



Migrating Cyclists and Identity Reconstructions: Two Tales of Living and Parting the Dream

¹Eleni Diakaki, ¹Marios Goudas, & ²Stiliani "Ani" Chroni

¹Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Thessaly, Trikala, Hellas

²Hedmark University of Applied Sciences, Norway

Abstract

The present study delves into two cases of sport labor migration and athlete identity, as we learn from two migrating athletes about the narrative mechanisms used to reconstruct their priorities and identities. Low-structured interviews were conducted with elite level male cyclists who migrated from Greece upon signing professional contracts with European continental teams. To immerse into the experiences, we employed the dialogic/performance analysis and, along with the theoretical framework of identity narratives (Douglas & Carless, 2006), this helped us co-construct a relational and a discovery tale. The narrations reveal that the cyclists' physical and mental relocations triggered and intensified processes of identity negotiation, formation, and reconstruction. These processes are traced in the narrative schemata they used as they tried to attain or maintain integrity, along with a sense of coherence between the lived and the told. A continuous negotiation took place between the self, the society, and the sport culture, as they struggled to find their fit within the stereotypically-accepted sport success stories. The findings are discussed with regard to migrant cyclists' psychology, identity development, and well-being, while highlighting the need to enrich the narrative repertoire in the elite sport culture, as it can promote and safeguard athlete identity and well-being.

Keywords: *sport labor migration, athlete identity, relational narrative, discovery narrative*

**Μετανάστες Ποδηλάτες και Ανακατασκευές Ταυτότητας:
Δυο Αφηγήσεις από τη Ζωή και την Αποχώρηση από το Αθλητικό Όνειρο**

¹Ελένη Διακάκη, ¹Μάριος Γούδας & ²Στυλιανή «Ανή» Χρόνη

¹ΤΕΦΑΑ, Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλίας

²Hedmark University of Applied Sciences, Norway

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα μελέτη εισχωρεί σε δύο περιπτώσεις αθλητικής μετανάστευσης και την ταυτότητα αθλητή, εξετάζοντας μέσα από δύο αθλητές ποδηλασίας τους μηχανισμούς αφήγησης που χρησιμοποίησαν για την ανακατασκευή των προτεραιοτήτων και ταυτοτήτων τους. Έγιναν συνεντεύξεις χαμηλής-δομής με δυο υψηλού επιπέδου ποδηλάτες που μετανάστευσαν από την Ελλάδα μετά την υπογραφή επαγγελματικών συμβολαίων με ευρωπαϊκές ηπειρωτικές ομάδες. Για να βυθιστούμε στις εμπειρίες τους χρησιμοποιήσαμε την διαλογική/απόδοσης ανάλυση και, μαζί με το θεωρητικό πλαίσιο των αφηγήσεων ταυτότητας (Douglas & Carless, 2006) συν-κατασκευάσαμε μια σχεσιακή και μια ιστορία ανακάλυψης. Οι δυο αφηγήσεις αποκαλύπτουν ότι η σωματική και ψυχική μετεγκατάσταση των ποδηλατών ενεργοποίησε και εντατικοποίησε τις διαδικασίες διαπραγμάτευσης, σχηματισμού και ανοικοδόμησης ταυτότητας, στοιχεία που εντοπίζονται στα σχήματα αφήγησης που χρησιμοποίησαν καθώς προσπαθούσαν να επιτύχουν ή να διατηρήσουν την ακεραιότητα τους, μαζί με μια αίσθηση συνοχής μεταξύ της εμπειρίας και της αφήγησης. Η διαπραγμάτευση μεταξύ του εαυτού, της κοινωνίας, και της κουλτούρας του αθλήματός τους ήταν συνεχής καθώς πάσχιζαν να βρουν τη θέση τους εντός των στερεοτυπικά αποδεκτών ιστοριών επιτυχίας στον αθλητικό χώρο. Τα ευρήματα συζητούνται αναφορικά στην ψυχολογία των μεταναστών ποδηλατών, την ανάπτυξη της ταυτότητας, και την ευημερία, τονίζοντας την ανάγκη να εμπλουτίσουμε το ρεπερτόριο αφηγήσεων περί αθλητών υψηλού αγωνιστικού αθλητισμού καθώς μπορεί να προωθήσει και να διαφυλάξει την ταυτότητα του αθλητή και την ευημερία αυτού.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: αθλητική μετανάστευση, ταυτότητα αθλητή, σχεσιακή αφήγηση, αφήγηση ανακάλυψης

Introduction

Sport labor migration has only been documented in sport science literature during the last two decades. Early on, it was primarily explored as a sociological phenomenon (e.g., Maguire, 1994; Maguire & Stead, 1996), while attention from a psychological perspective is relatively modest and rather recent (e.g., Kontos, 2009; Ryba, Haapanen, Mosek, & Ng, 2012; Schinke, Yukelson, Bartolacci, Battochio, & Johnstone, 2011). From the sociological viewpoint, migration has been discussed as a turning point experience in the athlete's life and career with an impact on the person's identity and culture (Maguire & Stead, 1996). Any changes in the socio-cultural contexts within which people live, operate, and perform, extend to the relationships and interactions that take place within these contexts, as well as to any alterations in one's sense of self (Maguire, 1994).

