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A narrative review of real-world heterogeneous mobility experiences

**Citation for published version:**

Bobrownicki, R & Valentin, S 2022, 'Adding experiential layers to the transnational-athlete concept: A narrative review of real-world heterogeneous mobility experiences', *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, vol. 58, 102075. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2021.102075>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1016/j.psychsport.2021.102075](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2021.102075)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Psychology of Sport and Exercise

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**Adding experiential layers to the transnational-athlete concept:  
A narrative review of real-world heterogeneous mobility experiences**

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Declarations of interest: none

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### **Abstract**

*Objective:* With rising mobility and greater recognition of the diversity of origins, cultures, and outlooks, there has been increasing interest in transnational perspectives in sport psychology scholarship and practice. Based on personal and professional experiences, however, we are concerned that there are diverse transnational athlete perspectives that have not yet been explored in the literature and often restricted by traditional nation-based sporting policies, organisations, and events. As cultural awareness and understanding may enhance consultancy effectiveness and enable the construction of heretofore unrealised identities for athletes, in this paper we seek to expand upon the heterogeneity of athlete experiences relating to mobility by exploring real-world cases of transnational athletes and how their experiences fit into current sporting structures.

*Design:* Narrative review and commentary

*Results:* Three identity orientations that showcase transnational diversity are identified: postnational, intranational, and non-national. Key characteristics and challenges relating to these for athletes, coaches, and practitioners are exemplified and discussed.

*Conclusion:* To enhance rapport and inclusivity, researchers and practitioners should not only consider experiences, perceptions, and constructed identities of postnational, intranational, and non-national athletes, but also seek to understand how these interact with or are influenced by environmental and structural factors.

*Keywords:* Mobility, postnational, intranational, non-national, identity, cultural sport psychology

### **Adding Experiential Layers to the Transnational-Athlete Concept:**

#### **A Narrative Review of Real-World Heterogeneous Mobility Experiences**

Recently, there has been increased focus on cultural issues within sport psychology with greater dialogue and recognition of sociocultural matters that impact sporting participation and performance (McGannon & Schinke, 2014; Ryba et al., 2018). Interest in this area is, on one hand, fuelled by rising levels of mobility, globalisation, and the exchange of people, values, practices, and ideas (Ryba et al., 2013) and, on the other, by growing public attention on and awareness of past and present inequality, unconscious bias, and marginalisation across large swathes of society (e.g., Dar et al., 2020; Vaughn & Amonoo, 2020). To promote research and practice that is *for*—rather than *on*—individuals, cultural sport psychology has emerged within the professional and academic domains emphasising practice and exploration of unique and/or cultural perspectives and experiences, as well as the performance implications relating to these (Blodgett et al., 2015).

One important focus for cultural sport psychology to this point relates to the concept of transnationalism, which refers to the interactions and relations (e.g., politically, socially, or culturally) between migrant athletes and the countries with or within which they work and live (Ryba et al., 2018). The lives of transnational athletes and other sporting professionals (e.g., coaches and psychologists), as well as their families, may span multiple geopolitical borders and can involve complex identities and conceptions of group membership (e.g., to cultures, places, or nations; Bloemraad, 2004). Consideration of this complexity is important not only for communication and motivation within psychology practice (Schinke et al., 2009), but is also critical for understanding, recognising, or confronting matters of power, privilege, and social justice (Fisher et al., 2003). Indeed, cultural structures, practices, and conceptions may promote or inhibit, for instance, athletic development, performance, career opportunities, wellbeing, identity, and coach-athlete relationships (Ryba, 2017).

One real-world example that demonstrates potential complexities associated with mobility and internationalisation might include high jumper Mike Edwards who was born in Great Britain (GB) to a Nigerian mother and Jamaican father and spent long periods of time in the United States (US; Henderson, 2018). After winning the GB indoor title in early 2018, he was picked by Nigeria (NG) to compete in that summer's Commonwealth Games (CG) in Australia (AU). Despite possessing NG citizenship and receiving the support of the GB and NG athletics federations, World Athletics ruled that he was ineligible to participate in the event because he had previously competed for GB at the European Junior Championships nine years prior and applications for "transfers of allegiance" were not being considered (Henson, 2018). Reflecting on this, Edwards remarked that his appearance in a GB vest as a youth had become "both a gift and a curse" resulting in a battle with World Athletics for them to recognise an identity (i.e., NG) that he had always possessed (Henson, 2018).

In a similar and more personal example that partly inspired this paper, the son of the first author is eligible from birth to represent Scotland (SCO), Northern Ireland (NI), GB, the Republic of Ireland (IE), and the US. With clear connections to all of these countries, but without ever having migrated himself, it is not certain how he would negotiate these multiple identities and arrive at the single culture or nationality of "allegiance". These issues of identity and allegiance are further complicated by indistinct conceptions of nationhood (e.g., athletes born in Belfast, could compete for NI, GB, and/or IE depending on the sport, the event, or their own personal beliefs or perceived identity).

For us, these two examples highlight the complex circumstances that increasing mobility and evolving geopolitical factors (e.g., the unique status of places like NI and Gibraltar, the development of the European Union [EU], and the implications of Brexit) can present for athletes that are often neither acknowledged within traditional sporting structures nor recognised within current sport psychology literature or practice. For that matter, such diverse

backgrounds arising from mobility were not part of our education and training, with our own awareness initially emerging from personal transnational experiences (e.g., relating to high-level sport, employment, and family life). Such awareness is important amongst practitioners, however, as it can provide meaningful context when starting or undertaking consultancy with relevant clients (Kontos, 2009). In contrast to traditions of “cultural universalism” in sport psychology (Ryba & Stambulova, 2013, p. 1), whereby common sport psychology interventions, such as goal setting and imagery, are taught and delivered on the basis that they are effective across most people (Schinke et al., 2009), there is recognition that greater cultural awareness and understanding may enhance consultancy effectiveness and client rapport (Schinke et al., 2007).

