running, and Emmi and Regina particularly mentioned that it should be something one is passionate about so that identity can be built around it. Additionally, Sylvi advised to not be surprised if the retirement process is more difficult than one thinks, and it is important to go through your feelings sooner or later. She thinks talking to a friend, having peer support, or getting help from a professional helps significantly. Finally, both Sylvi and Hillevi mentioned that even though the competitive career ends, a retiring athlete should not quit doing her/his sport abruptly if possible.

The advice to competing athletes was similar in nature as for the retiring athletes. Sylvi stated that it would be good to time the retirement well, and avoid ending one's career suddenly. Regina thought it would be good to think about what to do after the running career is over, but she was not sure how useful that advice is, as not everyone wants to think about retirement while they are still focusing on their sport. Ansa thought it would be important to think about it a little bit, because athletic career can come to an end fairly abruptly. In her opinion, an athlete's coach or the national federation for the sport should have something in place for the athletes, such as support and counseling, if nothing else. Hillevi mentioned that it is important to not give up easily so that there will not be any regrets later. Helena, Pirkko, and Siiri thought that it is good to have other things besides running, but they also contemplated that it can be difficult to decide whether or not to study, and focus solely on running. However, Pirkko stated that there should be some kind of plan in place, so that life will not be completely empty at the moment of retirement.

Discussion

Question #1: How did elite female Finnish distance runners react to their athletic retirement?

Retirement caused the participants to have various types of reactions, both emotional and physical, and for many of them the initial reactions were rather strong. Emotional responses included feelings of relief, joy, frustration, fear of regret, and disappointment. Feelings of relief and joy are in accordance with findings in previous research (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Coakley, 1983, Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008), as the participants felt relief that they were able to make the decision to retire, tell their decision to their coaches and parents, and that the pressures they had felt during their athletic career were removed. Getting rid of the struggles due to injuries was also a liberating feeling for the participants who had been dealing with several injuries during their career.

Two participants felt frustrated and disappointed after they retired because they had not achieved their goals, or that they had not reached their potential. Additionally, several participants were afraid of regretting the decision to retire, they were anxious about their coaches' and parents' responses to the retirement, and troubled about not knowing how others would perceive them after the retirement. Furthermore, confusion about one's own identity was another source of anxiety. Apprehension about identity has been apparent in previous research, especially in the study by Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) on retirement experiences of elite female gymnasts. However, according to Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000), gymnasts become single-mindedly focused on their sport far earlier than athletes in other sports, and this causes gymnasts to have more severe distress upon retirement. In this study, the participants were older when they started to focus on their

sport, and older at the time of retirement than the gymnasts in the aforementioned study. Therefore, confusion about identity can be a source of frustration even if the athletes are more mature at the moment of retirement, and even if they become more focused on their sport later.

According to Brewer et al. (2007), little research has examined the relationship between athletic identity and age. It is also unclear in this study if age was really a factor affecting athletic identity, as some of the athletes who retired at a more mature age stated that their athletic identity was strong, and on the other hand, some of the athletes who retired earlier said they did not have a very strong athletic identity. Additionally, studies that have examined the relationship between athletic identity and age have focused mainly on college students. It would be useful to research this topic among post-collegiate and professional athletes and, as noted by Brewer et al. (2007), environmental factors in athletic identity development should be included.

Furthermore, three participants mentioned that they continued to run and train significant amounts even after they retired, and stated that it was difficult to get used to running just once a day, and to reduce the overall training volume. Additionally, one participant mentioned the element of shocking others, as she enjoyed telling people who do not engage in exercise that before work she had run 20 kilometers. A third participant kept exercising to avoid weight gain, and she concluded this was partly caused by a former coach who had told the participant few years earlier she would have run faster if she had been thinner.

Question #2: What were the reasons for retirement?

This study is in accordance with the notion that athletic career termination is rarely a single cause decision, but rather a multi-dimensional process (Alfermann, 2007). All participants listed more than one reason for retirement, loss of motivation and interest in other things being the most prevalent causes. As each participant had struggled with injuries and other health issues before retirement, only two participants clearly stated that injuries were the main reason for retirement. Additionally, lack of time, change in priorities, age, loneliness, not liking the athlete life, starting a family, and not having progress, success, or support were mentioned.

Loss of motivation has been reported to be the reason for retirement in many previous studies (e.g., Allison & Meyer, 1988; Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008). Similar to the study by Kadlcik and Flemr (2008), the factors linked to loss of motivation in this study were lack of desire to compete, being frustrated or bored with the strict athletic life, decrease in performance, and not being successful. Additionally, as all participants were studying at some point during their athletic career and tried to balance life between studies and running, for some finding a balance between the two became too burdensome. One participant mentioned that she longed for more support for her everyday life as an athlete, and as she was heavily invested in her studies she felt running was not something in which she wanted to invest as much energy and time.

In their study, Ristolainen et al. (2012) investigated the role of injuries as the cause of athletic career termination among Finnish top-level athletes. According to the study, 54% of the retired athletes terminated their career due to an injury (Ristolainen et al., 2012). However, in this study, even though the participants had been dealing with

injuries and health issues prior to retirement, seven out of nine did not consider an injury as the reason for terminating their career. It was apparent that for many it was the timing of the injury that had a significant impact on motivation. For example, one participant mentioned that she could have recovered from the injury, but felt that it was time to move on and do other things, as she felt she had reached her potential. Additionally, dealing with injuries alone, and going from one injury to another, was mentally difficult to deal with. One of the participants was also afraid that the injury would prohibit her from running recreationally, which caused her to retire from competitive sports. This implies that coaches and sport psychology professionals need to focus more on educating runners on how to deal with injuries and consider what type of support benefits the athlete the most while dealing with an injury.

According to the Conceptual Model of Athletic Retirement by Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), one of the major causes of termination of an athletic career is the chronological age and, more specifically, the decline in performance due to advancing age. However, as mentioned earlier, in this study the participants were relatively young at the moment of retirement, especially when distance runners can perform well in their late thirties. The participants who mentioned age as one of the reasons to retire stressed the social rather than physiological implications. Two participants discussed that closer to 30 years of age a woman starts thinking about starting a family and doing other things, and one concluded that even though it is a rarely discussed topic, society expects that by the age of 30 an athlete should be done with an athletic career, and move on to other things in life. Additionally, unlike in the study by Taylor and Ogilvie (1994), deselection was not

mentioned as one of the reasons to retire from sports. This finding is in accordance with the results in the study by Kadlcik and Flemr (2008).

*Question #3: What was the degree of difficulty faced in
the athletic retirement process?*

All nine participants said that they had adjusted to life after athletic retirement, and six out of nine participants stated that they had a relatively easy transition out of sports. Three participants mentioned they had some difficulties, including trying to negotiate their new identity, and accept the fact that their athletic career was over. Seven participants declared that retirement as a situation was completely or somewhat under their control. Two participants had some issues, as one stated that it is impossible to say that the situation is under control 100% when the life change is something this significant.

Six out of nine participants said that they retired voluntarily, and three stated they were forced to retire due to an injury and/or other circumstances. According to previous studies (Alfermann & Gross, 1998, as cited in Alfermann, 2007; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1993), athletes who terminate their career voluntarily and make a conscious decision to retire report positive emotions more frequently. However, in Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) some of the gymnasts who retired voluntarily described their transition as difficult or very difficult. This study had similar results: two of the participants who stated that they had retired voluntarily had a fairly difficult or very difficult transition. Additionally, one participant who had not retired voluntarily stated that the transition was fairly easy. Therefore, this study is in accordance with the notion by Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) that the distinction between “voluntary” and “involuntary” is not always explicit.

Question #4: Which factors were the most significant in influencing the quality of adjustment to retirement?

Participants in the study employed several coping mechanisms to deal with retirement. All participants mentioned that being able to continue running made the transition easier, and the common consensus was that retirement would have been more difficult if the participants had to stop running completely. Kadlcik and Flemr (2008) encountered similar findings, as the athletes concluded that mentally it was helpful to continue exercising and be involved in sports after retirement. However, one of the participants in this study mentioned that she did not run a whole lot after retirement, as she did not want to give herself a chance to return to competition. She stated, "It was easier to close the door, and not even have that option to compete again, when I knew I was in bad shape." Similar to Stambulova's (2003) results, this demonstrates how some factors can be seen either as a barrier or a resource while coping with transitions.

Another coping method utilized by the participants was focus on other aspects of life. For example, all participants were students or had been students during their running career, and many of them geared their energy towards finishing their studies, starting a career outside of sports, or having a family. However, three of the participants mentioned that it would be beneficial if the other focus was something about which one was passionate, so that identity could be built around the new focus. Four participants discussed whether or not it is good to have other things besides running. Some of them mentioned that they had studied just because they were told by others that it is good to have something else besides running, and in a way studies allowed them to focus on running as they received a student allowance from the government. Additionally, many

of them chose the location of the school not because of studies but because of better training facilities.

