

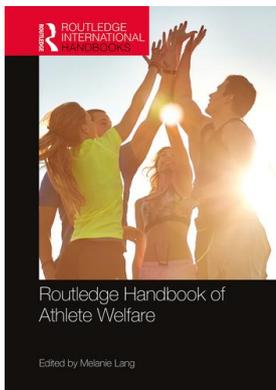
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# Organisational obligations toward athlete transitions

## Confronting the bureaucratisation of athlete welfare with an ethics of care

*G. Z. Kohe and L. G. Purdy*

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### Introduction

Research on career transitions in sport has been an area of scholarly interest for several decades, with work focusing on athletes' transitions out of sport and the various types of transitions that occur within/across sport and levels (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler & Côté, 2009). Such investigations have highlighted the importance of transitions within athletes' lives and drawn attention to the complexities that some transitions pose to individuals' daily lives and experiences. While key features of athletes' transitions within and beyond sport have been identified, transitions appear to be highly subjective. From a welfare perspective, athlete transition periods may precipitate several issues. These include the uncertainty of employment and a possible change in lifestyle; feelings of vulnerability due to athletes having expectations, goals, and plans change; possible fear of the unknown, which may be problematic for athletes whose lives/careers are built around structure and organisation; and the concern that transitions may have consequences beyond the individual athlete to their wider support networks/entourages.

Recently, high-profile athletes who have spoken out about difficulties in the transition process have placed pressure on sport organisations to better support athletes during and after key transition points. Calls for organisational acknowledgement of athlete transitions are underpinned by explicit or latent concerns regarding welfare. Within this, prevailing discourses have developed around the assumed implications transitions have on athletes' welfare and, by extension, what the organisational responses need to/must be. This chapter considers some of the links and issues between athlete transition programmes and wider welfare issues that are engendered within elite sport. Our interest is not in the utility, or otherwise, of the specific programmes themselves but rather in the ways in which such programmes are indicative of cultural shifts within the industry (i.e. regarding sports workers' expectations and corresponding organisational obligations about welfare). To begin, we articulate key themes within the athlete transition literature. We then situate transitions within a context of welfare provision. Before introducing a theoretical framework of care ethics, we discuss two sports organisations' approaches to athletes' transitions that highlight care concerns.

Scholars examining sport transitions have identified a number of key aspects of athletes' transition experiences (i.e. athletic identity; voluntary control over the decision to retire; the type, quality, and significance of the transition process; and distinctions between within-sport and out-of-sport career movements) (Butt & Molnar, 2009; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Warriner & Lavalée, 2008). One area of early interest has been in the development of models to help explain and map career transitions and provide directions for future research (i.e. Stambulova, 2003; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavalée, 2004). This work has been of value in providing frameworks that articulate some of the characteristics of athletes' career experiences, the interconnectedness between different areas of athletes' lives, and possibilities that exist potentially for smoothing the transition process. In addition, these models also provide a common ground upon which collective understandings of transitions might be entertained. However, issues of subjectivity and relativity remain.

Scholarly work has differentiated that transitions can be characterised as normative or non-normative. A normative transition is one in which an athlete leaves one life stage and enters another, for example, moving from junior to senior level or from participation to retirement (Wylleman & Lavalée, 2004). In contrast, a non-normative transition is unpredicted, unanticipated, and involuntary, for example, contract termination, career/season-ending injury, or personal issues that impact the sporting career (Schlossberg, 1981). Unsurprisingly, there has been significant recognition of the negative effects of transitions on athlete's lives, for example, adverse effects on mental health, social exclusion and/or withdrawal, occupational and financial woes, personal and professional identity crises, and changes to life satisfaction (Dimoula, Torregrosa, Psychountaki & Gonzalez Fernandez, 2013; Erpič, Wylleman & Zupančič, 2004; Martin, Fogarty & Albion, 2014; Perna, Ahlgren & Zaichkowsky, 1999). Recent work here has articulated the increased need for athletes (and coaches and sport organisations within the sector) to consider the complexities of transitions/retirement and to plan accordingly (i.e. Dimoula *et al.*, 2013; Stambulova, Stephan & Jäphag, 2007). Part of this planning involves the identification of coping strategies which, when introduced to athletes, may ease the transition process (i.e. Alfermann, Stambulova & Zemaityte, 2004; Dimoula *et al.*, 2013).