Therefore, in this paper we aim to add experiential layers to the transnational-athlete concept that further expand upon and exemplify its diversity and how it interacts with current nation-based sporting structures. To do this, we first review and establish key concepts relevant to transnational research and practice in cultural sport psychology and then set forth associated issues in these areas. From here, we draw upon literature, real-world cases, and personal experiences to identify key experiential orientations and illustrate the complexity and heterogeneity of athlete experiences relating to mobility and transnationalism. In exploring these experiences and generating the orientations, the construction of heretofore unrealised identities and understanding for athletes may also be enabled (see McGannon & Mauws, 2000). It is our position that exploration of these diverse transnational experiences also aligns with Ryba et al.’s (2018) recent challenge to researchers and practitioners to further develop concepts, terminology, and understanding pertaining to athletic mobility that could represent salient, nascent lines of research.

Before undertaking this review and commentary, in line with recent research relating to transnational mobility (e.g., Middleton et al., 2020), it is important that we first situate

ourselves as authors so that readers can understand and evaluate our interpretations and perspectives. Ontologically and epistemologically, we have approached this paper from a relativist and social constructionist perspective. This means that we feel that individuals interpret the social world based on their experiences and that we as authors or researchers cannot be neutral or free of bias (Thorpe & Olive, 2016). The first author is a Chartered Psychologist that has lived in three countries (US, AU, and GB), has travelled to forty more, and has dual citizenship (via birth and naturalisation). He is a native English speaker with basic Japanese language capabilities (e.g., Nikkei, 2021). While there were feelings of significant connection and identity to his country of birth (i.e., the US) for many years, official links and legal status to any country no longer feel as important. The first author enjoyed mild success in international athletics (CG finalist for SCO in the high jump with a personal best of 2.28 metres), but issues relating to residency often created barriers for funding, competitions, and team selection. He is currently coaching an international GB high jumper seeking qualification for the Olympic Games (OG; Egelstaff, 2020). The second author similarly has lived in several countries (i.e., the Netherlands, GB, Brunei, Qatar, AU, and Austria), has travelled to many others, and speaks several languages proficiently (e.g., English, Dutch, and German). While she has Dutch citizenship from birth, she has resided there for just two years in total, and has lived in SCO for nearly three decades, exercising the freedom of movement previously afforded to EU citizens prior to Brexit. Based on this, she feels varying but persistent connections with the Netherlands, while primarily identifying with SCO. She is interested in diversity and identity, and how these are shaped by cross-national experiences. Both authors would acknowledge that they experienced safe and more privileged upbringings.

### **Review of Terminology**

One of the issues facing research relating to scholarship in culture and diversity is that culture is a multifaceted, but often “convoluted” concept relating to race, ethnicity, religion,

language, and nationality (Godfrey et al., 2020, p. 131) and associated values, beliefs, and behaviours (Gill & Kamphoff, 2009). The complexity of culture is further compounded by (a) overlapping, interdependent, or inconsistent concepts (Godfrey et al., 2020) and (b) increasing levels of both temporary and permanent sport migration (Ryba et al., 2018) that can engender diverse and intersecting identities. To begin to address this, the following sections explore common terminology relating to athlete mobility and transnationalism using cultural psychology and cross-cultural psychology, two primary paradigms for exploring the effects of culture on psychological processes and behaviour (Stambulova et al., 2009)

### **Nationality and National Identity**

For assessing diversity and culture within groups and individuals, nationality represents a common factor (Godfrey et al., 2020). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR; 2005), nationality, which can be used interchangeably with citizenship, is a legal connection to a state that offers individuals access to civil, social, and political rights; protection; and, in many cases, identity. Emphasising the significance of the concept for states and individuals, article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that “everyone has the right to nationality” and “no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality” (United Nations [UN], 1948, p. 74). Alongside this legal sense of nationality, individuals may also possess national identity, which pertains to a subjective belonging or nation-centred self-categorisation. According to Rowe (2012), elite international sporting events, such as the OG or FIFA World Cup (WC), rely “heavily” (p. 1471) on nations and national identity for their meaning and, through events such as these, sport has been used to promote national identity and integration with majority, prevailing, or mainstream cultures (Ryba, 2005).

Historically, citizens were linked to only one sovereign state with policies and mechanisms deliberately designed to prevent occurrences of dual nationality (Sassen, 2002).



With greater mobility and immigration though, not only has the rigid exclusivity of nationality receded in many places (i.e., there is greater capability of changing allegiance or citizenship), but there is also increasing allowance or acceptance of dual citizenship (Spiro, 2019), where athletes or individuals may become citizens of multiple states (i.e., multinational). One way of acquiring dual citizenship may be through naturalisation as part of sport-related migration (e.g., to play in foreign sports leagues, to seek better training opportunities, etc.) and examples in high-level sport include Hakeem Olajuwon in basketball (Friend, 1993), Bernard Lagat in athletics (World Athletics, 2005), and Wayne Gretzky in ice hockey (Ormsby, 2011; Treble, 2018).

### **Transnationalism and Transnational Athletes**

With close connections to matters of nationality and mobility, transnationalism refers to increasing cooperation and connectivity spanning national borders (e.g., in terms of economics, communication, politics, medicine, and more) between individuals, organisations, and institutions (Giulianotti & Brownell, 2012; Koikkalainen, 2013; Ryba et al., 2018). “Transnational migration”, which has been increasing in sporting contexts (Ryba et al., 2015, p. 125), can foster diverse and fluid identities (Ryba et al., 2015, 2016) and influence development both inside and outside of sport (Ryba et al., 2018; Ryba & Stambulova, 2013), leading sport psychology researchers (e.g. Schinke et al., 2019) to advocate transitioning from singular interpretations of identity toward plural, intersecting conceptions (see Schinke et al., 2007; Stambulova & Ryba, 2020). The connections formed via transnational practice—which may be physical, psychological, or virtual links—have implications across a range of sporting professionals (e.g., athletes, coaches, sport psychologists, and other support staff) and across a range of skill levels and competences. According to Ryba and Stambulova (2013), elite-level athletes or support staff (whose travel or relocation may relate specifically to sport and non-elite athletes and staff (who may move due to reasons initially unconnected to athletic concerns