Tikkanen (2007) examined the life transitions of individual Finnish competitive athletes and their abilities to combine studies and competitive sports. According to the results, academic freedom and flexibility was seen as a positive and supportive factor for athletics, especially if studying was organized properly (Tikkanen, 2007). Two participants in this study agreed with this notion. However, two other participants criticized the Finnish system for not being very supportive of studying athletes. One said that nobody at the university cared how her training was going and if she was managing her time well, trying to balance between classes and trainings. She also added that there was no support system for the athlete's everyday life, as she trained alone and was responsible for finding all the supporting services on her own, including physical therapists and doctors. Additionally, another participant said the Finnish system is not really that great for athletes, as the student allowance barely covers all the living expenses, let alone all the basic needs of an athlete. This implies that there is a need for a better support system for athletes who study in institutions of higher learning.

Most of the participants had a strong athletic identity during their athletic career as they said that running set the pace for life and was everything to them. However, during the retirement process six participants reduced their athletic identity, and some even tried to remove it completely. Additionally, several of the participants avoided participation in athletic events, did not want their physical activities to be measured in any kind of way, and were irritated if they were recognized as athletes. These results are similar to what was found in previous studies (e.g., Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008; Lavallee,

Gordon, & Grove, 1997). According to Brewer et al. (2007), there is evidence that athletic identity is related to coping strategies during athletic retirement. For example, former athletes with high athletic identity at the time of retirement have been reported to use more venting of emotions, mental disengagement, behavioral disengagement, denial, suppression of competing activities, and seeking of emotional support during retirement (Brewer et al., 2007). As several participants in this study claimed that they had no issues with the transition out of sport and they immediately abandoned their athletic identity, it can be argued that this was one of the coping strategies used to adjust to their new life after their competitive running career was over.

Furthermore, it has been suggested in previous studies that strong athletic identity is associated with maladaptive behaviors during the athletic retirement process (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Grove, Lavalley, & Gordon, 1997). In this study one participant changed her lifestyle drastically following retirement and admitted that her life was rather wild for a while. Fortunately, no serious consequences resulted from this and she returned to a more tranquil way of life. However, the subject of athletic identity was rather interesting in this study. First of all, the questions about athletic identity were a little confusing for the participants, as some of them were not quite sure how to describe their athletic identity during the different stages of their career. Additionally, four of the participants concluded that even though athletics was an important part of their lives and identity, it was not everything to them. Some even admitted that their athletic identity could have been stronger and contemplated if it would have been beneficial to their athletic career to have a stronger athletic identity. Two participants who claimed to have a strong athletic identity during the peak of their career said that at times they had been irritated that

people considered them only as athletes. Therefore, at the moment of retirement they felt relief that they could have other identities and were not restricted solely to athletic identity. However, one participant thought that it was also part of her personality not to put all her eggs in one basket.

The main source of support for the participants at the moment of retirement was their families, including parents, significant others, and siblings. Friends and peer support was mentioned as well. However, according to three participants, conversations with athlete friends were not very direct. Many participants concluded that they had at least one person to talk to, to go through their emotions. This supports the study by Grove, Lavalley, and Gordon (1998) that the account-making model by Harvey, Weber, and Orbuch (1990) helps athletes cope with distressful reactions to retirement.

Interestingly, only two participants stated that their coach was a big part of the retirement process and supported them during the transition, and some of the participants were saddened by the fact that their coach did not offer any help after their athletic career was over.

One factor the participants mentioned that they perceived helpful was that the decision to retire was their own decision, and that no one forced them to retire. Many participants mentioned that it was important that others supported their decision, as some of them felt that they had an obligation to keep running, and they were afraid of disappointing others by retiring from athletics. This demonstrates that perceived control of the situation is important during the retirement process and may be helpful to successfully adjust to life after the termination of one's athletic career. Additionally, this suggests that good communication between the family and the athlete is important, as

well as offering the retiring athletes the right kind of support. It would be imperative in the future to bring together athletes, coaches and parents to discuss different matters to ensure the well-being of an athlete.

Furthermore, what was different in this study compared to many previous studies was the unimportance of a retirement plan. One participant stated that she had planned to retire if her results did not start improving. None of the participants had a particular schedule in mind to retire, but rather the idea about retirement evolved while taking a break from running due to an injury. All participants spent a fair amount of time thinking about retirement and weighed their options for several months. It was pointed out by many that the decision should not be a hasty one, and one participant contemplated if six months had been an adequate amount of time to think about the decision. Additionally, most participants did not have other parties included in the decision-making process, as only two participants mentioned they talked to their coach about ending their career. However, not having a plan to retire from athletics was probably not a major source of stress for the participants because they all were studying or had a degree from an institution of higher learning, and some of them were working.

Question #5: Was there a need for assistance before and/or after retirement?

All participants were battling injuries or other health issues before they retired. As the injuries occurred, many of them had a reduction in motivation, which in several cases lead to termination of their athletic career. Two out of nine participants stated that they were longing for assistance and support before retirement, primarily social support, and seven participants did not indicate if they needed assistance before retirement. Two participants stated that there was no need for support or assistance after retirement, and

seven participants said they received an adequate amount of support from their families, friends, significant others and coaches after the retirement. Studies conducted in other countries have found similar results. Stambulova and Ryba (2013) concluded that athletes in all countries uniformly mention their families as their major source of support during athletic retirement. However, according to studies conducted in Canada, New Zealand, and Spain athletes were seeking help from career assistance programs, and the results of research in the United Kingdom show that, of athletes receiving athletic retirement support, 100% had positive views (Park et al., 2013; Ryan & Thorpe, 2013; Schinke et al., 2013; Torregosa & Gonzáles, 2013). This is a good example of how diverse athletes' careers may be across cultures. Therefore, it is important to utilize culturally relevant frameworks and career assistance programs to help athletes follow their career pathways and fulfill their career development needs (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013).

Question #6: Was there assistance available before/after retirement?

Two participants indicated that there was no assistance available before retirement and seven participants did not indicate whether they were in need of assistance before retirement. As mentioned earlier, after retirement the participants received support mostly from their families and significant others and three participants said their coach was part of the retirement process. No other assistance was offered and it seemed the participants were not aware if any assistance was available. Additionally, as stated earlier, two participants mentioned that there was no need for any external assistance after retirement. These results are in accordance with previous studies on the athletic career retirement of Canadian, Swedish, and French athletes (Cecić Erpič, 2013;

Stambulova et al., 2007). For example, in Stambulova et al. (2007), one of the common transition patterns among French and Swedish athletes at the moment of athletic retirement was lack of support from sports organizations.

Question #7: What was the former athletes' level of life satisfaction before, during, and after their athletic retirement?

The life satisfaction of the participants before retirement varied. For example, even though health issues and injuries were present, two participants seemed content with their lives. However, most participants were frustrated due to injuries, lack of support, and family issues. During retirement, the participants were generally content with life. One said she had no issues or reactions to retirement and another participant stated that she was happy doing other things during the summers than traveling to races. Five participants mentioned that competitive running was replaced by many positive things, and one said that life became more positive after struggling for several years. One participant said she had not thought about her life satisfaction during retirement and was not sure. Currently, all participants are very happy with life. They all stated that they have adjusted to life after retirement, many of them had become mothers, had started working, and some continued their studies.

Athletes in this study have successfully transitioned to life after retirement. This is not to say that there were no difficulties and no need for support. Any transition, whether smooth or rough, requires a certain degree of adjustment (Coakley, 1983; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Therefore, it is important to offer support and assistance to athletes before, during, and after retirement to ensure a successful transition, as it is difficult to predict how an athlete reacts to retirement. As Schlossberg (1981) pointed

out, an individual may react differently to the same type of changes occurring at different times in their life. Furthermore, similar to findings by Sinclair and Orlick (1993), even though the retirement experiences of former athletes in this study were fairly positive, the adjustment took a fair amount of time. Hence, teaching transfer skills along with positive interventions would help the former athletes transition from being competent athletes to competent individuals more quickly and effortlessly (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Overall, the participants were happy with their current lives and concluded that they have primarily positive memories about their running career, and as one participant stated, “running gave her more than it took.”

General Discussion

A few years ago I was attending a track and field coaching clinic organized by USA Track & Field, and as we were learning about the different aspects of the sport, we finally started to talk about distance running. Ironically, the instructor started his lecture by talking about the “Flying Finns,” a concept that evolved to describe the superb Finnish distance runners during the early 20th century, such as Hannes Kolehmainen and Paavo Nurmi (Hannus, 1990). However, the coaching clinic instructor continued the session by pondering what had happened to the spectacular Finnish distance running. This same question has been troubling the Finnish distance running community as well, as the country has not managed to have very many representatives at Olympic Games or Track and Field World Championships during the past three decades in distance running events. This is quite a change from the days of Kolehmainen, Nurmi, and Lasse Virén, who all won several medals at the Olympics in the distance events. The most common explanations for the Finns being unsuccessful has been the dominance of African runners,

and the notion from world renowned distance running coach Arthur Lydiard that “Finland’s basic problem was the young Finns had lost their toughness” (Lydiard, 1978, p. 131).

Whether the reason for decline of Finnish dominance in distance running has been socio-cultural, socio-political, or just the fact that athletes of other nations have become better, in this study the lack of support and loneliness were prevalent issues. The participants were often training alone, they planned their life after high school alone, and most of them made the decision to retire alone, some because they were afraid of telling others about terminating their career, and others because they did not have anybody for support. Additionally, in most cases after retirement the participants received support from their significant others and families, but coaches were rarely part of the process, and no help from the national sport federation was reported. These findings are in accordance with studies on Slovenian athletes (Cecić Erpič, 2013). The studies revealed several socio-cultural specificities, such as socio-emotional support from coaches, and lack of support from sport-related institutions (Cecić Erpič, 2013).