Towards this end, Stambulova and colleagues (2007) identified how transition experiences might be mediated and, where adverse effects are concerned, mitigated using psychological training programmes. With regard to programme development, these have predominantly been based on the assumption that structured interventions are effective mechanisms that may help athletes identify, respond to, plan, and implement appropriate transition strategies that might afford them more positive experiences and alleviate detrimental consequences (Knights, Sherry & Ruddock-Hudson, 2016). The ethos underpinning transition programmes has, to a large extent, positioned transitions as life-altering and potentially negative and traumatic periods that require personalised responses. Furthermore, attention has been drawn to the need for sport organisations to do more to ease transitions over the course of athletes' lives (Stambulova, Franck & Weibull, 2012).

Reflecting academic concerns and wider sport-sector discourses vis-à-vis athlete welfare, many sport organisations have been undertaking work to ensure that athletes are 'appropriately' equipped for lives and careers once elite-level roles in the industry finish. In addition to external union-based activities, sport organisations, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and various national Olympic committees (NOCs) and international federations, now have educational programmes, business mentorship schemes, industry network opportunities, and personal support services designed to provide opportunities, encourage skill development, and alleviate feelings of uncertainty. In many cases, sport organisations' efforts are highly laudable; indeed, the range of schemes and support available now offer a rich resource that may

afford athletes a degree of comfort and security. However worthy, sport organisations' efforts appear, in part, to have also been driven by contextual forces and cultural shifts that have raised industry expectations regarding how businesses operate *for* the betterment of their employees and improve 'good' governance.

### Locating athlete transitions in a sociocultural-political context

Although sport organisations in many countries have been confronted with growing concerns about athlete welfare, institutional and organisational responses have differed considerably. In the United Kingdom, for example, athlete welfare issues have become subsumed within broader scrutiny of the sport sector and organisational accountabilities therein. One most recent development in this regard was the commissioning of an 'independent' report into sport organisations' duty of care to their constituents (i.e. the Duty of Care in Sport Review [DOCSR]; Grey-Thompson, 2017), led by House of Lords member and former Paralympian Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson. Focusing on athletes' working lives and relations with governing bodies, the report covers: education; transitions; representation; equality, diversity, and inclusion; safeguarding; mental welfare; safety, injury and medical issues; and, last, recommendations. In essence, the report formalises the UK government's concern for athlete welfare and, in doing so, places responsibility upon the government and organisations to improve institutional structures and cultures to enhance the athlete's environment and organisational practices. What this review demonstrates is there are key points at which care in sport is needed more (i.e. safeguarding, mental health, youth talent identification, deselection, and transition junctures). The following section extends beyond athlete transitions to look more critically at the DOCSR and the way in which broader discussions about athlete welfare, and specifically athlete transitions, are situated therein (i.e. sports workers' expectations and corresponding organisational obligations about welfare).

The DOCSR highlights some of the fundamental care and welfare issues at play within the nation's sport industry. Yet the report also speaks to prevailing concerns about care, labour, and employment beyond sport spaces. In the first instance, the report provides an overview of the scope of current welfare programmes evident within the UK professional sport sector and the perceived gaps in provision based on engagement with an array of industry stakeholders. The report derives from a consultation undertaken with an independent working group of eight people who have various engagement in sport in the United Kingdom as well as a substantial number of sport sector stakeholders. This 'consultation' was compiled into a government configuration of welfare and a set of priorities for the sector going forward. While the report represents a standard component of policymaking processes, by attempting to address mass concerns and be universally applicable, the report offers no alternative presentation (essentially, for instance, it establishes a set of relatively inflexible criteria, expectations, and imperatives that most suit the government's existing regulatory and governance frameworks). Here, while not (yet) legally enforced, the recommendations are designed to be set against existing funding provision, and thus organisations that do not appear to comply with the recommendations run the risk of losing future financial support. Beyond the funding consequences, there are more fundamental issues at play. The report does not, in the first instance, fully recognise the extant provisions with regard to welfare, care, support, and specifically transitions (i.e. formally established programmes, wider academic debates, and research about what works and what doesn't) and furthermore does not present an evaluation/data of the 'success'/'value' of existing programmes. Although there may be possibilities for organisations to engage with the recommendations on their own terms, there is still a broad sweeping ethos that the issues contained within will be

of relevance to all organisations. Out of this assumption about a shared experience comes the related assumption about an obligation to care and demonstrate a commitment to *this* version of welfare. In so doing, the DOCSR does not necessarily recognise the historical and evolutionary trajectories that some sport organisations have been on with respect to local, regional, and/or national development, resourcing, and capacity or, for that matter, existing inequalities that may inhibit care capacities. Finally, the burden/responsibility appears to be placed on the organisation, with far less emphasis on athletes' and/or other sport constituents' responsibilities.