such as education, employment, or family) will need to reconcile or navigate transnational and non-normative sporting, cultural, and personal matters. For all of these examples, transnationalism may represent opportunities for both short-term mobility without intention of settlement, and longer-term or permanent migration (Koser & Salt, 1997). With this cross-border activity of mobile athletes, which can offer or present unique experiences with cultural, personal, or developmental implications (Ryba et al., 2016), Ryba and colleagues (2012) have highlighted a need for sport psychologists to focus on the *process* of cultural transitions and adaptation through qualitative methodologies that generate more nuanced understanding and address previous methodological limitations (see Ryba, 2009a).

### **Country of Origin and Country of Settlement**

With the increase in mobility and transnationalism, two concepts commonly proposed for cross-cultural psychology research and practice pertain to country of origin and country of settlement (or residence). According to Berry (1997), understanding of the customs, demands, features, and cultural characteristics of the origin society and how they compare to the country or society of settlement is an important consideration for scholarship and applied practice (see Stambulova et al., 2009). Indeed, researchers and practitioners must consider athletes' cultural contexts, as these will impact psychological processes, and how these contexts compare across cultures (Peters & Williams, 2009). More broadly, factors may relate to political, economic, social, and linguistical concerns or, in sporting terms more specifically, playing styles, communication methods, rules, and even equipment (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014). With greater diversity or cultural plurality promoted by immigration, societies of origin and settlement may contain dominant and non-dominant cultures in terms of their relative influence or power (Berry, 1997), which may have implications for athlete experiences and transitions, as well as for practice in psychology.

## **Acculturation**

In terms of managing transition and change, in cross-cultural psychology, acculturation is thought to possess both theoretical and practical significance (Chirkov, 2009). According to Berry (1997), acculturation refers to psychological and cultural processes (e.g., change or adaptation) resulting from interactions between different cultural groups (e.g., country of origin and country of settlement). Berry (1997, 2008) argued that the degree of acculturation and even cultural plurality may be mediated by a range of factors including permanence (e.g., short-term work vs long-term migration), mobility (e.g., exposure to new cultural group due to your own move or due to a new group being brought to you), and voluntariness. For Ryba et al. (2018), voluntariness represents an integral part of intercultural engagement that distinguishes between those that pro-actively choose to build lives and livelihoods that span national borders (e.g., highly skilled athletes that train, compete, or live abroad) and those that may be forced into intercultural interactions (e.g., indigenous populations or refugees) due to war, persecution, or economic opportunity.

To explain and understand the process of acculturation, Berry (1997) proposed a cross-cultural psychological and coping framework that consists of four possible strategies: integration (bi-cultural identity), assimilation (country of settlement identity only), separation (country of origin identity only), and marginalisation (loss or neglect of identity often for reasons relating to exclusion or discrimination). This framework appears to reflect practitioner experiences, such as with native American client groups in counselling (e.g., Thomason, 1991), and to correspond to investigations relating to culture, citizenship, and identity (e.g., Rother & Nebe, 2009). Berry (1997) has argued that the long-term psychological processes and outcomes of acculturation will depend on the country of origin, the country of settlement, and the phenomena (e.g., relating to economics, employment, politics, education, etc.) that give rise to or arise during the processes of acculturation.

### **Issues and Limitations**

While Berry's model (1997) provides a seemingly straightforward method for understanding or explaining cultural transitions that has received considerable attention over the years both in sport and more generally (e.g., Choy et al., 2021; Elbe et al., 2016; Morela et al., 2013; Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008), the framework and the concepts that underpin this have also received criticism (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014). In this regard, a number of researchers have cited concerns with the linearity and apparent universality of the transition process (e.g., Agergaard & Ryba, 2014; Bhatia, 2002; Bhatia & Ram, 2009). Berry (2009) has responded to some of these concerns, arguing that cross-cultural psychology, and by extension his model, affords opportunities for both understanding intercultural commonalities across human beings while also exploring and sampling individual experiences that shape, or are shaped by, culture. Even if we are to accept that there are some commonalities, findings from qualitative research suggest that the acculturation process is dynamic, non-linear, and even "messy" (see Ryba et al., 2012, p. 93). Indeed, Ryba et al. (2012) suggested that cultural adaptation is an ongoing process of psychological and sociocultural negotiation. For us, we would largely agree with this position, but put forward that, in addition to the immeasurable individual and environmental (i.e., sociocultural) variables involved, attention is also needed on the impact of potential structural factors (e.g., laws, policies, rules on sporting eligibility, national governing body governance, etc.). Greater acknowledgement of such structural elements would reflect or build upon holistic, non-linear ecological conceptualisations of, for instance, motor learning (i.e., that movement emerges from interaction between individual, environmental, and task/rule/structural constraints; Correia et al., 2019) and dual-career development environments (see Henriksen et al., 2010, 2020).

This need to consider structural elements becomes apparent when we look more closely at concepts such as nationality and country of origin. For instance, although the UN (1948)

might define nationality as a legal status, how nationality laws are applied can differ significantly from country to country (e.g., nations may grant citizenship based on any combination of birth, descent, and/or residence) and the status itself is often conflated legally and practically with concepts such as race or ethnicity (Godfrey et al., 2020; Gracia, 2005). According to Kostakopoulou and Schrauwen (2014), the composition and application of these nationality rules can “oscillate” (p. 144) due to a range of factors such as security concerns, political integration, commercial interests, and the processes of both de-ethnicisation and re-ethnicisation. We put forward that these rules, policies, and structures relating to nationality have implications for the cost, accessibility, and feasibility of transnational work and mobility (e.g., by affording or constraining available opportunities to athletes) and interact with individual and sociocultural variables. This is particularly true at present because of the traditional nation-centred structure of many sporting events and organisations. Even across sport itself, nation or country is inconsistently defined (e.g., the United Kingdom—which comprises SCO, Wales, NI, and England [ENG]—competes as a single nation for the OG as Team GB, but as four separate nations in other events, such as the CG and FIFA WC matches).