Playing sports is often perceived as belonging and being part of a greater whole. However, the way athletes are brought into the sport system is important when considering their involvement and commitment to the sport (Green, 2005). After an athlete is recruited to the sport and decides to continue with it, she/he is socialized into the sport subculture (Green, 2005). According to Aarresola and Kontinen (2012), socialization is about interactions in which an individual develops and attaches to other people. During this time opinions and emotions are formed and the rules and norms of a community are learned (Aarresola & Kontinen, 2012). Furthermore, socialization in a

sports context is the process of creating and confirming the individual's role or identity with subculture that is caused by increased commitment to the sport (Green, 2005).

Socialization has an important role in athletes' development and career transitions, and impacts greatly how the environment is perceived. Three of the participants discussed about the distance running culture and environment, and how they felt they either did not fit the athlete mold, or had to hide certain aspects of their personalities in order to fit in. Elina stated that she had always been very social, but had to hide it when she was a competitive athlete. Additionally, Emmi thought the distance running community was boring to her, and she felt like she was expected to be a lone wolf with nothing else in her life than running.

Siiri had similar sentiments as Elina and Emmi, as she hated going to long training camps abroad and did not agree with the demands by her coach to relocate so that she would be away from distractions. The question here is: is it really necessary for a young runner to be single-minded in order to become a successful runner? Additionally, does the distance running community give young athletes room to grow as individuals? Some of the participants thought otherwise, as Elina continued later that she wished she could somehow show the younger runners, whom she has seen making the same mistakes as she did, that there are other things in life than just running.

There certainly have been different projects and attempts to improve the situation of Finnish track and field athletes, but those projects did not have a significant impact among the participants in this study. Recently there was a program set in place to increase the number of female athletes and coaches, and a mentor program for young female athletes was set in place (SUL, 2014). Additionally, the aforementioned working

group Huippu-urheilun Muutosryhmä founded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture focuses on athletes having a central role within the sports system and developing competence that will be transferred to coaching (Humu, 2012). However, the program has been strongly criticized by the media and different sport communities, claiming that the proposed changes are nothing new, and do not extend to the athletes.

Self-reflection

When I was starting to think about the subject of my thesis a year ago, I was hesitant selecting athletic retirement process as the topic. First, I felt that there was nothing new I could add to the abundant amounts of existing research about athletic retirement. Additionally, I felt that personally it would be too uncomfortable to research a topic that is close to my own experiences. I have struggled with my competitive running career, retired several times, and have always ended up returning to competition, hoping that I could finally train and compete without major issues. Additionally, I have felt often that my transition from competitive athletics should not be difficult; after all, I did not reach my goals to compete at the track and field world championships, or at the Olympic Games. I always assumed that only athletes who have competed at a higher level have a difficult transition out of sports.

However, I could not be more content that I chose this topic. It was very interesting to hear the stories of my peers and former fellow competitors, and it was as another world had been unveiled to me. It has been fascinating to see a different side of these women, as I had met most of them only on a starting line at races. This study also made me realize that I can retire from competitive running when I choose to do so, and if I decide to continue competing, I can do that just for the love of running. Running is

something that I have always loved and it will always be part of my identity, maybe just with a lesser quantity than it has been in the past. However, even though strong athletic identity could sometimes be considered a negative factor, I feel that a strong athletic identity has been a blessing in disguise on numerous times for me, as moving to another country can be a difficult transition for anyone. I often felt that I was an alien in my new home country, but did not belong to Finland either. During those times, being a runner made life easier. Additionally, this study has demonstrated to me how important it is to process the different emotions that are caused by athletic retirement. Lastly, it was a liberating feeling to hear about the experiences of my former fellow competitors; in a way, this study was simultaneously an educational as well as a therapeutic experience.

Implications for Researchers

The purpose of this study was to examine the athletic retirement processes of Finnish female former elite distance runners. Finnish female distance runners have not often been a subject of research and certainly have not received as much attention as their male counterparts. The framework of this study was to take a look at the retirement procedures holistically, starting with stories of how the women became distance runners, how they experienced retirement, and what is their level of current life satisfaction. Indeed, even though the participants perceived their transition out of sports as a fairly easy and successful procedure, most of them had fairly strong reactions to athletic retirement. The group of participants in this study was rather small, but the largest possible number of participants was not large either for several reasons.

First, Finland is a small country with only five million inhabitants and after the delimitations were set in place, the group of possible participants was approximately 17

female runners. Fifteen participants were contacted via social media or by email, and 11 former athletes responded to my request to be part of the study. However, one runner was not sure if she had retired, and another stated that she considered herself still as a competitive athlete in other distance events, even though she had retired from running. Four former runners did not respond, which is understandable, as most of the former runners work and have families. Additionally, future researchers should be aware that some former athletes might not feel comfortable talking about their retirement experiences, especially if the career termination was a difficult process.

On the other hand, the former athletes who agreed to participate in the study were eager to do so. As I was traveling around Finland during winter recess, in most cases I conducted the interviews at interviewees' homes, where I was treated more as a guest than a researcher. Twelve days was not enough time to travel to see all participants, and therefore one interview was conducted via Skype and one via telephone. All participants enjoyed talking about their athletic career and retirement experiences, and some stated that it felt like therapy to talk about all the different aspects of the retirement. Some participants were very eager to learn about the results of the study, as they wanted to see if any of the other former runners had similar experiences during their retirement.

In some cases the conceptualization of athletic retirement was unclear, as one of the participants became a mother and considered that as her moment of retirement from competitive athletics. The participant kept training and competing, but did not consider it as goal oriented, and did not think it was possible to continue training at a higher level after starting a family. However, she admitted that after starting a family, her attitude towards running changed and she enjoyed herself more while competing. It would

certainly be interesting to examine how being a mother-athlete in Finland is perceived by the society and athletes themselves.

All participants were informed that the interview would take between one to two hours, but the amount of time I spent with each participant was far longer than that, in some cases the entire day. This may have been due to the fact that I am a former fellow runner of the participants, I have run races with many of them in the past, and we had a lot to talk about. Additionally, many of the participants have become mothers and in most cases children were present during the interviews. It definitely made the situation interesting, as sometimes a baby needed to be fed, or children wanted to ask something from their mother. Furthermore, for some children a guest from the United States seemed exciting and I received the treatment of a celebrity. For future researchers I would advise to reserving an adequate amount of time to conduct the interviews, if the interviewee has small children. Fortunately, I was prepared for this and scheduled only one interview a day. The interview that was conducted at a café took less time, as well as the Skype and telephone interviews. I was a little concerned about conducting an interview via telephone since it is not quite the same as a face-to-face interview, but despite the fact that I could not see the reactions of the interviewee, I was able to hear certain emotions in the interviewee's voice.

During some interviews it was apparent that the participants had preconceived ideas of what I was trying to examine in my research. The following phrases were said often: "There was no crisis," "I did not have any issues," and "I did not need help because I had no difficulties." Even though I emphasized what the study was about, it seemed that some participants thought I was solely trying to find out if they had a crisis

transition out of competitive sports. Additionally, questions about athletic identity seemed a bit confusing, and using an athletic identity questionnaire could have been beneficial. Furthermore, the utilization of sport psychologists and sport psychology consultants by the Finnish female distance runners was not discussed in this research. It would be beneficial to examine this topic in the future, considering some of the issues the participants were dealing with.

Lastly, I hope this research brings attention to female athletes and runners in Finland. Even though Finnish female distance runners have not been in the spotlight and have never achieved what their male counterparts have achieved, I hope that future generations of female runners will not let that get in the way of their dreams, specifically their running dreams.

Implications for Practitioners

It was apparent in this study that even though all the participants were female, from the same country, and were representatives of the same sport, there were significant differences in how each individual handled transitions, changes, and difficulties during their athletic career. Some good examples are that one participant thought that the Finnish educational system makes combining athletics and education easy, while another claimed there is not enough support, and that the system makes an athlete's life difficult. Additionally, as one participant thought being able to keep running after retirement helped her with the transition, another felt that she needed to close the door completely, and did not run much so that she would not even have a desire to keep competing. These individual differences are important to take into consideration when working with distance runners when they are transitioning out of competitive running. In addition, as

was noted by Baillie and Danish (1992), each individual's sport history must be understood in order to have useful predictions regarding the quality of an athlete's retirement from competitive sports. This includes how the athlete was socialized to the sport, what was the support system during the athlete's career, the athlete's personality, athletic identity, relationship with the coach, and other aspects of life that had an impact on the athletic career.