From a psychological standpoint, migration is regarded as a career transition process (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014) and as such it can have an impact on the person and the performance. Athlete adaptation and acculturation in new locations were studied, mainly identifying functional issues that impact the process (see Ryba et al., 2012; Schinke, McGannon, Battochio, & Wells, 2013). Smith and Sparkes (2010) suggested that each athlete's story is situated in a specific context that mirrors the prejudices, taboos, and norms of the society along with his/her struggle(s) to negotiate approval, rejection, or the 'bargain' to discover one's own terms in the lived experience. The changes in one's sense of self that come with the experience of migration have not been explored in depth so far. Considering the heightened phenomenon of migration in today's globalized world of sports, the need to enrich the sport psychology scholarship with more in-depth knowledge of the ramifications of the migration experience on athlete identity becomes apparent as it will add essential facts for applied practitioners who are called to support this transition.

Expanding the growing interest among sport psychology scholars, Blodgett and Schinke (2015) inquired the cultural transitions of Aboriginal student-athletes in their dual career pathways. The vignettes they presented discuss issues of belonging, struggling to refute negative stereotyping, the importance in the role of social support, the need to "prove themselves" to the donor community [the move was viewed as an act of "cultural betrayal" (p. 119)], the effort to balance the dual career priorities, and the development of a sense of self that identifies more deeply with the donor community while being abroad. Extending the work on migrating student-athletes, Schinke, Blodgett, McGannon, and Ge (2016) fittingly noted the fluidity of the acculturation experience. To highlight the idiosyncratic nature of the migration experience along with the complexity and uniqueness of the challenges encountered by the migrating athletes in the social and sport spheres of the host country, the authors urged for further research through the use of narrations (i.e., storied stories).

Tibbert, Andersen, and Morris (2015) exploring a footballer's acculturation via the construct of mental toughness, wrote that the prioritization of success over the athlete's physical and mental well-being, the plea to be acceptable and to belong to the team can impede the development of multidimensional identities, leading to identity foreclosure and balance in the social and sport life of a person. Andersen (2011) had earlier concluded that in order for an athlete to attain the qualities of mental toughness and become a professional, he/she has to sacrifice or compromise or undermine the role of loving relationships and subsequently his/her role as a partner, among other roles. As each person has a unique character, the effort to attain qualities of mental toughness in sport results in homogenizing and razing those elements of the person's identity that cannot abide with the elite sports culture ideals (Andersen, 2011; Tibbert et al., 2015).

The challenges and stressors that relocated athletes face, the adaptation, the acculturation processes, as well as the development of frameworks for transnational migration have also attracted the attention of researchers (see Agergaard, 2008; Agergaard & Ryba, 2014; Battochio et al., 2013; Chroni, 1995; Meisterjahn, 2011; Ryba et al., 2012; Ryba, Stambulova, & Ronkainen, 2016; Schinke & McGannon, 2014; Schinke et al., 2011, 2013). While looking into the cultural adaptations and challenges faced by migrant athletes Schinke et al. (2011) and Ryba et al. (2012) found that the main themes of loneliness (i.e., lack of relatedness with the new teammates), communication issues, and adaptation to the social norms, were informed by cultural resources. These resources acted either as an aid or a barrier to the processes of cultural adaptation, integration, and/or adjustment. Meisterjahn (2011) in his doctoral research on American basketball players who played overseas concluded that both the positive and negative aspects of the experiences abroad came to the fore through a constant comparison between life in the donor and host country and contributed to the athlete's self-actualization as well as to a reconsideration of his sense of self. This reconsideration of one's sense of self that appears to accompany migration and impact personal and professional growth necessitates further exploration.

The present study

Rationalizing the notions of identity, athlete identity, and identity narratives we argue that a person's self is constituted by identities that are dynamically constructed through a constant interplay between the contexts and cultures within which people function. The identities' content entail the meanings one gives to the multiple roles they may have (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012). Along this line, narrative inquiry implements the concepts of self and identity as being multidimensional in nature, constructed through narratives, located in space, time, and contexts (Smith & Sparkes, 2008a).

Recognizing identity as a parameter that can influence athlete discourses and actions, researchers started exploring athletic identity. As defined by Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder (1993), athletic identity refers to one's identification with the athlete's role and its value to their self-worth. The salience of athletic identity is influenced by the social environment and in turn influences the smoothness of one's transition experiences when injured and retired (Muscat, 2010; Stoltenburg, Kamphoff, & Bremer, 2011). In recent years, researchers have also inquired about different aspects of the elite-athlete identity, beyond its athletic aspect. Learning from illness narratives in sport (Smith & Sparkes, 2008b; Sparkes, 2004), female golfers' career termination narratives (Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009; Carless & Douglas, 2009), and elite athletes' identity development narratives within the sport culture (Carless & Douglas, 2013a, 2013b), researchers claimed that different kinds of identities and narrations can co-exist, clash or cooperate, while counter-narratives subsist for those willing to hear them.

The cultures in the micro and macro environments people live in not only define "who I am", but also place standards regarding "who I should be". They subcutaneously define what kind of narrative is tellable and what kind should be silenced. In an attempt to dispute this tradition, Douglas and Carless (2006), advocated that different types of identity narratives exist, depending on the priorities and values given by the athletes to the notions of performance, discovery, and social relations. Three types of narratives were originally identified (performance, discovery, and relational), however, the authors suggested that these are not conclusive and cannot embrace all possible cases. In the performance narrative, the script unfolds around sport-related issues overemphasizing athletic identity and neglecting other aspects of life and identity, constituting a monological story. This narrative schema, which is expected to be the case for all elite athletes, "provides a script in which the athlete wants so much to win that he accepts discipline, sacrifice, and pain in the pursuit of glory" (Douglas & Carless, 2011, p. 10). Discovery narratives on the other hand, are told with a focus on exploring new places, people, and experiences. Achieving sport success is valued but is not central priority to the narrator, whose constitution of multiple selves with different roles creates a dialogical story. Along the same lines and dialogically narrated are the relational narratives, where social relationships are the priority, as the narrator's precedence is to "be with" and to "share with" others the lived moments of success and/or failure.