In terms of the concept of country or society of origin, despite acknowledgement of the growth in global mobility over the years, few studies clarify what this means (e.g., if it refers to the place of birth, usual place of residence during childhood, etc.). When people may be born in one place with eligibility for multiple citizenships (e.g., children born in NI), may be born in one country to parents who themselves are from different nations (which is increasingly common in the EU), or may move around frequently during childhood, it is not clear how an individual’s place of origin (or “home culture”) is determined. We are not necessarily advocating for strict, universal definitions or practices, as these will be hard to define and athletes may fall into or intersect multiple categories, terms, or identities (see Gill & Kamphoff, 2009). Instead, authors should look to operationalise terms or categories relating to diversity

and culture where possible (see Godfrey et al., 2020) and provide hermeneutic guidelines that can be adapted across time and contexts (see Ryba, 2009).

Moreover, as we agree with the view that identities are “multiple, dynamic, and fragmented” (Ronkainen et al., 2016, p. 47), we advocate the use of more inclusive language that better reflects this reality. Encouragingly, research in cultural sport psychology has increasingly highlighted the plural and intersecting backgrounds that can be engendered by migration and transnational practices (e.g., Stambulova & Ryba, 2020). That said, we still encounter language in research and real-world sport that we feel fails to recognise this diversity. For instance, we have seen language used in cross-cultural psychology and developmental psychology relating to acculturation (e.g., in articles, participant materials, or questionnaires) that presumes (a) a single ethnicity, culture, or nationality of origin by using the terms in the singular (e.g., Berry, 1997; Choy et al., 2021; Musso et al., 2018) or (b) only two cultures or societies are involved in cultural exchange (e.g., bi-directional exchange; Berry, 2008). In the case of real-world sport, stakeholders must also be mindful of the implicit messages that sporting structures and relevant policies may convey to transnational athletes. For example, although World Athletics has expressed commitments to diversity and inclusion (e.g., Ramsak, 2020), the “transfer of allegiance” system, which features a name that implies athletes should have a loyalty or obligation to a single nation state, appears designed to restrict recognition of athlete diversity. Even if a nation-centred focus is arguably required for administering track and field, we would posit that “changing country of representation” may be a more inclusive and empowering term for this process than “transfer of allegiance”. With the recognition of increasing sports mobility and international settlement, we put forward that there should be a corresponding development of terminology and understanding relating to identity in cultural and national terms. In some cases, this might simply be achieved using plural forms (e.g., nationality vs nationalities), but we would also argue that there are additional circumstances or

orientations of athletes within transnational mobility that require consideration. By extending understanding of what athletes experience or how they might identify, researchers and practitioners can better acknowledge the ethical dilemmas and other difficulties that athletes face (Douglas, 2009).

### **Adding to the Diversity of Transnational Athlete Experiences**

In order to best serve their clients, practitioners need to understand how they can facilitate within each sporting environment rather than obstruct or limit by ignoring cultural context (Schinke & Stambulova, 2017). As Douglas and Carless (2016) noted, through the media, we can see how athlete backgrounds, culture, and identity may be used to both exclude or ridicule (e.g., the "Plastic Brits" controversy in the United Kingdom where GB athletes of multinational backgrounds "insulted" the home London OG according to British media; Kelly, 2012), which has implications for mental health, motivation, confidence, and self-esteem. It is our position that cultural sport psychology has advanced awareness of diversity, imbalances of power, and privilege to address such concerns. We still feel that there is yet room to push this further to promote enhanced inclusion and understanding, however. For instance, for us personally and professionally, we have encountered people and situations that bear many of the hallmarks of transnationalism, but these instances do not necessarily involve what we would consider transnational "migrants" or transnational "migration", which are terms commonly used to describe athletes and longer-term mobility in the literature (e.g., Agergaard & Ryba, 2014; Ryba et al., 2015, 2016, 2018). It may be that "migrant" and "migration" are intended as neutral terms that apply to any movement, but migration is a complex and disputed term (Hilsum, 2015; International Organization for Migration, 2019; Ruz, 2015) that for us typically connotes movement of people to *new places* (see Stevenson, 2010). As mobility and transnational trends have been ongoing for many years now (Bruce & Wheaton, 2009), there are athletes that possess, are developing, or are inheriting ever more complex and diverse identities (e.g., from

transnational parents) that differ from those transnational experiences previously explored. For instance, there are athletes that engage in movement that would likely not be considered short-term mobility, but which we would argue is not commonly classed as migration either due to existing links (e.g., moving to country of citizenship, but not customary residence). In addition to this, we would argue that political and social developments; recognition of past or continued marginalisation, colonisation, or unethical practice; and other world events mean that borders may, in fact, seem to move around, or even close off to, athletes.

In examining athlete experiences like these, we have organised this exploration into orientations of transnational diversity (i.e., postnational, intranational, and non-national). These orientations have been informed and inspired by our own personal experiences, real-world athlete accounts, and scholarship in citizenship (e.g., Bloemraad, 2004; Sassen, 2002), identity (e.g., Bruce & Wheaton, 2009; Koikkalainen, 2013) and sociology (e.g., Deckard & Heslin, 2016). The term identity orientation was adopted based on the precedent of Comănaru et al. (2018) and Roccas and Brewer (2002) and it was intended to convey the relativeness, subjectivity, and capacity for change (i.e., re-orientation) we perceive for transnational conceptions of identity. To aid understanding, we have offered our own interpretations of these orientations and associated challenges for both athletes themselves and practitioners. Throughout this section, we also draw upon media accounts of athletes and their circumstances, which can help in understanding how society views, promotes, or subverts these experiences and identities (McGannon & McMahon, 2016).