Furthermore, it is important for sport psychologists and sport psychology consultants to examine what running means to Finnish female distance runners. As recreational running has become immensely popular in Finland, currently with 650,000 people claiming running as their hobby (Nurmi, 2013), it would be beneficial to focus on determining with the retiring athlete what is the role of running after she/he retires. As a few of the participants mentioned that it is not necessary to retire from running completely, it certainly implies that the distinction between an elite runner and recreational runner does not need to be so drastic. However, the label "runner" can be difficult to live up to, as most former elite runners are not able to keep their fitness at the same level after retirement. Therefore, redefining the role of running in former runners' lives would be essential. This would be in accordance with research by Ronkainen and Ryba (2012), who suggested that discovering "spiritual running" can be a protective element for an athlete at the moment of retirement, and would allow runners to maintain running as a central part of their identity after retirement from competitive running.

Lastly, coaches and sports administrators should take into consideration the needs of female distance runners. Lack of support was clear, and, even more so, social support and being part of the everyday life of an athlete were not present. Therefore, athletic

career transition programs should be established to help athletes with different career transitions. Additionally, the effectiveness of these programs should be documented and evaluated frequently.

CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the athletic retirement process of former Finnish female elite distance runners. The subject matters studied included the beginning of the participants' athletic career, how the participants started focusing on distance running, the pre-retirement conditions, and the manner by which the former competitive runners began to consider retiring from competitive sports. Additionally, the retirement processes were observed closely as well as the current life satisfaction. Nine former distance runners participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews. Seven of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in Finland, one interview via Skype, and one via telephone. All participants considered themselves retired from competitive sport, and time elapsed since retirement varied from 2 to 10 years.

The interviews were listened several times, transcribed verbatim, and read several times to become familiar with the material. A total of seven themes evolved from the raw data, and 25 subthemes. All participants stated that they had adjusted to life after retirement. Additionally, most participants perceived their transition out of sports as an easy process; some even said they had no symptoms related to the retirement. However, even though all participants were studying while focusing on running, and had at least a

preliminary plan of what to do after their competitive running career was over, many of them had to negotiate their identity. Two participants stated that retirement was a difficult process for them, and three participants said they did not retire voluntarily. The most common reasons to retire were loss of motivation, interest in other things, and injuries. Additionally, lack of time, age, starting a family, and not having progress or success were mentioned.

None of the participants had a clear plan to retire, but rather the idea of retirement evolved usually during a break due to an injury. For most of the participants it was difficult to determine how long it took to adjust to the retirement, and the estimates varied between a few months to two years. Many participants commented that they had to live through all the usual training and racing cycles that happened during a calendar year until the symptoms started to dissipate. Most reoccurring reactions to retirement were reduction of athletic identity, unwillingness to follow sports, and continuing training at significant levels up to two years after retirement, or having troubles adjusting to the reduced amount of training. The participants mentioned the following factors as helpful in adjusting to retirement from running: being able to continue running, other interests and passions in life, decision to retire was their own decision, being honest with oneself, talking to someone, and family support. However, what some participants considered helpful had an opposite effect on others, which is a good example of differences between individual perceptions.

All participants stated that they were mostly or somewhat in control of the situation during the retirement process, even if they had difficulties accepting the fact that their athletic career was over. Despite different reactions and difficulties during the

athletic retirement process, all athletes concluded that they had a successful transition from competitive athletics and were satisfied with their current lives. Major effects of retirement were the ability to manage time better, change in lifestyle, improvements in health and physical changes, financial situation, and perception of self. All participants had positive memories from their athletic career, and seven out of nine participants were satisfied with their athletic career. Two participants were not happy mainly because of the way their athletic career ended and that they had not achieved their goals.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn based on the nine interviews conducted with Finnish female former elite distance runners:

1. Even though athletic retirement was a major life change for most of the participants, and for some the adjustment was challenging, the retirement process was not perceived as overwhelming.
2. The retirement processes of the former female distance runners were multi-dimensional, as was expected. The reasons to retire, the reactions to retirement, and coping mechanisms among the participants varied greatly, and all participants named two or more reasons that lead to retirement.
3. The most common reasons to retire were loss of motivation, interest in other things, and injuries or other health issues.
4. It was apparent that combining studies and running was challenging to many, although one participant thought that combining sports and studies in Finland is easy.

5. Some of the evident issues among the runners were lack of support and loneliness. Many of them talked about having to take care of everything on their own and longing for having someone to support the everyday life of an athlete. Two athletes mentioned that they could have considered training if they had had more support.

6. Coaches were rarely reported to be part of the retirement process and sports organizations not at all. Most participants mentioned that they made the decision to retire on their own, and only one participant stated that she had discussed retirement with her coach.

7. Social support was important to the participants after the retirement. However, some of them were afraid of telling their coaches or parents about the decision to retire, mainly because they did not want to disappoint anyone. Participants reported that it made the situation easier if others supported their decision.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Questions about athletic identity were confusing to the participants; therefore it would be useful to examine the athletic identity of Finnish female distance runners in detail.

2. Several participants had issues with their coaches during their athletic career. Future investigation should focus on the coaching relationships and dynamics between Finnish female distance runners and their coaches.

3. Due to the small sample size of the study, results may not be generalizable to the entire Finnish elite female distance running population, especially when the participants' experiences varied greatly. The study should be repeated using a larger sample.

4. As several participants stated that they were not comfortable with limiting their identity to being a distance runner, it would be beneficial to study the socialization process of Finnish female runners into competitive distance running.

5. Most participants were battling injuries during their careers. However, mental skills training being part of the process to recover from injuries was not discussed in this study. Future research should focus on the processes of how female distance runners deal with injuries, and how mental training would help with dealing with injuries among this particular population.

6. It was apparent in this study that many of the participants did not receive sufficient social support during their career. Therefore, the role of environment in talent development in Finnish distance running should be studied in detail.

7. All participants indicated that they did not receive support from sports organizations. Additionally, most participants stated that they did not need help with athletic career retirement. Therefore, it would be beneficial to examine the athletes' attitudes toward career assistance programs in Finland.

REFERENCES CITED

- Aarresola, O., & Konttinen, N. (2012). Vanhemmat moni-ilmeinen vaikuttaja kilpaurheiluun sosialistumisessa. *Liikunta & Tiede*, 49(6), 29-35. Retrieved from <http://lts.fi/julkaisut/liikunta-ja-tiede/julkaisut/liikunta-jatie/2012/6/tutkimusartikkelit/vanhemmat-moni>
- Alfermann, D., Stambulova, N., & Zemaityte, A. (2004). Reactions to sport career termination: A cross-cultural comparison of German, Lithuanian, and Russian Athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 5, 61-75. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ehost/>
- Alfermann, D. (2007). Causes and consequences of sport career termination. In Lavalley, D. & Wylleman, P. (Eds.), *Career transitions in sport: International perspectives* (pp. 49-58). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Allison, M. T., & Meyer, C. (1988). Career problems and retirement among elite athletes: The female tennis professional. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5, 212-222. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ehost/>
- Anderson, D., & Morris, T. (2007). Athlete lifestyle programs. In Lavalley, D. & Wylleman, P. (Eds.), *Career transitions in sport: International perspectives* (pp. 59-80). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Atchley, R. C. (1989). A continuity theory of normal aging. *The Gerontological Society of America*, 29(2), 183-190. Retrieved from <http://gerontologist.oxfordjournals.org/>
- Baillie, P. H. F., & Danish, S. J. (1992). Understanding the career transitions of athletes. *The Sport Psychologist*, 6, 77-98.
- Baillie, P. H. F. (1993). Understanding retirement from sports: Therapeutic ideas for helping athletes in transition. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 21(3), 399-410. Retrieved from <http://tcp.sagepub.com/content/21/3/399>
- Blinde, E. M., & Greendorfer, S. L. (1985). A reconceptualization of the process of leaving the role of competitive athlete. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 20(1-2), 87-94. doi: 10.1177/101269028502000108
- Blinde, E. M., & Stratta, T. M. (1992). The "Sport Career Death" of college athletes: Involuntary and unanticipated sport exits. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 15(1), 3-20.
- Brewer, B. W., Van Raalte, J. L., & Petitpas, A. J. (2007). Identity issues in sport career transitions. In Lavalley, D. & Wylleman, P. (Eds.), *Career transitions in sport: International perspectives* (pp. 29-58). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.