The possibility for different narrative scripts articulated by Douglas and Carless (2006) was the vehicle for the storytellers in the present study, for claiming alignment within their lived migration experiences, the stories told, and their identities. Via the two tales presented here we aim to add knowledge about the impact of the migration experience on athlete identity as we locate the narrative mechanisms that shaped these athlete's identity reconstructions.

Method

Participants

The sole participation criterion was to be a highly qualified seasonal migrant worker (European Committee on Migration, 1996), meaning that the participating athletes should have held a salaried contract with a team for a specific period of time abroad. Five Greek cyclists (four males and one female) fitted this criterion at the time of the study and were invited to participate. We present here the tales of two male cyclists that comprise dialogical narratives portraying two distinct experiences: a 4-year living and cycling abroad experience and a 2-month one. The decision to analyze and present these stories was based on their sameness as dialogical narratives and their difference in the length of stay. To enrich the voices of sport migration and our understanding of it, telling the story of an athlete who terminated his contract and returned home after two months was viewed as important. Such stories repeatedly occur in the realm of global sport movement and the media usually portrays them as 'unsuccessful' stories, since the athlete's contract is terminated before its expiry, but most importantly the aspired and/or expected performance level was not achieved in this short time (the athlete did not prove him/herself).

At the time of the interviews, the two cyclists had cycled on average for 18 and 11 years respectively; Nick was still a competitive cyclist while Manolis had retired seven years earlier. Both had previously been members of the Greek national team. Their competitive experience included national, European and World Championships, World Cups, and pre-Olympic teams. One was a road cyclist and the other a mountain biker. Both cycled for continental teams located in central Europe and continued to cycle competitively post returning to the home country.

Data collection

Single face-to-face interviews were conducted by the first author, who has been a competitive mountain biker for the past 13 years. Contacting the cyclists by telephone and inviting them to be interviewed was straightforward as the interviewer had been a teammate of theirs on the national team. This also means that an unforced conversational style characterized the interviews through the use of open-ended questions (Kvale, 1996), while she also held an empathetic stance throughout the interviews, following Sparkes' (1996) suggestion for the researcher to be an "emotional insider". Knowing them from before also allowed for the interviews to take place in the cyclists' homes, preserving a familiar atmosphere and personal space so that they could feel comfortable (Donaghy, 1984; Douglas, 1985). Due to the retrospective nature of the interviews a low structure was followed to facilitate the recall of detailed stories (Riessman, 2002).

The interviews were conducted in the Greek language, lasted 116 and 129 minutes, respectively and were audio-recorded. They were transcribed verbatim yielding a total of 149 single spaced pages of text. Subsequently, the transcripts were analyzed and the data extracts chosen to be presented in this manuscript were translated into English by the first author (Twinn, 1997). An independent experienced sport psychology researcher and practitioner, fluent in both English and Greek, reviewed the translations and confirmed that the meaning was maintained as in the source language.

Dialogic/Performance Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis was chosen as most suitable for locating the narrative modes the cyclists employed in order to negotiate their multiple identities and reveal how the migration experience impacted their sense of self (Bamberg & Cooper, 2012). More specifically, we used Riessman's (2008) dialogic/performance analysis, which is a hybrid interpretive tool that borrows elements from thematic and structural analyses while engaging to understand to *whom* a storied account refers, *when* and *why* someone tells a story, and what the story seeks to accomplish (Bamberg & Cooper, 2012).

According to Riessman (2008), through the dialogic/performance analysis people construct and perform their narration via a dialogue between themselves and/or others, negotiating, claiming, accepting or denying relationships in the past, present, and future--not only with people but also with and inside specific contexts. The dialogic/performance analysis was suitable as it would help us highlight the polyphonic nature of the cyclists narratives, where the micro and macro contexts (e.g., social, historical, local, cultural, relational) impose, provoke, foster or silence certain narratives. Meaning is not restricted in the narrative itself but is ascribed in the dialogical interaction between the storyteller and the audience, the researcher and the transcript, as well as the written text and the prospective readers (Riessman, 2008).

We began the analysis during the transcription of the interviews when 'with a first glance' we picked the storied excerpts that appeared to illuminate the research question, and continued until these were fully identified and agreed upon by all the researchers. Frank (2012) describes this phase as a process of continuous revisions of research report drafts, where the researcher discovers what part of the narration will be left out and what comprises a story or small stories that capture the phenomena under study; and this is how we arrived at the two short stories presented below. Our work also focused on discovering parts of the narration that could answer central questions on identity, such as "how does the story teach people who they are, and how do people tell stories to explore whom they might become" (Frank, 2012, p. 45).

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

A unique feature of the two narrators is that they are among the first group of Greek cyclists who signed professional contracts with teams abroad. This signifies that they were pioneers and as such easily identifiable. Following Punch's (1998) proposal, we informed the cyclists about this potential exposure, both orally and in writing (consent form) and they agreed to participate. To protect their anonymity we use pseudonyms, omit the names of home and host countries and towns, as well as all other personal and professional details that could make them easily identifiable. However, the risk of being identified cannot completely be eliminated in studies with elite athletes. The study was reviewed and approved by the first author's institutional ethics committee.