### **Postnational Orientation**

Political, social, and economic developments have created the environment for not only transnational opportunities and identities, but also the emergence of postnational ones. With the advent of supranational structures such as the EU and African Union, the importance of participation and direct engagement with nation-states is weakening in favour of individually



vested civil rights and social welfare (see Bloemraad, 2004). In our view, postnational athletes represent an emerging trend of globally oriented individuals whose lives not only spread beyond national boundaries and will ordinarily contain membership of multiple groups, but their lives also reflect increasing deterritorialisation and/or weakened emphasis on official relationships with nation-states or other relevant identity groups, in line with postnational concepts of citizenship (e.g., Deckard & Heslin, 2016; Rubenstein & Adler, 2000). Based on our own experiences, postnationalism is a status or identity that follows significant transnational engagement (by either the athletes themselves or close family) where the structure or constraints of nation-states (e.g., residency and citizenship rules) and sporting organisations (e.g., rules on eligibility and transfers of allegiance) no longer seem to apply to or match with perceived conceptions of self and lived experiences. For instance, it is possible for an EU citizen—due to the removal of border controls within the Schengen Area (Koikkalainen, 2013)—to play a sport for many years in one country, perhaps since birth due to family migration, but not possess the corresponding passport for that country. To compete internationally, this can create the dilemma that such athletes may have to (a) travel to the “home” nation as indicated on the passport (a place that could conceivably be more “foreign”) or (b) “migrate” to the country of ordinary residence by acquiring citizenship there. Both options can come alongside a range of practical (e.g., requirement to relinquish previous citizenship, financial implications, etc.) or psychological concerns (e.g., self-efficacy, identity, confidence, etc.). For instance, ENG-based sprinter and CG medallist Leon Reid, who has possessed eligibility from birth to compete for ENG, GB, NI, and IE (Haughey, 2018), endured hardships in transferring his allegiance from GB to IE (Bloom, 2018). Reid found himself “in exile” for 18 months while trying to navigate World Athletics’ complicated transfer process (Bloom, 2018; Haughey, 2018) and endured racial and online abuse in the wake of his switch, which “led to him questioning himself” (BBC Sport, 2021). Hurdler Tiffany Porter—who was

born in the US to a GB mother and NG father; self identifies with all three countries; and “does not conform to one box” (Evening Standard, 2012)—endured significant media scrutiny and public questioning of her Britishness for years (see Kelner, 2015). These examples highlight that sport psychologists may need to be prepared to support athletes in the face of limited public and media understanding or acceptance of multi-layered national backgrounds.

It should be stressed, however, that postnational concerns will not be confined to citizens of western countries, although policies across countries and regions may impose significant restrictions (e.g., for autonomy, development, and career opportunities) for realising or achieving postnationalism. For instance, Naomi Ōsaka—a long-time US resident born in Japan (JP) to a JP mother and Haitian father—was required to relinquish her US citizenship in order to compete for (Boren, 2019) because JP’s constitution continues to expressly forbid dual nationality despite recent court challenges (Japan Times, 2021). As the first author has experienced first-hand, postnational athletes may face bouts of both inclusion and exclusion (e.g., in terms of funding, competition opportunities, and team selection) depending on how their circumstances correspond to rules, laws, and other structural elements. For example, Tabinas Jefferson, currently a young J-League footballer in JP, was selected to tour Germany with an All-JP High School team (Jonny, 2016) based on JP residency and schooling, but ran into difficulties later when trying to gain selection to the U-17 JP National Team (Ando, 2021), which instead required JP nationality. Born and raised in JP by a Ghanaian (GH) father and Philippine (PH) mother, he had always considered himself to be Japanese until he was asked to establish his eligibility to compete for JP and surprisingly discovered that he was a PH national instead (Ando, 2021). Shocked but initially undeterred, the athlete looked to naturalise as a JP citizen based on his residency from birth, but suffered a further setback when he found that his immigration status did not even confer eligibility for naturalisation (Ando, 2021). About the situation, Jefferson stated, “自分が何人なのか、どういう存在なのかすらも見

失って……この頃は頭の中がずっと混乱していました” (I lost track of how many people I was and what I was... At that time, in my head, I was really confused; Ando, 2021). To play internationally, Jefferson reluctantly began exploring alternative options and recently made his debut for the PH (Terrado, 2021). Despite apprehension of playing for the PH, he was comforted by the diversity of the PH team, which currently features many multinational players (Ando, 2021). On his situation, he remarked:

これで形式上、フィリピン人だとハッキリした。でも僕の心はフィリピン人、ガーナ人、日本人である自分が同居している。どれも大事なルーツであり、すべて自分。それでいいんです (Formally, this made it clear that I am Filipino.

That said, as for my heart, I co-exist as PH, GH, and JP. All are important roots; all are me. That's fine; Ando, 2021).

For us, this example illustrates how the structural components of society (e.g., strict JP nationality and immigration rules) and sport (e.g., nation-focused teams that require citizenship) can interact with an athlete's diverse postnational background (in this case engendered by his parents' transnational mobility) to alter how athletes view themselves in both general and sporting terms. These circumstances also underscore the possible challenges and implications not only for identity, but also career opportunities, team culture, immigration status, and more that practitioners and researchers may need to consider. The diversity of postnational athletes could also lead to scrutiny or unwanted attention regarding language, accents, ethnic names, or racial heritage from other athletes, governing bodies, fans, or the media, which the first author himself has previously experienced (e.g., accent highlighted in newspaper-article headline and text; see Law, 2014). Such issues demonstrate that sport psychologists may need to help prepare athletes with skills and strategies to cope with and navigate these pressures. Collins and Cruickshank (2015) have suggested sport psychologists utilise a pre-emptive, structured planning framework in addressing possible concerns such as

these before they occur. Sport psychologists may also need to be ready to support postnational athletes with team and organisational cultural dynamics because of a frequent emphasis on shared values and qualities in performance teams with limited consideration for “contestation, ambiguity, or variability” (McDougall et al., 2020). If sport psychologists are working with teams, they may need to consider strategies or interventions that account for and help to negotiate potential diversity in values, expectations, and communication (see Stambulova et al., 2009).