Congruent with the State's funding of the sector, the DOCSR closely links organisational adherence and compliance to performance funding accountability measures. There is recognition that some of the recommendations will have implications for organisations' resources, yet, in lieu of the government being forthcoming with funding, the expectation is that organisations will have to prioritise; the paradox created is that if organisations do not have the capacity to meet imperatives, there may be funding implications.

Organisations provide athletes with opportunities, assistance, and resources in training and performance. However, there is a limit to some organisations' resources to extend beyond the 'fundamental' aspects of performance (i.e. to include transitions to retirement, life skills training). This may be the case with state-funded national federations and clubs, whereby performance funding mechanisms are outcome based and remain subject to strict monitoring and evaluation criteria. In many cases, the direct agendas of the organisation may relate to the maintenance of their high-performance programmes in this first instance and then to subsidiary activities (for example, youth development, community outreach, and corporate social responsibility agendas – all of which are aimed at indirectly aiding the organisation in some way). The resource capacity of organisations to contribute to work and initiatives beyond these considerations may be a challenge due to financial constraints and/or limited due to organisational priorities. For example, in non-Western contexts, organisations may have limited or no capacity for the type and standard of welfare provision that have come to be expected in the United Kingdom and other Western nations. The normal recourse for these sport organisations is to defer welfare support to the international federation initiatives, athlete unions, and/or organisations such as the IOC. The point here is to respect that welfare concerns and responsibilities have expanded to include a wide variety of issues, duties, and contexts that sport organisations are now being asked to confront.

We acknowledge that there are connections between wider discussions of welfare in sport and, of note, specific welfare practices such as safeguarding and child protection which are legal requirements of sport organisations in the United Kingdom. This may be the case with state-funded national federations and clubs, whereby performance funding mechanisms are outcome based and remain subject to strict monitoring and evaluation criteria. In many cases, the direct agendas of the organisation may relate to the maintenance of their high-performance programmes in this first instance and then to subsidiary activities (for example, youth development, community outreach, and corporate social responsibility agendas – all of which are aimed at indirectly aiding the organisation in some way). Regardless, the DOCSR sets forth a clear State-driven agenda for sector change.

A few aspects of the DOCSR that illustrate organisational burdens and responsibilities are worth detailing. In the first instance, the review calls on the government to implement infrastructure changes – the most notable includes establishing a commission that would create clear industry standards and benchmarks related to care provision, build communication and pastoral support pathways (including a focus on athlete transitions), revise legislation, and improve stakeholder representation and participation (Grey-Thompson, 2017). The report also calls on sports organisations to forge better relations with those involved in sport at all levels and ensure greater support throughout individuals' sport experiences (Grey-Thompson, 2017).

The DOCSR provides an attempt at a comprehensive solution that appeals to a wide array of stakeholders and best reflects the diversity of welfare issues evidenced within and across the sector. In so doing, the review has essentially created a range of key delivery areas and imperatives to be addressed. While there is some overlap between items, the issue with such compartmentalisation is that it constructs a formal relationship between the objectives, delivery, measurement, and evaluation. Some national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) have engaged in the consultation process informing the report, and it is likely that NGBs see the report, the issues, and the priorities and processes it highlights as important. Yet there remains a danger that some NGBs reading the report approach ‘welfare’ as a tick-box exercise to ensure the continuation of funding. Although not ideal, given the context in which NGBs face increased pressures to deliver a wider array of services and products to their constituents (and thus may make delivery decisions based on their own economies, efficiencies, and resources), a tick-box mentality makes some sense.