- Cecić Erpič, S. (2013). Athletes' careers in Slovenia: The remarkable sporting achievements of a small country. In Stambulova N.B. and Ryba, N.V. (Eds.), *Athlete's careers across cultures*. (pp. 173-184). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cecić Erpič, S., Wylleman, P., & Zupančič. M. (2004). The effect of athletic and non-athletic factors on the sports career termination process. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 5, 45–59. doi:10.1016/S1469-0292(02)00046-8
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis* [Nook Book version]. Retrieved from Barnesandnoble.com
- Coakley, J. J. (1983). Leaving competitive sport: Retirement or rebirth? *Quest*, 35, 1-11. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com>
- Côté, J., Salmela, J. H., Baria, A., & S. J. Russell. (1993). Organizing and interpreting unstructured qualitative data. *The Sport Psychologist*, 7, 127-137. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ehost/>
- Côté, J., Horton, S., MacDonald, D., & Wilkes, S. (2009). The benefits of sampling sports during childhood. *Physical & Health Education Journal*, 74(4), 6. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ehost/>
- Cummings, E., Dean, L., Newell, D. S., & McCaffrey, I. (1960). Disengagement: A tentative theory of aging. *Sociometry*, 23(1), 23-35. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2786135>
- Embassy of Finland, Washington D.C. (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.finland.org>
- Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. T., & Tesch-Roemer, C. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance. *Psychological Review*, 100(3), 363-406. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ehost/>
- Finland Athletics. (n.d.) In *Sports-reference*. Retrieved from www.sports-reference.com/olympics/countries/FIN/summer/ATH/
- Finnish Ministry of Education (Opetusministeriö). (2010). "Sanoista teiksi": Huippu-urheilutyöryhmän ajatuksia suomalaisen huippu-urheilun kehittämiseksi. Retrieved from http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Julkaisut/2010/huippu_urheilu.html
- The Finnish Olympic Committee, (2007). Urheiluakatemioiden osana Suomalaista huippu-urheilua järjestelmää. Retrieved from <http://www.noc.fi/@Bin/39991/Urheiluakatemioiden+osana+huippu-urheilua+jarjestelmaa.pdf>

- Green, B. C. (2005). Building sport programs to optimize athlete recruitment, retention, and transition: Toward normative theory of sport development. *Journal of Sport Management, 19*, 233-253.
- Grove, J. L., Lavalley, D., & Gordon, S. (1997). Coping with retirement from sport: The influence of athletic identity. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 9*(2), 191-203. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10413209708406481>
- Grove, J. L., Lavalley, D., & Gordon, S. (1998). Account-making: A model for understanding and resolving distressful reactions to retirement from sport. *The Sport Psychologist, 12*, 52-67. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.libproxy.temple.edu>
- Gröhn, T., & Riihivuori, T. (2008). Urheiluakatemioiden osana suomalaista huippu-urheilujärjestelmää – urheilun ja opiskelun yhdistäminen korkea-asteella. Retrieved from https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/18404/URN_NBN_fi_jyu-200804251393.pdf?sequence=1
- Hannus, M. (1990). *Flying Finns: Story of the great tradition of Finnish distance running and cross country skiing*. Helsinki: Tietosanoma.
- Harvey, J. H., Orbuch, T. L., & Weber, A. L. (1990). A Social psychological model of account-making in response to severe stress. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 9*, 191-207. Retrieved from <http://jls.sagepub.com/content/9/3/191>
- Havighurst, R. J., & Albrecht, R. (1953). *Older people*. New York, NY: Longmans, Green. In Lavalley (2007). Theoretical perspectives on career transitions in sport. In Lavalley, D. & Wylleman, P. (Eds.), *Career transitions in sport: International perspectives* (pp. 1-27). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Heikkala, J., Honkanen, P., Laine, L., Pullinen, M., & Ruuskanen-Himma, E. (2003). Liikunnan ja urheilun tarina. Retrieved from http://www.slu.fi/lum/17_03/paakirjoitus/liikunnan_ja_urheilun_tarina/
- Hill, P., & Lowe, B. (1974). The inevitable metathesis of the retiring athlete. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 9*, 5-32. Retrieved from <http://ird.sagepub.com/content/9/3/5>
- Iisalo, M., & Mustranta, M. (2006, February 10). Urheilija, hanki elämä! *Ylioppilaslehti*. Retrieved from <http://ylioppilaslehti.fi/2006/02/urheilija-hanki-elama/>
- International Association of Athletic Federation (IAAF). (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.iaaf.org/athletes/romania/constantina-dita-132645#honours>
- Kadlcik, J., & Flemr, L. (2008). Athletic career termination model in the Czech Republic: A qualitative exploration. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 43*(3), 251-269. Retrieved from <http://irs.sagepub.com/content/43/3/251>

- Kansaneläkelaitos (Kela). (2013). Opintotuki. Retrieved from August 12, 2013
<http://www.kela.fi/opintotuki>
- Kalish, R. A. (1966). A continuum of subjectively perceived death. *The Gerontologist*, 6, 73-76. Retrieved from <http://gerontologist.oxfordjournals.org/>
- Kerr, G., & Dacyshyn, A. (2000). The retirement experiences of elite, female gymnasts. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 12(2), 115-133. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10413200008404218>
- Koukouris, K. (1991). Quantitative aspects of the disengagement process of advanced and elite Greek male athletes from organized competitive sport. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 14(4), 227-246.
- Kulju, M. (2007, April 21). Lopettaminen on iso elämänmuutos. *Kaleva*. Retrieved from <http://www.kaleva.fi/urheilu/lopettaminen-on-iso-elamanmuutos/12390/>
- Kuypers, J. A., & Bentson, V. L. (1973). Social breakdown and competence: A model of normal aging. *Human Development*, 16, 181-201. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.libproxy.temple.edu>
- Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying* [Nook Book version]. Retrieved from Barnesandnoble.com
- Laine, A. (1997). Ura Loppuu, loppuuko elämä? Tarkastelussa huippu-urheilijan ura ja sen päätyminen (Graduate thesis, Jyväskylä University, Jyväskylä, Finland). Retrieved from <https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/11645/625.pdf?sequence=1>
- Lally, P. (2007). Identity and athletic retirement: A prospective study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 8, 85–99. Retrieved from www.elsevier.com/locate/psychsport
- Lavallee, D. (2007). Theoretical perspectives on career transitions in sport. In Lavallee, D. & Wylleman, P. (Eds.), *Career transitions in sport: International perspectives* (pp. 1-27). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Litchman, M. (2013). *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lydiard, A. (1978). *Running the Lydiard way*. Mountain View, CA: World Publications.
- Malina, R. M. (2010). Early sport specialization: Roots, effectiveness, risks. *Current Sports Medicine Reports*, 9(6), 364. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ehost/>

- Malvela, M. (2003). Kilpauimareiden menestymisen ja lopettamisen taustoja (Graduate thesis, Jyväskylä University, Jyväskylä, Finland). Retrieved from <https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/9567/G0000213.pdf?sequence=1>
- Metsä-Tokila, T. (2002). Combining competitive sports and education: How top-level sport became part of the school system in the Soviet Union, Sweden and Finland. *European Physical Education Review*, 8(3), 196–206. doi: 10.1177/1356336X020083002
- Mihovilovic, M. A. (1968). The status of former sportsmen. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 3, 73-92. Retrieved from <http://irs.sagepub.com/content/3/1/73>
- Miller, D. (2003). The official history of the Olympic games and the IOC: Athens to London part I: The early years (1894-1936) [Nook book version]. Retrieved from Barnesandnoble.com
- Murphy, G. M., Petitpas, A. J., & Brewer, B. W. (1996). Identity foreclosure, athletic identity, and career maturity in intercollegiate athletes. *The Sport Psychologist*, 10, 239-246. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ehost/>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2012). Estimated probability of competing in athletics beyond the high school interscholastic level. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/>
- Nurmi, T. (2013, May 7). Juoksun suosio kiihtyy vauhdilla. *Turkulainen*. Retrieved from <http://www.turkulainen.fi/artikkeli/236101-juoksun-suosio-kiihtyy-vauhdilla>
- Park, S., Lavalley, D., & Tod, D. (2013). Athletes' careers in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland: Differences in the evolution of research and support programs in two neighbor nations. In Stambulova N. B. and Ryba, N.V. (Eds.), *Athlete's careers across cultures*. (pp. 209-221). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Pearson, A., & Petitpas, A. J. (1990). Transitions of athletes: Developmental and preventive perspectives. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 69, 7-10.
- Pohjola, H. (2012). Uransa loukkaantumiseen päättäneen nykytanssijan identiteetti (Doctoral thesis, Theater Academy, Helsinki, Finland). Retrieved from <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/37771>
- Ristolainen, L., Kettunen, J. A., Kujala, U. M., & Heinonen, A. (2012). Sport injuries as the main cause of sport career termination among Finnish top-level athletes. *European Journal of Sport Science*, 12(3), 274-282. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17461391.2011.566365>

- Rosenberg, E. (1981). Gerontological theory and athletic retirement. In S.L. Greenoerfer & A. Yiannakis (Eds.), *Sociology of sport: Diverse perspectives* (pp. 118-126). West Point, NY: Leisure Press.
- Ryan, C., & Thorpe, H. (2013). Athletes' careers in New Zealand (Aotearoa): The impact of the Graham Report and the carding system. In Stambulova N.B. and Ryba, N.V. (Eds.), *Athlete's careers across cultures*. (pp. 148-159). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Saarinen, P. (2011, June 7). Yksikään urheilija ei lopeta ilman tuskaa. *Iltalehti*. Retrieved from http://www.iltalehti.fi/urheilu/2011070614015490_ur.shtml
- Schinke, R. J., Cummings, J., & Bonhomme, J. (2013). Athletes careers in Canada: Four decades of research and practice. In Stambulova N. B. and Ryba, N.V. (Eds.), *Athlete's careers across cultures*. (pp. 53-64). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 9(2), 2-18. Retrieved from <http://tcp.sagepub.com/content/9/2/2.2>
- Sinclair, D. A., & Orlick, T. (1993). Positive transitions from high-performance sport. *The Sport Psychologist*, 7, 138-150.
- Stambulova, N. (2003). Symptoms of a crisis-transition: A grounded theory study. *SIPF yearbook* (pp. 97-109). Örebro, Sweden: Örebro University Press.
- Stambulova, N. (2010). Counseling athletes in career transitions: The five-step career planning strategy. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, 1, 95-105. doi: 10.1080/21520704.2010.528829
- Stambulova, N. B., & Ryba, N.V. (2013). Setting the bar: Towards cultural praxis of athletes' careers. In Stambulova N.B. and Ryba, N.V. (Eds.), *Athlete's careers across cultures*. (pp. 235-252). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Suomen Urheiluliitto (SUL). (2014). Tyttö- ja naisyleisurheilun kehittämisohjelma. Retrieved from <http://www.sul.fi/sivut/tytto-ja-naisyleisurheilun-kehittamisohjelma>
- Swain, D. A. (1992). Withdrawal from sport and Schlossberg's model of transitions. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 8, 152-160. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ehost/>
- Taylor, J., & Lavalley, D. (2010). Career transitions among athletes: Is there life after sports? In Williams, J.M. (Ed.) *Applied Sport Psychology: Personal growth to peak performance*. (pp. 542-562). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