### **Intranational Orientation**

The second identity orientation relevant for cultural sport psychology relates to *intranational* matters (i.e., pertaining to territories, provinces, or areas within larger regions or nations). For us, intranationally oriented athletes possess membership of and strongly identify with an intranational group with significant historical, contemporary, or future ties or notions of independent statehood, but there are restrictions on this representation. Upon initial inspection, examples of intranational concerns for athletes (e.g., identifying as SCO versus GB, Valencian versus Spanish, or Tibetan versus Chinese) might not appear to relate directly to athletic mobility or internationalisation. If one considers, however, that the Korean peninsula’s first ever OG gold medallist in 1936, Sohn Kee-chung, was forced to accept his medal under the JP flag, the JP anthem, and the JP name of Son Kitei (Bull, 2011) due to JP colonisation, it might become clearer that issues and real-world matters that might appear internal and unconnected to international affairs and mobility at one time may be viewed very differently only a few years later as national or international events unfold. Reflecting on his OG experience under JP occupation, Sohn described the event and the suppression of his Korean identity as “unendurable humiliating torture” (Harvey, 1988). This is not to say that GB and Spain from our previous examples are necessarily colonising SCO or Valencia, respectively, or that these regions should or should not be independent, but these intranational circumstances

that might not outwardly appear to relate to acculturation, assimilation, internationalisation, oppression, or mobility (or the lack thereof) may to those athletes living these experiences. It is entirely possible that athletes, despite not moving their training or competition base, could see the borders moving around them and end up living in or competing for entirely different countries with different cultural, national, or athletic expectations that may or may not align with the athletes' cultural, political, or ideological preferences or world views. Alternatively, developments such as these may compel athletes to engage in transnational mobility (across borders that were not previously international).

Ostensibly, some of the circumstances that characterise intranationally oriented identity and experiences can appear similar to postnational ones (e.g., membership of a larger region, country, or body), but unlike postnationalism where we posit that there are typically multiple recognised connections of varying strength (e.g., athletes identify with multiple nations and/or supranational bodies), intranationally oriented athletes will clearly identify with the intranational area or region and do not affiliate with—and may even actively reject—the larger nation-state or entity that encompasses it. For example, in SCO, where dual identification has been common in the past, notions of Britishness have declined in recent years with some Scots identifying only as SCO and expressly insisting that they are not British (see Braber, 2009) despite SCO presently being a constituent part of the United Kingdom of GB and NI. For sport psychologists and coaches working with national and international teams, some of the approaches to handling the diversity that would come with intranationally oriented athletes might mirror some of those suggested for postnational orientations (e.g., organisational strategies or interventions that consider diversity in values and expectations). We would also argue that particular consideration should also be directed to inclusive language and practices that do not overemphasise dominant within-country cultures and marginalise smaller intranational ones. It should be recognised, however, as we illustrated with the example of JP-

colonised Korea, that important intranational characteristics and practices (e.g., language, writing systems, names) may even be intentionally suppressed or even legally restricted, limiting options for athletes, coaches, and sport psychologists. In such cases, it may be important for sport psychology researchers and other scholars to try to share perspectives and experiences through research, potentially via immigrant diasporas so that current athletes are not put at risk.

### **Non-National Orientation**

The last group relates to non-national or stateless athletes who have temporary or long-term legal or sporting detachment from nation-states. Although the UN (1948) has stipulated that everyone has the right to nationality and should not be deprived of the right to possess or change nationality, there are nonetheless millions of people around the world that do not possess any nationality and are stateless (UNHCR, 2005). Traditionally, statelessness is associated with athletes from collapsed states (e.g., the Soviet Union) or those fleeing war or persecution, which may seem a world away for many practitioners. Even wars that are long over can continue to present challenges decades later. For instance, thousands of ethnic Koreans resident in JP at the end of World War II, who lost their JP citizenship with the fall of the JP empire, have continued to pass on their stateless status to their descendants (Park, 2018). Today, these ethnic Koreans in JP, known as Zainichi (meaning “foreign resident of JP”), who are born in JP like their parents and grandparents, include athletes such as former premiership footballer Lee Tadanari and WC footballer Jong Tae-se (Cho & Kobayashi, 2019). Lee, who is fourth-generation Zainichi, was able to acquire JP citizenship to play in the Beijing OG, but stated that he endured discrimination in doing so and that his identity “remains resolutely Zainichi” (Brasor, 2010). Jong’s case is even more complex. While the J-League footballer and his parents were all lifelong JP residents, he famously went on to represent North Korea in the WC (Brasor, 2010). According to Cho and Kobayashi (2019), in a transition arguably from

non-national to postnational that demonstrates the potential dynamism of these identity orientations, highly mobile Jong “exemplifies flexible citizenship, one who neither belongs to any nation, nor is limited by fixed or essentialist notions of nationality” (p. 682). Jong may also represent a growing class of athletes that may seek national affiliation for pragmatic or professional reasons, rather than traditional patriotism or allegiance, which probably further underscores a potential transition to a postnational orientation, at least from a sporting sense.