The fact that the interviews are retrospective--in that they were conducted almost 10 years after the migration took place--brings up issues of accuracy in remembering and in trustworthiness. We justify the decision for such retrospective interviews with Neimeyer and Metzler's (1994) writing on autobiographical memory that it is more of "a process of personal reconstruction than one of faithful reconstitution" (p. 105). Meaning that with regard to the remembering of memories, personal identity endows with structure and stricture in the recalling processes. In our study, the questions of the interview guide aimed to trigger a step-by-step personal reconstruction of the migration experience. Furthermore, as Smith and Sparkes (2010) wrote, the narrated events and stories when situated in specific contexts mirror the prejudices, taboos, and norms of the society along with the narrator's attempts to negotiate rejection, approval or the 'bargain' to find a fit between the experience, the self, and the narrated story. The two cyclists, when they narrated events during the interviews were promoted to elaborate on the context of the event and along with it to re-story their negotiations.

Following McCormack's (2004, as cited by Riessman, 2008) suggestions for reserving trustworthiness in narrative inquiry, we explicated in the section above the rationale behind our methodological and analytical choices, while in the section below we elaborate on our positioning and reflexivity. In addition we documented the referenced sources we used and invite the reader here to uncover our understanding and critically view the various components of our work both separately and in relation to each other (McCormack, 2004, as cited by Riessman, 2008). Furthermore, as suggested by Riessman (2008), in the findings we present below we linked the data and theoretical concepts in a coherent way to further strengthen the study's 'validity'. Moreover, we chose to narrate graspable interview excerpts following Holstein and Gubrium's (2011) position that in narrative research "validity of answers derives ... from the respondent's ability to convey communicated experiences in terms that are locally comprehensible" (p. 154).

Our role as 'active participants' lies in the social constructionist approach which emphasizes the role of interactions in the co-construction of meanings and interpretations of our multiple realities, experiences, and selves (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). Our positioning along with personal and professional biases and views inevitably influenced the research procedure and so we wish to acquaint the readers with these. Throughout this research process we tried to engage in self-reflection to comply with Chases' (2005) view about understanding ourselves if we were to understand how we interpreted the narrators' stories.

We the researchers are all natives of Greece, and thus familiar with the donor setting and sociocultural context, while at the same time we have all had shorter and/or longer migration experiences. The first author has been a competitive cyclist and has represented her country with the national team on numerous occasions. She holds a master's degree from a Western European country (making her a seasonal migrant for one year) and a doctoral degree in sport psychology from her native country. The second author was a competitive athlete for eight years, worked as a coach for four years, holds master's and doctoral degrees in sport psychology from the USA (thus a seasonal migrant for six years), has been working as an applied practitioner for 20 years in Greece and abroad, and is currently a 'permanent' migrant as she lives and works in a European country other than her native. The third researcher was also a competitive athlete and holds graduate degrees in sport psychology from a Western European country (also a seasonal migrant for four years). All researchers have previously worked and published qualitative studies. We were also aware that our scientific curiosity and interests, our academic training and experiences, sports experiences, vocational migration, and personal experiences would have an impact on the research process and product in a reciprocal manner. Thus, besides self-reflection we also engaged in group discussions to jointly reflect on our views, biases, and work in progress (Knowles, Gilbourne, & Niven, 2011; Riessman, 2008).

Results and Discussion

Migration Tales and Identity Reconstructions

The act of rewriting the stories told by interviewees reveals the co-construction processes, the active presence of the researchers in the narrative performance, and the emerging relationship with the participants (Riessman, 2008). In this section we present the tale of each cyclist as it was told by using excerpts from their interviews. Following each narration the analysis outlines the impact of the migration experience on the athletes' identities (being) and actions (doing/future athletic career decisions). In the final part we present the analysis of the identity reconstructions they engaged in following the move abroad.

A Relational Tale: "The Other Side of the Peloton"

Prelude. When the interview with Nick took place, he was 31 years old and cycling as a member of the Greek national team on his way to the Olympics. He was born and had lived in Greece before moving at the age of

18 to join a continental team in central Europe--following his graduation from high school. Today, he still cycles competitively and is considered to be one of the most successful road cyclists in Greece. When the interviewer arrived at his house, the Tour of Spain was on the TV, showing close-up scenes from the peloton. He pointed to the TV and said:

Do you know what you see here now? Here, they are not going to show you the last cyclist who is struggling at the end of the peloton. These are the first 50 riders. There are another 150 that the camera is not showing. Let them show the other 150 at the back who are pushing past their limits, struggling. Yeah, right! When I am winning the national championships, I am winning with a smile and I look cool. Go talk to the other riders who are ranked 20th and can hardly stand on their feet at the finish line.

The tale. Once I got there, my feelings were mixed: I was feeding my happiness with images. I understood that I was in an environment I had been dreaming of for a long time and wanted to be in; but on the other hand I didn't have my people to share it with. And honestly, many nights I was reaching a point of feeling such sorrow that I wanted to cry. Yet in the mornings, I woke up anticipating the moment we would go out for training to enjoy myself. [What] I felt [was] exactly this: I moved to a different and completely unknown environment. It wasn't easy to be 18 years old and to leave your family, your homemade meals, your home, your friends, your parents. I moved away from all this and went to stay with five people that I didn't know, all the while trying to be friendly. All this is hard. Imagine that I couldn't speak [their language], only a little English--almost nothing! And they didn't speak English, communication zero, nothing but very few things. And I was only 18!