- Taylor, J., & Ogilvie, B. C. (1994). A conceptual model of adaptation to retirement among athletes. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 6, 1-20.
- Tikkanen, S. (2007). *Opiskelevan kilpaurheilijan elämänkulku: Siirtymiä, valintoja ja aikatauluja* (Graduate thesis, University of Kuopio, Kuopio, Finland). Retrieved from http://akatemia.jns.fi/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=cf0276e3-dfa1-450b-850b-9dc0a75006a1&groupId=12173
- Toiviainen, S. (2011). *Tarinoita suomalaisten huippunaisuimareiden uintiuran lopettamisen syistä: Voisiko naisten uintiuria pidentää?* (Graduate thesis, Lahti University of Applied Sciences, Lahti, Finland). Retrieved from http://publications.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/29172/Toiviainen_Suvi.pdf?sequence=2
- Torregosa, M., & Gonzáles, M. D. (2013). Athletes' career in Spain: Professional and developmental consequences. In Stambulova N.B. and Ryba, N.V. (Eds.), *Athlete's careers across cultures*. (pp. 185-196). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Vuolle, P. (1978). Sport as life content of successful Finnish amateur athletes. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 13(3), 5-29. Retrieved from <http://irs.sagepub.com/content/13/3/5>
- Weinberg, K., & Arond, H. (1952). The occupational culture of the boxer. *American Journal of Sociology*, 57(5), 460-469. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2772326>
- Wylleman, P., Alfermann, D., & Lavallee, D. (2004). Career transitions in sport: European perspectives. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 5, 7-20. Retrieved from www.elsevier.com/locate/psychsport

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide Questions (Part I)

I. Introductory remarks and demographics

1. Please tell me about your athletic career?

Follow-up questions:

At what age did you start participating in sports?
 Did you participate in other sports addition to track and field?
 At what age did you start focusing on distance running?
 What was the highest level of competition you competed at?
 What was the highest athletic success you managed to achieve?
 At what age did you achieve that success?
 What were your goals?
 Did you achieve your goals?
 At what age did you terminate your athletic career?
 How old are you now?

2. How important was the role of an athlete for you, when you were on the top of your athletic career?
3. How satisfied were you with your athletic career?

II. Pre-condition for athletic retirement

4. Please tell me when and how you started thinking about your athletic career retirement?
5. What were the main reasons for you to end your athletic career?

Follow-up question: Do you think your athletic retirement occurred at the right time? Or do you think you retired too early/too late?

6. Did you plan your athletic retirement in advance? (if 'no', move on to the next question; if 'yes', proceed with follow-up questions.)
 Tell me more in detail how your plan looked.
 How other people, (e.g. your coach, family, etc.) were involved in your retirement planning?
7. Can you say you retired voluntarily?

8. Can you say you had full control over the situation of ending your athletic career?

Interview Guide Questions (Part II)

III. Transition period

9. Tell me, how did you feel in general after finishing your athletic career?
What were your dominant emotions?
What were your dominant thoughts?
10. What changes did you experience during the retirement process in different spheres of your life?
In studies and/or professional work?
In financial matters?
In family/social network?
Your body/Physical well-being?
In your life-style in general?
11. Which areas of life did the transition affect the most?
12. Tell me, how did you cope with the changes you mentioned?
13. What kind of support did you receive during the transition period?
14. What characteristics of your personality and/or experience (e.g., knowledge, skills) helped you to cope with the situation?
15. Can you say that something (in you or outside) worked as a barrier in your coping/adaptation?
If yes, please specify.
16. How important was your athletic role (or identity) for you at that time?
17. Do you think you have adapted to life after being an elite athlete, or are you still coping with the transition? (If the former athlete thinks she has adapted, proceed to the follow-up question 1 and 2. If the athlete is still adapting, proceed to follow-up question 3.)

Follow-up question:

1. How long did it take you to adapt to the transition?
2. How satisfied were you with your life during the transition period?
3. How satisfied are you with your life right now?

IV. Current life status

18. Tell me, what do you find important in your current life?
19. How much do you still consider yourself as an athlete?
20. How do you plan to participate in sport and exercise in the future?
21. Do you have advice for athletes who are currently transitioning?
22. Do you have advice about athletic retirement for athletes who are still participating in sports?
23. How satisfied are you with your life right now?

(Modified from Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008: Athletic Retirement Interview Guide Questions)

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE IN FINNISH

Haastattelukysymykset suomeksi:

I Esittely/taustatiedot

1. Kerro urheilu-urastasi

Jatko-kysymykset:

- Minkä ikäisenä aloitit urheilemisen?
- Urheilitko muiden lajien parissa yleisurheilun lisäksi?
- Minkä ikäisenä aloit keskittymään kestävyysjuoksuun?
- Korkein taso millä kilpailit?
- Urheilu-uran paras saavutus?
- Minkä ikäisenä saavutit parhaat tulokset/saavutuksen?
- Mitkä olivat urheilu-urasi tavoitteet?
- Saavutitko tavoitteesi?
- Minkä ikäisenä lopetit aktiivin kilpailemisen/urheilu-uran?
- Minkä ikäinen olet nyt?

2. Kuinka tärkeä urheilijan rooli oli sinulle uran huippuvaiheessa?

3. Kuinka tyytyväinen olet/olit urheilu-uraasi?

II Ennen lopettamista

4. Kerro miten ja milloin aloit miettimään urheilu-uran lopettamista?

5. Mitkä olivat suurimmat syyt uran lopettamiseen?

- Lopetitko mielestäsi oikeaan aikaan? Vai liian myöhään/aikaisin?

6. Suunnittelitko urheilu-uran lopettamista millään tavalla? (jos 'ei', siirry seuraavaan kysymykseen; jos 'kyllä', kysy jatko-kysymykset)

- Millainen suunnitelma sinulla oli?
- Millä tavalla muut (valmentaja, perhe, muu tuki) ottivat osaa urheilu-uran lopettamisen suunnitteluun?

7. Voitko sanoa että lopetit aktiiviuran vapaaehtoisesti?

8. Oliko urheilu-uran lopettaminen tilanteena hallinnassasi?

III Siirtymävaihe

9. Millaisia tunteita sinulla oli heti urheilu-uran päättymisen jälkeen? Voimakkain tunne/fiilis? Mitkä ajatukset olivat voimakkaimpia?

10. Millaisia muutoksia kävit elämän läpi elämän muilla alueilla uran loppumisprosessin aikana?

- Opinnot/työura/ammatti?
- Rahallinen tilanne?
- Perhe/sosiaalinen verkosto/ympäristö?
- Keho/fyysinen hyvinvointi?
- Elämäntyyli yleisesti?

11. Mihin elämäntilanteeseen muutos vaikutti eniten?

12. Kuinka käsittelet kohdassa 11 mainitut muutokset?

13. Millaista tukea sait muutoksen aikana?

14. Mitkä persoonallisuutesi piirteet ja/tai kokemukset auttoivat muutoksen aikana/selviytymään tilanteesta?

15. Mitkä asiat auttoivat muutoksen aikana? Mitkä asiat hidastivat muutokseen totumisessa?

16. Kuinka tärkeä urheilijan rooli/identiteetti oli muutoksen/siirtymävaiheen aikana?

17. Oletko mielestäsi sopeutunut urheilu-uran jälkeiseen elämään, vai käytkö edelleen läpi muutosta? (jos haastateltava on sopeutunut, siirry jatko-kysymykseen 1 & 2, jos ei, kysy jatkokysymys 3)

- Kuinka pitkään sopeutumiseen meni?
- Kuinka tyytyväinen olit elämääsi muutoksen aikana?
- Kuinka tyytyväinen olet elämääsi juuri nyt?

IV Nykyinen elämäntilanne

18. Mikä on sinulle tärkeää tällä hetkellä?

19. Kuinka vahvasti miellät itsesi edelleen urheilijaksi?

20. Aiotko osallistua urheiluun/liikkua tulevaisuudessa? Millä tavalla?

21. Onko sinulla neuvoja/vinkkejä urheilijoille jotka ovat siirtymävaiheessa/lopettamassa urheilu-uraansa
22. Onko sinulla neuvoja/vinkkejä urheilu-uran lopettamisesta aktiiviurheilijoille?
23. Kuinka tyytyväinen olet elämääsi tällä hetkellä?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

Title of research study: The Athletic Retirement Process of Finnish Elite Female Distance Runners

Researchers and Department: Michael Sachs and Irina Watkins, Department of Kinesiology, Temple University

Why are you being invited to take part in this study?