Not all stateless athletes will necessarily have the resources (e.g., psychological, financial, or emotional) to navigate the constraints and obstacles that this status can present. The circumstances relating to statelessness have arguably increased too. In this regard, athletes in recent years have effectively become stateless in international competition due to misconduct or negligence by national sporting bodies (e.g., the suspension of the Russian Athletics Federation from major sporting events due to systemic anti-doping violations; BBC Sport, 2019), which has led to significant restrictions for affected athletes (see World Athletics, 2020b). Whether stateless due to war, persecution, or issues with sporting bodies, many affected athletes—who will come from a variety of backgrounds—lack bargaining power, the capability to enact meaningful change in sporting structures, or even the possibility of competing because they have no outlet or recourse in many cases for collectively gathering or voicing concerns (such representative bodies are typically based on national origin, which these athletes will neither share nor necessarily have access to). For example, consider that stateless persons are not eligible to compete in the OG (Kostakopoulou & Schrauwen, 2014), because the Olympic Charter (International Olympic Committee [IOC], 2018) requires that competitors be proposed by an eligible National Organising Committee for participation (although the OG may finally be starting to review and address some of these issues via the Olympic Solidarity programme; IOC, 2021). If athletes are stateless or their respective governing bodies are suspended rendering those athletes effectively stateless, they may have no means for

participation in major sporting events, which remain based on traditional nation-centred structures. Issues involving statelessness such as these may promote and lead to migration (e.g., to seek sporting opportunities in other countries based on professional interest rather than cultural or national affiliation) and conditions that promote transitions to transnational, multinational, or postnational orientations depending on circumstances.

We would also posit that statelessness may coincide with issues concerning limited autonomy and control (see Table 1) and, as such, have implications from self-determination theory and related perspectives that might further be of interest to scholars and practitioners in sport psychology. With this in mind, sport psychologists for affected athletes will want to consider assisting athletes to pre-emptively plan (see Collins & Cruickshank, 2015) for the considerable challenges and costly bureaucracy they will face relating to travel, competition entry, and beyond. For athletes that are effectively stateless for issues relating to state-sponsored doping, they may also face stigmatisation from fans, media, competition organisers, and fellow competitors that sport psychologists may need to help them cope with. Interestingly, as the examples from the Zainichi Koreans demonstrated, it can be possible to quickly transition to or from non-national orientations, so coaches and practitioners could assist athletes in creating transnational or postnational links that might help them. At the same time, some athletes may be reluctant to forge alternative links because they identify with their non-recognised status (e.g., Zainichi Korean).

### **Extending Scholarship and Practice in Transnational Diversity**

In this paper, we have explored the diversity of athlete experiences relating to mobility, which we have organised into postnational, intranational, and non-national orientations, and exemplified these using references to literature, policy, and real-world cases (see Table 1 for summary of the orientations). In doing this, however, we concede that these proposed orientations are based on our own interpretations of personal experiences and secondary



sources. Going forward, it could be worthwhile for researchers to explore these experiences and orientations empirically to investigate whether these provide the basis for a transnational taxonomy or typology. In doing this, however, researchers must be careful that they are conveying the diversity and dynamism of experiences and not creating categories that may obscure underlying and complex diversity. We feel ourselves that we have moved between these identity orientations and that the speed and direction of movement or adaptation may depend on a range of factors and change suddenly. For instance, heated rhetoric early in the coronavirus pandemic triggered rapid changes in public perceptions and behaviour toward some nationalities or ethnic groups, leading members of affected groups to unexpectedly question where they fit in (see Wang, 2021 for an example for Chinese Americans). At the same time, there are athletes who will engage in transnational mobility throughout their careers, but their links with their country of citizenship (which may overlap with country of origin and residency) will remain stable along with their transnational orientation. Either way, it may be worthwhile for future research to explore interventions or practical pathways for settlement and acculturation that consider identity orientations alongside socioeconomic factors.

\*\*\*Insert Table 1 here\*\*\*

The groups of athletes highlighted in the previous section also shine further attention on the complexity of transnational identity and the importance of moving beyond traditional conceptions of identity, nationality, and citizenship for sport psychology research and practice (see McGannon et al., 2012). Even more generally, there are scholars that posit that membership of different identities will be the standard, rather than “singular notions of citizenship” (Rubenstein & Adler, 2000, p. 524). For us, it is important that sport psychologists not only continue to heed greater consideration of transnational diversity and related concerns, but also begin to consider how different policies, environments, and practices (e.g., pertaining to access, training, and competition) interact with and impact such athletes. For instance, the

Olympic Charter (IOC, 2018) stipulates that sport is a “human right” (p. 6) that should be available to all “without discrimination of any kind” (p. 12), such as on the basis of national origin, but the traditional nation-centred structure of the OG and many other elite, international sporting events appears to limit participation for the categories of athletes discussed in this paper. These structures also do not seem to acknowledge the reality of the increasing mobility, internationalisation, and diversity present both within and outside sport. Further to this, current sporting structures typically “involve overtly nationalist dimensions” (Seippel, 2017, p. 44), require fixed affiliation with a single nation (or employ deliberately arduous processes to discourage “switching”; Athletics Weekly, 2018), and do not recognise that many athletes may lawfully and very reasonably possess multiple citizenships, identify with multiple nations or cultures, or have legitimate postnational ties with their country of residence without possessing citizenship. We are concerned that these restrictions may have performance, psychological (e.g., on perceived identity, autonomy, competence, and relatedness), and even athletes’ rights implications. In this regard, recent research (e.g., Adams & Kavanagh, 2018) indicates that the current nation-aligned structure allows national governing bodies (NGB) to exert undue influence on athletes with Adams and Kavanagh commenting that high performance athletes are often vulnerable to maltreatment and exploitation because they *must* work with the NGB in order to earn selection for the OG. With this requirement, forced participation, limited opportunities for decision making, restricted freedom of expression, and obstruction of due process constituted real-world examples from elite athletes themselves of potentially deliberate restrictions of their freedoms and, in turn, their individual human rights and well-being by NGBs (Adams & Kavanagh, 2018). At its worst, according to Fisher and Anders (2020), the structures and practices of NGBs can facilitate and perpetuate systematic abuse and sexual exploitation of athletes who lack the power or voice to take action. In the case of USA Gymnastics in particular, athletes were fearful of coming forward because it could end their

OG selection chances and even those that did report abuse were not believed (Fisher & Anders, 2020). Athletes—whether they possess none, one, or many citizenships—currently operate within “a web of power dynamics and relationships” (Fisher & Anders, 2020, p. 130) that may advantage some athletes while disadvantaging others. For researchers and practitioners, it is important that we offer opportunities for communication and support to more pro-actively identify and assist with these issues to address imbalances of power. According to McGannon and Smith (2015), within discursive psychology, critical discourse analysis of taken-for-granted self-identity talk, media texts, and the roles and rules of sport organisations may help in exploring and identifying subverted identities and imbalanced power dynamics. Because the media and sporting structures often promote the position that one nationality is the normal position, such methodologies that may challenge these assumptions are important. Similar approaches have been taken to explore adaptation processes of boxers (Schinke et al., 2012) and the impact of the media in shaping athlete identities (McGannon et al., 2012).