[As the years went by], the problem started to grow bigger. The fact was that I wanted to be in my place, my own environment here in Greece. I would see negative things [in the host country] which somehow I blended inside me and converted to sadness. The most important thing is that I didn't have my own people there. I believe that if I had, let's say one single person, even my brother or if I was older and had my wife things would be completely different for me. I could stay and integrate; I could get over this big obstacle that is called loneliness abroad, of feeling lonely while surrounded by people. Overall, this thing bothered me. I went to races, I was winning and had no one, no one close to me to celebrate, to share with. Whether I was sad or happy I had no one to share. With whom could I share? With the strangers? With my teammates it's not the same; I felt close to them but not so close as to my own people, at least in the way I see it. Especially during the fourth year, I don't know what got into me, I didn't want to integrate, I was distancing myself mentally and they [the team] realized it. I was reacting to every change.

So here is what happened, what I said to the [team] when I was leaving after four years, I said to [the coach]: 'Look, it's hard for me. Let me explain to you: I am neither from Ukraine, nor from Russia. I've been to Ukraine, Russia, Romania, and I know where they live. If you come see where I live, you will ask me why I cycle.' I am 100% sure.

Analyzing and reflecting on the relational tale. From the commencement of the interview, Nick's reactions to the social conventions and dispute of images propelled by media became apparent. He pointed out the habitually silent fact that in the elite sport culture what is highly valued is the end result, the victory, and the final 'battle' of the best riders; while the endeavor to finish the race is not enough. These are ideals present in the contemporary Western world and cultures (Carless & Douglas, 2009; Edensor, 2002) and Nick's reaction to the TV scenes revealed that he did not fully identify with them. As Tibbert et al. (2015) and Andersen (2011) noted, the values of the subcultures of elite sport promote a hyper-masculine and sometimes even a supernatural athlete figure as a hero, which impedes the growth of a polyphonic sense of self. Consequently, the most popular scenario in elite sports portrays mentally tough athletes who outface all obstacles and achieve optimal performances that lead to victory, and it is this scenario that attracts media attention. Carless and Douglas (2009) outlined the issue of media involvement and the need to produce 'good news' or a 'feel good' story. This element was strikingly articulated by Douglas and Carless (2011), who wrote that "the participants did not portray life in elite sport as the media portray it, nor did they portray life as it is represented in sport psychology and sociology textbooks and journal articles" (p. 4).

Consistent with Evans and Stead's (2014) findings on Australasia professional rugby players migrating to the United Kingdom, feelings of loneliness arise when there is an absence of intimate relationships with one's own people--also highlighted by Schinke and colleagues (2011). In the Evans and Stead's (2014) study an athlete comments on the feelings of loneliness at night (see p. 721) similar to how Nick narrates his sadness at the night and anticipation for the next morning's training. This brings out a narrowing of the sense of self as he places intense focus on his training. Along the same lines, Ryba et al. (2016) found that in the acute cultural adaptation phase migrating athletes felt loneliness and "missed family and friends as well as familiar spaces, landscapes, and ethnoscaapes, attesting further to the felt rupture of their daily lives, inner meaning, and established routines" (p. 8).

In Nick's case, the frustration he experienced from the loss of his personal relationships and the way he negotiated with it resonates in the following excerpt: "In [the host country] there was no chance I would take a day off from training. Never! What would I do if I stayed at home?" Him asking rhetorical questions reveal an attempt to emotionally engage and awaken the audience to co-produce the obvious meaning he implied (Riessman, 2008). His words disclose how his athletic identity was dominant and how he could find meaning and joy mostly (if not solely) when training with his team, while burying the absence of finding meaning in other aspects of his life abroad. Similarly, Weedon (2012) in his study of young migrant footballers' acculturation, revealed that issues of loneliness arose especially in non-training periods. In Nick's tale the clash between living the dream and acquiring a performative and achieving self, while sacrificing or struggling with the relegation of his relational self, surfaced.

The processes through which the migration experience impacted his sense of self were multifaceted. Unfamiliarity with the place and people, communication difficulties (absence of common language to communicate), and the simultaneous loss of the taken-for-granted everyday habits/practices (e.g., living with his parents, having homemade meals, being around friends) are important details in the narration. As regards the challenges of communication, these have been acknowledged in studies about athlete adaptation (Battocchio et al., 2013; Ryba et al., 2012; Schinke et al., 2011). For example, the importance of communicating in a common language in some cases (Battocchio et al., 2013) was highlighted by teammates and coaches as a facilitator of connectedness. However, when Nick mentions his age of 18 as being too young to confront his challenges, we can understand his experience only if we take into account the cultural specificities of Greece as a country that still retains collectivistic features characterized by strong family ties. In short, family and religion are central values in Greek society that influence mentality and way of life, and form and preserve stereotypes and traditions (Chroni, Diakaki, & Papaioannou, 2013).