We invite you to take part in a research study because you are a Finnish female elite distance runner who have retired from competitive athletics.

Whom can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, contact the research team at +1 (404) 580 – 6293 or email at: irina.watkins@temple.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board. You may talk to them at +1 (215) 707-3390 or e-mail them at: irb@temple.edu for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Why are we doing this research?

This study examines the individual athletic career termination process and experiences of former Finnish female distance runners. The study takes a holistic approach exploring the reasons for athletic career termination and athletes' adaptation to post-athletic career life. Findings from the study may serve as a reference point for future research and as a guideline to the type of services and support athletes need when facing retirement from competitive athletics.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for 1 hour (the approximate length of the interview).

How many people will be studies?

We expect about 8 – 10 people to participate in this study.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

This study consists of narrative semi-structured interviews that will be conducted either in person or via skype/phone.

What happens if I say no, I do not want to be in this research?

You may decide not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you. It will in no way affect your relationship with the researcher.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You agree to take part in the research now and if you stop at any time, it will not be held against you. Again, it will in no way affect your relationship with the researcher.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

This study is a low-risk study. However, occasionally individuals may feel uncomfortable reminiscing back to their athletic career. If any issues arise, they can be discussed with the researcher. If you wish to talk to a licensed counselor, the researcher can refer you to a licensed counselor, sport psychologist, or a mental health professional.

Will being in this study help me any way?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from taking part in this research. However, this study will give you the chance to talk about your athletic career and reflect on your experiences during your competitive career and your athletic retirement process.

What happens to the information we collect?

Efforts will be made to limit your personal information, including research study and medical records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. For example, though the study team has put in safeguards to protect your information, there is always a potential risk of loss of confidentiality.

Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB, Temple University, Temple University Health System, Inc. and its affiliates, and other representatives of these organizations, and the Office of Human Research Protections.

Participating in Future Research Studies

We may want to contact you in the future to see if you would be interested in participating in another research study and/or to obtain additional information related to your participation in this study. Please indicate by initialing on the line in the next paragraph below if you are willing to be contacted. Please know that you can amend your answer below at any time without prejudice to you or your relationship with the study, Temple University, or the Study doctor and team.

Initial your choices

Yes, I agree to be contacted about future research studies.

OR

No, I do not want to be contacted about future research studies.

Yes, I agree to be contacted to obtain additional information related to my participation in this study.

OR

No, I do not want to be contacted to obtain additional information related to my participation in this study.

Your signature below indicates that:

- Someone has explained this research study to you.
- You freely volunteer to be in this research study.
- You can choose not to take part in this research study and it will not affect your care.
- You can agree to take part in this study now and later change your mind. Your decision to leave the study will not affect your care.
- You have been offered the opportunity to ask questions and all your questions have been answered.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

_____ Signature of subject	_____ Date
_____ Printed name of subject	_____ Date
_____ Signature of person obtaining consent	_____ Date
_____ Printed name of person obtaining consent	_____ Date
_____ Printed name of person obtaining consent and assent	_____ Date

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE AND VIDEOTAPE

Title of research study: The Athletic Retirement Process of Finnish Elite Female Distance Runners

**Name and Department of Investigator: Michael Sachs and Irina Watkins,
Department of Kinesiology, Temple University**

This study involves research. The purpose of the research is to examine the athletic career retirement process of elite Finnish female distance runners.

What you should know about a research study:

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- You volunteer to be in a research study.
- Whether you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
- Whatever you decide, it will not be held against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before and after you decide.
- By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of the legal rights that you otherwise would have as a participant in a research study.

The estimated duration of your study participation is approximately one hour (length of the interview).

The study procedures consist of semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts are that participation in the study will cause you to have emotional responses during the interview, especially if your athletic retirement process was distressful. Finland has several sport psychologists in numerous different locations. If you have emotional discomfort during the study, you will be provided contact information to a certified sport psychologist by the researcher.

The benefits you will obtain from the research is knowing that you have contributed to the understanding of this topic, you have the possibility of reflecting on your athletic retirement process, and discuss your experiences. You will also contribute to the literature on retirement of women in sport, which in Finland is sparse.

The alternative to participating is not to participate.

Please contact the research team with questions, concerns, or complaints about the research and any research-related injuries by calling + 1 (404) 580 6293 or e-mailing irina.watkins@temple.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Temple University Institutional Review Board. Please contact them at (215) 707-3390 or e-mail them at: irb@temple.edu for any of the following: questions, concerns, or complaints about the research; questions about your rights; to obtain information; or to offer input.

The interviews will be audiotaped and/or videotaped, unless you prefer otherwise. If you wish your interview will not be audiotaped or videotaped, please initial next to the statement:

I am not willing to be audiotaped _____

I am not willing to be videotaped _____

Confidentiality: Efforts will be made to limit the disclosure of your personal information, including research study records, to people who have a need to review this information. However, the study team cannot promise complete secrecy. For example, although the study team has put in safeguards to protect your information, there is always a potential risk of loss of confidentiality. There are several organizations that may inspect and copy your information to make sure that the study team is following the rules and regulations regarding research and the protection of human subjects. These organizations include the IRB, Temple University, its affiliates and agents, Temple University Health System, Inc., its affiliates and agents, the study sponsor and its agents, and the Office for Human Research Protections.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

_____ Signature of subject	_____ Date
_____ Printed name of subject	_____ Date
_____ Signature of person obtaining consent	_____ Date
_____ Printed name of person obtaining consent	_____ Date
_____ Printed name of person obtaining consent and assent	_____ Date

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT
IN FINNISH

TUTKIMUSSUOSTUMUS

Tutkielman aihe: Suomalaiseen kestävyysjuoksuliittiin kuuluneiden naisten urheilu-uran lopettamisprosessi

Tutkijat ja tiedekunta: Michael Sachs ja Irina Watkins, Department of Kinesiology (liikuntatieteiden tiedekunta), Temple University

Miksi teidät on pyydetty mukaan tutkimukseen?

Pyydämme teitä osallistumaan tutkimukseen, koska olette suomalainen eliittitason naiskestävyysjuoksija, joka on päättänyt aktiivisen kilpailu-uransa.

Yhteystiedot tarvittaessa:

Jos teillä on kysymyksiä, huolenaiheita tai huomautuksia tai tutkielma on mielestänne ollut teille vahingollinen, ottakaa yhteyttä tutkijoihin puhelimitse +1 404 580 6293 tai sähköpostitse irina.watkins@temple.edu.

Tämän tutkielman on tarkastanut ja hyväksynyt Temple University -yliopiston tutkimuslautakunta (Institutional Review Board). Voitte ottaa yhteyttä tutkimuslautakuntaan joko puhelimitse tai sähköpostitse (+1 215 707 3390 / irb@temple.edu) seuraavissa tapauksissa:

- tutkijaryhmä ei vastaa kysymyksiinne tai ota kantaa huolenaiheisiinne tai huomautuksiinne
- ette saa yhteyttä tutkijaryhmään
- haluatte puhua tutkijaryhmään kuulumattoman henkilön kanssa
- teillä on kysymyksiä koskien oikeuksianne tutkimuskohteena
- haluatte lisätietoja tästä tutkielmasta tai antaa siitä palautetta.

Miksi teemme tutkielman tästä aiheesta?

Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee yksilöllistä urheilu-uran lopettamisprosessia suomalaisten kestävyysjuoksijanaisten näkökulmasta ja heidän kokemuksiaan. Tutkielma lähestyy aihetta kokonaisvaltaisesti tarkastellen urheilu-uran päättämiseen johtavia syitä ja urheilijoiden sopeutumista kilpaurheilun jälkeiseen työelämään. Tutkielman tuloksia voidaan käyttää tulevaisuudessa lähteenä muissa tutkimuksissa sekä ohjenuorana tukea ja palveluita tarjottaessa urheilu-uransa päättäneille urheilijoille.

Tutkimuksen arvioitu kesto:

Tutkimuksen arvioitu kesto on noin yksi tunti (haastattelun arvioitu kesto).

Kuinka monta henkilöä osallistuu tutkimukseen?

Tutkimukseen osallistuu arviolta 8–10 henkilöä.

Mitä tapahtuu, jos suostun osallistumaan tutkimukseen?

Tämä tutkimus koostuu narratiivisista puolistrukturoiduista haastatteluista, jotka tapahtuvat henkilökohtaisesti, puhelimitse tai Skypen välityksellä.

Mitä tapahtuu, jos kieltäydyn tutkimukseen osallistumisesta?

Osallistuja voi päättää olla osallistumatta tutkimukseen ilman seuraamuksia. Päätös ei vaikuta mitenkään suhteeseen tutkijan kanssa.

Mitä tapahtuu, jos suostun osallistumaan, mutta muutan mieleni osallistumisesta myöhemmin?