As athletes of transnational diversity have no forum for collectively addressing issues that may impact them, we argue that there is need for research that (a) begins to explore and consider these athletes’ perceptions and experiences and (b) considers how these perceptions and experiences may be impacted by current nation-based sporting structures, policies, and events. For us, this line of research is meaningful not only for informing psychology scholarship and practice, but also potentially for informing sporting bodies, structures, and policies. Even more important though might be the capability for work in this area to empower the athletes themselves or to draw attention to issues that may be affecting them.

### **Conclusion**

In this narrative review, we aimed to add experiential layers to transnational diversity through the exploration of real-world examples and the impact of sporting structures on these. In doing this, we hope that we have raised awareness for practitioners and, perhaps through

this, the possibility of assisting athletes in constructing unrealised or latent identities that we posit are often intentionally limited by nation-based sports policies and structures. With the traditional nation-based structure of sport and recent concerns for athlete welfare, research and practice that gathers and lends voices to diverse transnational experiences may be invaluable. For this reason, it may be that a cultural praxis approach, which challenges structures that do not account for diversity and cultural differences (Ryba et al., 2013, 2018), may be particularly well suited for contributing to this task. Going forward, we hope that researchers and practitioners in sport psychology will heed our proposals to further theory, research, and practice relating to heterogeneous transnational diversity.

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**Table 1**

*Suggested identity orientations relating to athlete mobility. These orientations may be impacted by a range of internal and external factors and may often be dynamic, fluid, and complex.*

<b>Identity</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Stability</b>	<b>Transnational mobility &amp; voluntariness</b>
<b>National</b>	Close correspondence between perceived national identity, legal status (i.e., citizenship or similar), and place of residence.	Can be stable, but personal, economic, political or other events may also promote gradual or more rapid transition (e.g., to transnational or intra-national). Such transitions may be forced (e.g., political annexation, votes for independence, or fleeing poverty) or sought (e.g., immigration for work or family opportunities).	Mobility may be limited, although increasing immigration and supranational structures (e.g., the EU) might make it difficult to remain exclusively national. Geopolitical events may mean that borders move around athlete and result in unintended or undesired transnationalism.
<b>Transnational</b>	Athletes whose lives span international borders with formal and informal connections across two or more countries, but may only have permanent legal status in one (e.g., citizenship)	Often fluid and dynamic based on lived experiences and external events. May transition to multi-national or post-national. Connections to new countries or regions may fluctuate (e.g., depending on opportunities, acceptance, racism, or other events). Continued transnationalism may lead to multinational or postnational transitions.	Typically involves travel, work, or settlement spanning borders. This may be voluntary and desired, but family, political, or sporting pressures can also mean that agency is (more) limited for other athletes.
<b>Multinational</b>	Athletes that possess nationality or citizenship of more than one country or territory and also closely identify with these.	Can be stable, as some athletes may be born with clear links to multiple countries or territories, but others may acquire legal status following transnational processes.	Some athletes may be multinational from birth or from young, so limited mobility and agency will have been involved initially (but such status may ultimately offer increased

<b>Postnational</b>	Similar to multinational or transnational athletes, but often with weakened emphasis on official relationships with nation-states and/or feelings of greater regional/global connectedness and deterritorialization.	It may typically be stable, but potentially more rare than other forms of transnationalism and it is possible that circumstances may impact perceptions of postnational status (e.g., EU citizens in UK might begin to value possession of recognised legal status following Brexit that previously might not have been important).	opportunities for mobility), whereas others may actively pursue multinational status (often via transnational engagement). May result from transnational mobility, although may not require it. Like multinational athletes, postnationalism may involve range from less direct engagement from athlete (e.g., family migration when young) to more deliberate decisions (e.g., job, training, or competition opportunities).
<b>Intranational</b>	Athletes that have citizenship of one country, but they more clearly or exclusively identify with a particular state, region, or territory within their country of citizenship (e.g., identifying only as Scottish but possessing a British passport) and may actively reject membership of the larger entity.	Can be stable, but may change over time depending on both internal and external events. Domestic and international events (e.g., plebiscites, referenda, wars, etc.) may promote or even force quick transitions (e.g., to multinational or transnational).	Outwardly such athletes may not appear transnational to others because they live in their country of citizenship, but intranational athletes may feel they are engaging in transnational mobility (e.g., travel between or working in different regions). Mobility and agency are not required features, however, and it is possible that borders may move around these athletes with limited interaction or choice on part of athletes.



**Non-national** Athletes may have identity, but do not have a corresponding legal status. Traditionally this may be associated with athletes from collapsed states or fleeing war, persecution, or poverty. More recently, athletes may be effectively stateless in sport due to national-level sanctions (e.g., for state-sponsored doping).

Potentially more volatile than other forms of transnationalism, but status may persist depending on circumstances.

Often non-national athletes may have more limited agency regarding their status, although this is not always the case (e.g., see Zainichi in Japan). Despite not having traditional nation-based status, some non-national athletes may still have opportunities to effectively engage in transnationalism for competition and training opportunities and to transition to other forms of transnationalism (e.g., transnational and postnational).

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