Through the use of rhetorical questions, Nick also emphasized the difference between the relationships he had with the host country teammates and family and friends at home, while he repeatedly stated missing "his people". According to Evans and Stead (2014), athletes who move with a partner or a family member find the settlement to be a smoother process, in comparison to those who migrate alone. While they wrote that intimate relationships may act both as a facilitator and a barrier (e.g., when a relationship comes to an end due to the relocation, or when a partner couldn't find a job and had to move back to the donor country), they posit that friendships with teammates do not substitute relationships with family and friends from home. As Richardson, Littlewood, Nesti, and Benstead (2012) also pointed out, the immigrant players in their study preferred to turn to family for social support instead of the team staff. In the Chroni (1995) study of American basketball players who moved to play overseas, to make it through the contract one of them moved to the host country with his wife and two kids and another, after the first few months of staying abroad alone, made sure that he always had a friend or relative from home visiting him. Regardless of the country and culture of origin, characterized by more or less collectivistic or individualistic practices, it appears that migrating athletes prefer to resort to their own social network from back home for coping with the challenges faced in the host country.

Taking into account the findings of Evans and Stead (2014) and Weedon (2012), we postulate that the absence of social network, of sense of belonging, and of sharing similar cultural values potentially led Nick to disintegration strategies. At some point he became tired of trying to integrate, to adapt or to re-form his sense of self and the storyline of his narrative. Inertia was his reaction to the clash of his being and doing, his identities, and experience. An atmosphere of despair was communicated, not just a distant report of the facts, and the situation was rather dramatized to highlight the psychological consequences of his feelings of loneliness. His aversion to his athletic identity and the fact that he did not want to train appear to have stemmed from the annihilation of his relational identity. Riessman (2008) argues that this dramatization is a sign for the "narrator's plea for commonality [that] cannot be easily ignored" (p. 112). What we also observe at various points in the narration is a repetition in describing feelings of loneliness and nostalgia, while he also elaborates on how these feelings impacted his mood, performance, and subsequently the decision to return home. This repetition when used places emphasis on critical moments that have a significant impact on the progression of the story (Riessman, 2008). Nick's words about "feeling lonely while surrounded by people" show this emphasis and correspond with the Ryba et al. (2016) observation in the acute phase of cultural adaptation where "feelings of loneliness amidst people" were also present in the migrating athletes of their study.

The use of direct speech according to Riessman (2008) "builds credibility and pulls the listener into the narrated moment" (p. 112), while at the same time conveys a significant moment in the narration. It was important for Nick to share the 'exact' words he used to inform the coach of his departure because these point out more vividly his agency and his active role in the final decision. What he shared was an informed decision after having revisited his past experience and present priorities. Finally, although he was a competent

enough cyclist to remain with the team, he came to the decision to leave the team as he could not find alignment between his own construction of identity and the one that his role as a professional athlete dictated (Tibbert et al., 2015).

A Discovery Tale: “The Odyssey”

Prelude. At the time of the interview Manolis was 39 years old; seven years after he stopped cycling at the age of 32, when he did not make the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. At the age of 28, he moved to central Europe to join a continental cycling team. He was used to relocating, having been born in the USA and relocated to Greece as a youngster only to move back to the USA again in his late teens for cycling. His relocation experiences gave a unique perspective which he conveyed right from the start:

I believe the difference between me and your other interviews is for sure that I come from a migrating family. What I am trying to say is that I had already learned to erase, to humble myself and move to a new place and absorb. If an athlete has an attentive mind along with the travelling he will do [for races], he will become a greater man first and then a better athlete.

The Odyssey. Elite sport is very good and needs dedication. You have to erase a lot of things and maybe this robotic [routine] is what is needed sometimes. It didn't fit with my mentality. I wanted, for my free time, a different way of life; I couldn't stand this robotic [lifestyle]. Some people didn't have a problem; most of them were road cyclists and they were always with many of their teammates. Whereas, I was in a house completely alone, there were no other people. [I had] one or two brief friendships; it wasn't a big deal and I didn't want this way of life. The only thing that didn't happen for me was to be in a developing team with all the pro-athletes training together morning to night and eating together. But anyway, this wasn't my case. My professional team didn't have a house for all the athletes to live together. We had athletes from Italy, Germany, Austria and we were getting together only for the races.

[When I was in my host-hometown] I could wake up in the morning and go do an uphill climb at a repetition of ten times. From the fifth repetition on I was bored. I am not some sort of a robot. I mean, I wanted to train but before reaching the hill [to be climbed] I wanted to pass by a beach, to say hello to a couple of people. I wanted to become a better athlete, yet I didn't want to erase too many things from myself in order to succeed. OK, maybe this was the reason why they chose someone else for the Olympics and they didn't choose me. Because for me, all that matters at the end is this entire Odyssey that has to do with the experiences and the things you are going to live. If I think back then I made the right choices.

I wasn't psychologically strong to make it, to do it all alone, to be alone and fight for the Olympics. It meant three years away [the Olympics] and there was no chance I could live my life that way; to lose years from my life for a goal. Which of course is great, it would be the most beautiful thing for me to finish my career like that but at the end it's like the Odyssey: The road is more important than anything else. Maybe this is a mistake for someone who wants to have great achievements. But again, a lot of athletes stay in beautiful places and have their lives. As my level was increasing I met more and more people, some of the best in the world, who had chosen beautiful places to live in. And you know what? They were even going out at night to have a drink.

This move affected my identity. I wouldn't be the same person I am today. It has to do with the way I travel. A lot of people leave for four years and they never leave; in fact they never left home, as they didn't absorb a single thing. That's why they [Greek coaches] were yelling at me at some point; because when the training was over [in training camps and races abroad] and I had free time I was going out to see things, to meet people. I wanted to chat and to see, I was travelling and I was absorbing. That's why I place a lot of importance on the journey, the trip to get there, like in the Odyssey. When an opportunity like this comes up, enjoy it. Open your eyes and you will have a great time.