Further concerns here relate to communication, perception, and practice. For example, little is yet known about the report’s dissemination, reception, and the mechanisms needed to enhance and maximise engagement among NGBs and stakeholders. In addition, it is unclear as to how NGBs may receive, interpret, and implement the report’s recommendations. Given the DOCSR’s universality, there is also a possibility that NGB congruence and adherence may be lost, or at least diminished, as organisations engage with the report on their own terms and respond to the recommendations that most appropriately reflect their resources, vision, and capacity (Girginov, 2017; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011; Tacon & Walters, 2016). Finally, the use of such directives neglects to recognise the work that some NGBs might already be doing or have done in relation to athlete welfare. Although the report has positioned care and welfare in measurable ways, conceptually, it is worth considering how care might be defined, understood, and operationalised within sport. Much as the report indicates, care is recognised as a key component of sport culture. Within this, athlete transitions are crafted as a key time in which organisations need to demonstrate care *in situ*. Accordingly, it is useful to think about the cultural structures and assumptions upon which this provision of care may be based and the implications this might have for NGBs in addressing duties, obligations, and expectations regarding athlete transitions.

To summarise, the DOCSR review is *one example* of an institutional response to global sport welfare discourse. Within the United Kingdom, the review shows the potential roles and responsibilities stakeholders may take/need to take in addressing welfare and care provision complexities. The review recognises that transitions are a time of insecurity and emotional vulnerability and uncertainty. While athletes may require care at all points of their careers, transitions are periods in which there may be heightened emotions and vulnerability. Ergo, there may exist a perception that organisations should care more or that care should be *more evident* in relations with athletes. Demonstrations of care may be seen as an effective means to resolve emotional turmoil. Yet, and to rehearse earlier arguments about organisational burdens, it is important to recognise athlete transition care exists within a broad remit of organisational welfare and care provision. Thus, it is useful at this juncture to raise further questions about care, its place within organisational cultures, and also the underlying ethical dimension of care (which in sport is underpinned by assumptions vis-à-vis the sport ethic, fraternity, nostalgia, legacy, and stewardship).

### Understanding a care ethic within welfare provision

Within critiques of sport organisational welfare, discussions have not yet attended to care ethics as a constituent of provision. Focus has, rather, been on examining the underlying intentions of initiatives and the practicalities of their contents (Dimoula *et al.*, 2013; Stambulova *et al.*,

2007). Nonetheless, a concern for care ethics (evident in other sectors such as health, social care, and welfare) can be adopted to understand how care may be evidenced within sport organisational practices and what value demonstrating care may have in enhancing relations between organisations and their constituents. In terms of how relationships are conceived in this context, theorists remind us that all human (and by extension business) relationships are imbued with moral obligations. More specifically, while moral obligations may vary between parties, there are inherently individual and collective values, ideals, and beliefs that warrant respecting, protecting, and nurturing (Pettersen, 2011; Tronto, 1993). Care also entails values related to respect, dignity, fundamental rights, and civic duties. Fundamental to an ethics of care, theorists argue, is a universal commitment to human flourishing, condemnation of exploitation and hurt, and conviction to do no harm (Pettersen, 2011). Although not an explicit component of sport organisations' current practices, care essentially matters because it reiterates the importance of human empathy and understanding that lays at the heart of interaction. In essence, care cannot be divorced from sport organisations' athlete business. In giving attention to care within welfare discourse, it is thus possible to understand and appreciate that sport organisational work is not ethics or value-free but rather comprises (or should comprise) moral and ethical dimensions and virtue positions. It is necessary to recognise here, however, that caring is not a unilateral process. Rather, the notion and practice of care require an acknowledgement that each party (in this case the sport organisation and athlete) possesses independent ethical positions (which may vary considerably) and understands their moral obligations and responsibilities differently and thus requires respect and protection. It may be possible that sport organisations appreciate that care ethic matters in their work. Yet, as far as current programmes suggest, it remains uncertain as to how genuine this care is or whether care is used as a proxy for ulterior means and ends (i.e. good governance accountability, monitoring and evaluation maxims, or to achieve funding imperatives). Given these concerns, and guided by theoretical criticism of care ethics, we contend that care is not just a practice (i.e. welfare is not just something that is 'done' by an organisation to athletes). Rather, care is a disposition and not an act performed for bureaucratic measure. Furthermore, we argue care is something that should be *evidenced* across organisational systems and processes and *felt* by its constituents in their day-to-day working lives and experiences. Welfare, for example, should be part of an organisational-athlete state of relations, embedded in the ethos as opposed to something that is 'done' to athletes as part of organisational bureaucracy.