Osallistuja voi halutessaan keskeyttää tutkimukseen osallistumisen ilman seuraamuksia. Päätös ei tällöinkään vaikuta mitenkään suhteeseen tutkijan kanssa.

Voiko tutkimus olla minulle vahingollinen?

Tämä tutkimus on vähäriskinen tutkimus. Joissain tapauksissa osallistujat saattavat kuitenkin kokea epämiellyttäviä tuntemuksia muistellessaan urheilu-uraansa. Jos näin tapahtuu, asioista voidaan keskustella tutkijan kanssa. Jos tutkimukseen osallistuja haluaa keskustella lisensoidun psykologin kanssa, tutkijalla on yhteystiedot psykologin, urheilopsykologin tai muun mielenterveysammattilaisen vastaanotolle.

Onko tutkimuksesta minulle hyötyä?

Emme voi luvata osallistujan hyötävän tutkimukseen osallistumisesta millään tavalla. Tutkimuksen aikana osallistujalla on kuitenkin mahdollisuus puhua aktiivista urheilu-urastaan sekä pohtia kokemuksiaan ja tuntemuksiaan urheilu-uran ja sen päättymisprosessin aikana.

Mitä tutkimuksen aikana kerätylle informaatiolle tapahtuu?

Henkilökohtaisten tietojen, kuten tutkimustietojen ja potilasasiakirjojen, jakaminen pyritään rajaamaan vain niille henkilöille, joiden täytyy käydä läpi kyseiset tiedot. Täydellisen salassapidon takaaminen ei ole mahdollista. Vaikka tutkimusryhmä pyrkii suojaamaan tietonne, tietosuojan menetys on aina mahdollista.

Organisaatiot, jotka voivat tarkastaa ja kopioida tietonne, ovat Temple University IRB (tutkimuslautakunta), Temple University, Temple University Health System, Inc. ja sen yhteistyökumppanit, muut näiden organisaatioiden edustajat sekä Office of Human Research Protections.

Tutkimuksiin osallistuminen tulevaisuudessa

Saatamme tulevaisuudessa ottaa teihin yhteyttä kysyäksemme halukkuuttanne osallistua muihin tutkimuksiin tai kerätäksemme lisätietoja tämänhetkiseen tutkimukseen. Kirjoittakaa nimikirjaimenne asianmukaiseen kohtaan seuraavassa kappaleessa, jos haluatte teihin otettavan tulevaisuudessa yhteyttä. Voitte halutessanne muuttaa vastauksenne, ilman että siitä aiheutuu haittaa teille tai suhteellenne liittyen tutkimukseen, Temple Universityyn, tutkijalääkäriin tai tutkimusryhmään.

Osoittakaa
Valintanne
Nimikirjaimin

Kyllä, minuun saa ottaa yhteyttä tulevaisuuden tutkimuksien osalta

TAI

Ei, en halua minuun otettavan yhteyttä tulevaisuuden tutkimuksien osalta

Kyllä, minuun saa ottaa yhteyttä lisätietoa varten tähän tutkimukseen liittyen

TAI

Ei, en halua minuun otettavan yhteyttä lisätietoa varten tähän tutkimukseen liittyen

Allekirjoituksenne merkitsee sitä, että:

- teille on selitetty tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus
- osallistutte tähän tutkimukseen vapaaehtoisesti
- voitte päättää olla osallistumatta tähän tutkimukseen ilman että se vaikuttaa hoitoonne
- voitte päättää osallistua tähän tutkimukseen mutta muuttaa mielenne myöhemmin, ilman että päätöksenne poistua tutkimuksesta vaikuttaa hoitoonne
- teillä on ollut mahdollisuus esittää kysymyksiä ja kaikkiin kysymyksiinne on vastattu.

Kykenevän aikuisen allekirjoitus

Allekirjoitus merkitsee suostumista tähän tutkimukseen osallistumiselle.

Osallistujan nimikirjoitus	Päiväys
Osallistujan nimenselvennys	Päiväys
Tutkimussuostumuksen hakijan nimikirjoitus	Päiväys
Tutkimussuostumuksen ja hyväksynnän hakijan nimenselvennys	Päiväys

APPENDIX F

PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE IN FINNISH

LUPA HAASTATTELUN ÄÄNITTÄMISEEN
JA VIDEOIMISEEN**Tutkielman aihe: Suomalaiseen kestävyysjuoksuliittiin kuuluneiden naisurheilijoiden urheilu-uran lopettamisprosessi****Tutkijan nimi ja tiedekunta: Michael Sachs and Irina Watkins, Department of Kinesiology (liikuntatieteellinen tiedekunta), Temple University**

Tämä tutkielma käsittää tieteellisen tutkimustyön. Tutkimustyön tarkoituksena on tarkastella urheilu-uran päättymisprosessia suomalaisten naiskestävyysjuoksijoiden näkökulmasta.

Mitä teidän tulisi tietää tutkimuksesta:

- Teille selitetään tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus.
- Osallistutte tutkimukseen vapaaehtoisesti.
- Te päätätte tutkimukseen osallistumisesta.
- Voitte päättää olla osallistumatta tutkimukseen.
- Teillä on oikeus muuttaa mieltänne tutkimukseen osallistumisesta.
- Päätöksestänne olla osallistumatta ei aiheudu teille seuraamuksia.
- Voitte esittää kysymyksiä ennen päätöstänne osallistua ja sen jälkeen.
- Allekirjoittamalla tämän tutkimussuostumuslomakkeen ette luovu mistään lainmukaisista oikeuksistanne, joita teillä muutoin olisi osallistuessanne johonkin tutkimukseen.

Tutkimukseen osallistumisaikanne arvioitu kesto on noin yksi tunti (haastattelun kesto).

Tämä tutkimus koostuu perusteellisista puolistrukturoiduista haastatteluista.

Ennakoitavana riskinä tai haittana tutkimukseen osallistumisesta voidaan pitää sitä, että haastattelun aikana osallistujat saattavat kokea voimakkaita tuntemuksia, etenkin jos urheilu-uran lopettamisprosessi oli stressaava. Suomessa on useita urheilupsykologeja monilla eri paikkakunnilla. Jos osallistuja tuntee olonsa emotionaalisesti epämukavaksi tutkimuksen aikana, tutkija antaa yhteystiedot lisensoidun urheilupsykologin vastaanotolle.

Tutkimukseen osallistumisen hyötynä voidaan pitää sitä, että autatte osaltanne ymmärtämään tätä aihetta ja teillä on mahdollisuus puhua aktiivisen urheilu-uranne lopettamisprosessista sekä kokemuksistanne. Autatte myös kartuttamalla naisurheilijoiden urheilu-uran lopettamisprosessia koskevaa materiaalia, jota ei Suomessa ole paljon.

Vaihtoehtona osallistumiselle on osallistumisesta kieltäytyminen.

Jos teillä on kysymyksiä, huolenaiheita tai valituksia koskien joko tutkimusta tai tutkimukseen liittyviä vammoja, olkaa hyvä ja ottakaa yhteyttä tutkimusryhmään puhelimitse + 1 404 580 6293 tai sähköpostitse irina.watkins@temple.edu.

Tämän tutkimuksen on tarkastanut ja hyväksynyt Temple University yliopiston tutkimuslautakunta (Temple University Institutional Review Board). Ottakaa heihin yhteyttä puhelimitse +1 215 707 3390 tai sähköpostitse irb@temple.edu, jos teillä on tutkimusta koskevia kysymyksiä, huolenaiheita tai valituksia, kysymyksiä koskien oikeuksianne tai jos haluatte tietoa tai antaa palautetta.

Haastattelut nauhoitetaan tai videoidaan, ellei haastateltava kiellä haastattelujen taltioimista. Jos ette halua haastattelua taltioitavan, kirjoittakaa nimikirjaimenne asianmukaiseen kohtaan.

En suostu haastattelun nauhoittamiseen _____

En suostu haastattelun videoimiseen _____

Yksityisyyden suojaaminen: Henkilökohtaisten tietojen, kuten tutkimustietojen, jakaminen pyritään rajaamaan vain niille henkilöille, joiden täytyy käydä läpi kyseiset tiedot. Täydellisen salassapidon takaaminen ei kuitenkaan ole mahdollista. Vaikka tutkimusryhmä pyrkii suojaamaan tietonne, tietosuojan menetys on aina mahdollista. Useat organisaatiot saattavat tarkastaa ja kopioida tietonne varmistaakseen, että tutkimusryhmä noudattaa tutkimusta ja tutkimushenkilöiden suojaamista koskevia sääntöjä ja määräyksiä. Näitä organisaatioita ovat IRB (tutkimuslautakunta), Temple University ja sen yhteistyökumppanit ja edustajat, Temple University Health System, Inc. ja sen yhteistyökumppanit ja edustajat, tutkimuksen rahoittaja ja sen edustajat sekä Office of Human Research Protections.

Kykenevän aikuisen allekirjoitus

Allekirjoitus merkitsee suostumista tähän tutkimukseen osallistumiselle.

Osallistujan nimikirjoitus	Päiväys
Osallistujan nimenselvennys	Päiväys
Tutkimussuostumuksen hakijan nimikirjoitus	Päiväys
Tutkimussuostumuksen ja hyväksynnän hakijan nimenselvennys	Päiväys