Analyzing and reflecting on the discovery tale. Manolis' previous migration experiences and the standards these set with regard to his way of living strongly impacted the decision to depart from the host country. As the narration flows we observe that the reason was not that he could not meet the team's demands, as he was offered a continental contract that he himself terminated very early. As regards the goal to meet the performance demands it was the place, the situation, and the quality of life that did not meet with his personal mentality, his approach to the performance goal, and living standards. The way the culture of elite sports is promoted through a need to sacrifice and devotion to a robotic and single-minded lifestyle, did not suit Manolis' approach to training and his past experiences. Even though Manolis claimed that the team's strategy of housing the newcomers separately, and that the solitariness during the training sessions weighed up in the decision to depart the team, his differentiation appeared to be built mostly upon systematic comparisons of different places and the way of life he experienced through his migrating past that set different standards

for him. Similarly, Meisterjahn (2011) found that constant comparisons made by the players in his study led them to self-reflection and actualization; thus it is possible that for migrating athletes who systematically compare host and donor countries and cultures, this practice activates internal processes that lead to life and career-determining decisions.

Manolis continuously switches between first and second person singular throughout, and in this way engages the audience in a more immediate way. Similarly, by switching verb tenses (from present to past), according to Riessman (2008) he adds vividness, immediacy, and lessens the distance between the narrated event and the listener. These interchanges underline his agency, which is revealed in the progression of the narrated event.

As he narrates not being selected for the 2004 Olympics he negotiates how his life and self-worth did not depend on sport achievements (Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas, 2009). Self-fulfillment for him derives from experiences and emotions lived through cycling. Pursuant to Douglas and Carless (2006), self-worth and self-esteem do not always relate to great performances and fulfillment of high performance goals. While Manolis had achieved a high level of performance as a cyclist and was offered a contract abroad, he had lived in different places that provided him with standards and priorities about the quality of life he wanted as a person (and athlete), and the standards and priorities he sought in his move with the continental team. His narration is like an internal dialogue where he is trying to find alignment with himself and an assurance that he made the right choices.

Manolis contradicts himself when he admits that big sport achievements need “blind” dedication and then argues that there has to be more than this. To compromise was not an option as he believed that alternative routes to success were possible and attainable (Carless & Douglas, 2013b; Tibbert et al., 2015). He didn’t want to “lose” and “erase” himself and the part of his identity that relied on discovering new places, people, and experiences. His narration follows a script that merits the maintenance of a multifaceted self, preserving his quality of life. Social relationships matter to him not only in the narrow borders of his loved ones, but also in meeting new people while discovering new places and living new experiences (Douglas & Carless, 2011).

The most prevalent and repetitive theme in Manolis’ tale is that he parallels his migration experience with an odyssey. This metaphorical reference is inspired by Constantine Cavafy’s (Savidis, 1992) Greek poem *Ithaka*, which starts “As you set out for Ithaka hope the voyage is a long one, full of adventure, full of discovery...” and ends “...And if you find her poor, Ithaka won’t have fooled you. Wise as you will have become, so full of experience, you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean”. This is what Manolis conveys in his tale, that the journey to the destination is more important. The everyday experiences and the maintenance of a multifaceted identity are more important for a meaningful life than foreclosure to an athletic identity.

Identity Reconstructions via Identity Narratives

Taking a closer look at how migration triggered identity fragmentations, negotiations, and reconstructions, the experience of the two cyclists marked a transition that provoked culture shock and acted as an incentive for each of them to re-create his own identity through narratives. Similar to the study of Douglas and Carless (2009), once the performance narrative no longer aligns with the athletes’ experiences, priorities, and values, they go through a narrative wreckage as they seek asylum in non-existent alternative narrative resources. Finally, the cyclists’ reconstructed their identities anew, after vacillating between a sporting career and a balanced self and life, to finally prioritize and commit themselves in a wide open and polyphonic narrative construction of selves.

In Nick’s tale, the fragmentation of his identities becomes apparent when the relational self opposes the performative self. As asserted by Douglas and Carless (2011), what a relational storyteller perceives as threat is not the underachievement or the failure to attain optimum performance “but the experience of isolation through a loss of intimacy or relationship” (p. 13). As Nick’s story evolves, cultural differences lived in everyday life become obstacles to his adaptation to the new environment. In this respect, the fact that the Greek culture still grooms strong family relations and the collective self plays an important role in the psychological well-being of the person (Chroni et al., 2013) created conditions that intensified the feelings of isolation and restriction in the cyclist’s social life.

Manolis found himself facing a junction early on: he had to choose between his shrunken life and his quality life. When he viewed the absence of quality in his social life, he started asking himself “What is this for?” By rejecting the monotonous robotic life of a pro-cyclist he preserved his need for the discovery element of his identity and way of life. He chose a life that was going to make him a better man and not de-

grade his being; he wasn't enraptured with reaching the 'destination' of achieving great performances (Douglas & Carless, 2006) but with enjoying the journey to the destination.

Ryba et al. (2012), studying elite Finnish female swimmers, found that when they moved to Australia for a training camp their acute cultural adaptation became apparent in everyday practices and was based on satisfying their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Similarly, the two cyclists in this study had to come to terms with everyday practices, giving emphasis to their senses of agency (i.e., autonomy to make a decision) and competency (i.e., good to have a contract that they decided to terminate), as well as to the missing link of relatedness when they couldn't identify with a way of life that jostled their values. Both narrators in this study claimed not a cycling victory but instead a relational and a discovery self, respectively (Carless & Douglas, 2013a; Douglas, 2009).