We recognise that our argument starts from a philosophical (and perhaps idealistic) standpoint. We appreciate, also, that there is a futility and fragility in being able to 'capture' an affective concept (for extended discussion of conceptual conundrums, see Hughes, Kohe & Purdy, 2019). Here, a natural inclination is a recourse to employ the language of measurement and quantification to ascribe a 'meaningful' value to care that might be easily understood. These caveats withstanding, what we take interest in is how sports organisations might engage with holistic characteristics of care and create a context in which a recognised/recognisable shared set of values can be articulated, understood, and respected in a meaningful way.

Tronto's (1993) work is of use in understanding the complexities of care and organisational responsibilities, attitudes, and activities to care. It reminds us that caring comprises both rational explications of needs and emotional sympathy (two principles that are not readily explicated in sport organisations' welfare approaches). Tronto (1993) raises questions with respect to care, in particular: Who are the caregivers? What relations exist between the carer and the care-recipient (Tronto has less consideration for care as a bilateral process)? Who holds responsibilities, and how are those responsibilities enacted? What conflicts emerge? Nonetheless, Tronto encourages us to analyse our own activities of care and critically examine the consequences that care dynamics have in organisational settings and relations. Within these examinations, there must

be an evaluation of the stakeholders' values and expectations (i.e. in our case, athletes, sports workers, sport organisations' approaches regarding the conceptualisation and practice of care).

The potential uncertainty of transitional moments for athletes means this is a juncture at which sport organisations may need to demonstrate greater attention to care. At present, sport organisations provide a range of support mechanisms for athletes (e.g. the IOC's Athlete365 programme and the corporate Athlete Career Transition [ACT] programme – discussed subsequently). Moreover, this work is becoming representative of what care looks like in the industry. With respect to evidencing care within transitional moments, athletes' individual situations may be complex and idiosyncratic. Therefore, what sport organisations have done (at least in the examples we illustrate subsequently) is simplify the practice of care to ensure the 'greatest good for the greatest number'. Inherently, universal care is not the same, necessarily, as the sort of bespoke care that some athletes desire. Nonetheless, sport organisations are having to find some middle ground in determining the extent of universal care coverage and a responsiveness to specific athletes' personal needs. Transitional services, at present, are evidence of the blurred lines/tightrope that organisations are having to negotiate.

### 'Caring' practice

In the media, a call has been made by professional athletes across a number of sports for organisations to better respond to their needs and experiences by providing specific care and welfare structures. Such structures cannot, nonetheless, just exist in the ether of discussion but rather must take tangible form(s) that can be seen, understood, engaged with, and evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in addressing athlete concerns. To these ends, some sport organisations have invested substantially in developing defined programmes, strategies, and initiatives related to transitions (and relatedly employment, dual careers, and retirement) that directly speak to athletes' concerns, provide discernible content with which they can engage, and have outcomes that may be visibly recognised and/or have a clear meaning for athletes' individual lives. However, what seems to have transpired is that in trying to provide 'appropriate' support for the masses, sport organisations (for example, the IOC) have had to overgeneralise, stereotype, and decontextualise in order to make programmes relevant to the widest possible cohort and be able to be utilised by a broad range of sport federations and NOCs. This approach has, invariably, been effective in fulfilling the IOC's obligations as a leading sport entity and agendas toward appeasing and placating athletes' concerns and wider public and political scrutiny. Moreover, in the absence of welfare and career programmes at the local and national levels, or where athletes deem existing domestic programmes insufficient, the IOC's approach may provide a suitable option or substitute. Similarly, these macro-scale programmes may be considered a complementary resource to fill in knowledge and practical gaps in information that local organisations may be unable to provide. Irrespective of intention, scope, and applicability in addressing contemporary concerns about athletes' welfare and wider career trajectories, questions may still be asked about the ethical intentions of the organisation and meaningfulness of the programme's reception.