Taking into account the cultural transition model introduced by Ryba et al. (2016) that consists of three phases (pre-transition, acute cultural adaptation, and sociocultural adaptation), the migrating cyclists in the phase of acute cultural adaptation struggled to find a fit within the team that would enhance their feelings of belonging. While in their third phase of sociocultural adaptation, they tried to preserve a balance between their selves and the ideals of the elite sport culture. The negotiations of their values led to reconstructions of their identities, enacted through the way they narrated their migration experiences--moving back and forth from re-evaluating their priorities to the essence of their resistance as is captured in Manolis words "I wanted to become a better athlete, yet I didn't want to erase too many things from myself in order to succeed."

The two tales narrated here are at odds with master narrative plots (Sparkes, 2004) revolving around performance-related life events and athletic identity; they constitute attempts to dialogically construct a multidimensional identity (Carless & Douglas, 2013a). Through storying their experiences, the two cyclists created space for dialogs among and between their different identities as friends, sons, travelers, and not just as athletes or teammates. We came to view these narrations as attempts to claim "a life" not only beyond, but also alongside their athletic careers.

Concluding Remarks on Migration and its Impact on Athlete Identity

As we tried to grasp and learn from the lived experiences of two migrant cyclists, the fundamental issue that surfaced was that of identity fragmentation, negotiation, and re-construction. While experiencing a life in different and unfamiliar environments and social spaces, the two cyclists tried to find coherence through and within their own stories from the past, which would bring them to terms with and help them make sense of their present selves as well as future lives. The transitions lived through the migration experience provoked changes in their everyday habitus (Carter, 2011). The different way of living and functioning, the different mentality and culture, brought up negotiations and reconstructions in their identities that were 'traced' by using Douglas and Carless' (2006) framework of alternative narratives. The dialogical tales that formed based on their interviews generate space for negotiation, alignment, and a quest for coherence.

Migrating to pursue a professional career and to step-up performance was a challenging experience for the interviewed cyclists. For an elite athlete who is transitioning to a team and a career abroad everyone anticipates a success story (Carless & Douglas, 2013b; Douglas & Carless, 2011; Tibbert et al., 2015), that the athlete will accomplish the dream and make everyone proud--family, friends, social network, and nation. However, this is not always the case and those athletes who find themselves outside the borders of a performance narrative struggle to find alignment with their identities and experiences (Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2011). When performance narratives become the benchmark of what is acceptable and logical a number of athletes are marginalized. All the taken-for-granted routines of these cyclists were concealed and they storied their migrating experiences instead with greater emphasis on what they missed the most and could not bear to live without.

It is crucial to acknowledge the importance of alternative narrative schemas as a means to reconstruct identities through different transitions (e.g., migration, injury, retirement, withdrawal) and situations where the performance plot does not align with the experiences lived and the attainment of a balanced life and healthy identities (Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2011; Schinke et al., 2016; Sparkes, 1996). The enrichment of the narrative resources by the accepting and embracing of alternative and diverse narratives will aid integration interventions and positive transitioning across the different phases of an athlete's career. Athletes should have the opportunity to draw from a rich repository of narrative schemas to reflect, to relate, and to problematize. The plurality of narrative repertoires (Smith & Sparkes, 2009) may encourage and inspire other athletes to share their intimate thoughts about experiences, to foster the sense of belonging and thus construct a healthy sense of self, preserve psychological well-being and symphony among stories lived,

told, and the teller's identities. More importantly, it will raise athlete awareness and their feelings of agency by claiming alternative ways of being and becoming an elite athlete.

Significance for Competitive Sport

Not only athletes, but coaches and sport psychology practitioners can also benefit from culturally-sensitive, life-long professional advancement programs that reinforce the use of narratives. Using stories in team staff education can aid our understanding of the holistic approaches that focus on the athlete as a person with a life inside and outside of sport, and promote psychological well-being during and after the span of the athletic career (Douglas & Carless, 2008). Sport psychology consultants need to raise their awareness and elaborate on the impact of the migration experiences on athletes' identities in order to act as a conduit between them and the new environment to facilitate smooth adaptation in the new contexts, while taking care of the human being and not only of the human doing.

Limitations and Future Research

The tales narrated here are derived from a single interview with each cyclist, which might be viewed as limiting, however, the interviewer felt that she exhausted all the story details with these athletes (saturation was reached because, after a point, there was repetition of the same events). The small sample of data presented here is an inevitable limitation due to the small number of cyclists who migrated from Greece and the limited number of pages we have to tell their stories. Of course, the findings and conclusions while not representative of all Greek athletes moving abroad to play their sport, afforded the opportunity for first-hand reflection on the migrating experiences of the first generation of Greek cyclists migrating to pursue a professional cycling career in central Europe.

Future research should pay closer attention to the multiple simultaneous transitions very often faced by migrating athletes; stepping out and up (i.e., abroad and to higher levels of performance demands). Cycling and its different disciplines (track cycling, road, mountain biking) ought to be studied further as the hiring of foreign athletes in this sport appears to be standard protocol. Last but not least, more research is necessary to look at the different narrative devices athletes employ to make sense of their experiences, specifically of critical moments throughout their careers and lives.

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