To understand the general scope and nature of existing provisions regarding athlete welfare related to career transitions, it is useful to look at a few key features. In the IOC's flagship initiative Athlete365, for example, there is an explicit focus on career transitions and providing athletes with generic knowledge, skills, and attributes deemed of value in future employment (see IOC, 2018). While athletes may dip in/out of this programme in varied ways, the starting point for stimulating reflection, introspection, and discussion is in the tapping into athletes' mental health and providing reassurance, particularly related to identity crises, feelings of loss

and despair, sense of belonging, lack of direction, emotional instability, depression, and anxiety. Subsequently, as part of this reality check, Athlete365 encourages athletes to turn these potentially negative yet natural experiences and thoughts to positive means and ends vis-à-vis career development and employment. As such, in addition to providing opportunities for athletes to participate in online professional development workshops and utilise training ‘tool kits’ and psychometric self-reflection exercises, there is an emphasis on encouraging the athlete to develop/work on personal attributes (i.e. ‘resilience’, ‘coping’, ‘adaptability’, risk mitigation, and appropriate ‘mindsets’) that may serve them during dual-career phases and/or at transitional points. Athlete365 also encourages athletes to be proactive and recognise their existing resources, to take advantage of their ‘networks’, and to facilitate connections to business and industry.

There is a distinction between international or national federation-level programmes and those offered by private entities. External providers, for example, have developed a relatively comprehensive suite of programmes and initiatives to ease athlete transitions. One example, the Athlete Career Transition programme (ACT, n.d., see [www.athletecareertransition.com/](http://www.athletecareertransition.com/)), moves beyond the provision of online resources that engage athletes in consideration of career transitions (i.e. Athlete365) and provides an individualised, face-to-face programme. Using connections between the athletes and employers who are part of the network, ACT draws upon psychometric testing that is utilised to identify options and opportunities for future careers. Working with partner organisations in a variety of industries around the globe, ACT focuses on mobilising the transition from sport to a future career. The approach has been to treat welfare as something that can be assessed/evaluated (by way of psychometric tests), ‘understood’, and ‘managed’. Here, care can be conceptualised as the athlete being appropriately equipped with the personal and professional skills that enable them to manoeuvre beyond sport and transition successfully into a defined career. In this context, care equates to, and is framed as, ‘support’, ‘guidance’, individualised mentorship, effective network building, and (positive) career success.

There are evident advantages for athletes engaging in the ACT programme in terms of having access to a supportive, bespoke, and caring transition process. First, the programme goes beyond that of the IOC’s Athlete365 initiative, as it addresses the need for increased social support by providing athletes with access to, and encouragement to develop, appropriate employment/industry networks. For athletes, this is potentially empowering, as they can feel a greater degree of agency in their own post-sport trajectory. The professional and personal skills being developed in the programme, for example, may give athletes confidence and a sense of security and ownership over what resources they currently have at their disposal, what responsibilities they can take in determining their own destiny, and what that destiny might ultimately look like. The emphasis in the programme is not necessarily ensuring a smooth transition but on identifying/equipping athletes with a suitable skill set that aids the way they experience whatever type of transition they may be presented with. As stated on its website, “ACT have also developed a transition assistance program[me] that works constantly with the athlete to mentally prepare the athlete for their transition”.

While ACT’s bespoke approach has merit, transition care has a financial cost that may make it prohibitive to a wider audience of athletes and sports organisations who could benefit from such a programme. Furthermore, the programme appears to be heavily based on psychometric testing that codifies the transition process into a series of understandable variables (i.e. things that can be measured and assessed). Consequently, care is reduced to something that can be easily delivered within the parameters of either organisation budgets or, in the case of ACT, as part of an economically rationalised, commercialised business product.

To produce a financially sustainable care service, organisations have had to rationalise and bureaucratise what the offer of care is, and, as a result of this, assumptions have had to be made (i.e. that athletes' career transitions and careers may be linear/logical). There is the possibility that organisations' transitional care responses overplay the role of formal employment, which may limit alternate ways of thinking about athletes' development. Furthermore, such an approach may be limiting in how it frames employment outside of Western cultures or Western-derived employment models. Notions of work, identity, progression, development, family and community responsibilities, time, and age are culturally relative. As such, these particularly structured approaches may not coalesce with athletes' individual world views. The relevance of culturally resonant programmes that better reflect or engage with nuances of identity and community, and more broadly epistemology, has already been highlighted by some scholars who note the incorporation of culturally cognisant concepts within professional athlete development as a means for organisations to demonstrate improved rapport and care (Erueti & Palmer, 2017). We concur with Erueti and Palmer (2017) on the value of such approaches, yet there remains scope for further work in this area.

## Conclusion

A particular notion of athlete welfare has become normalised in sport-sector discussions and in the literature. In this chapter, we have expressed a concern that current initiatives will continue to result in approaches becoming institutionalised, standardised, and bureaucratized to the extent that if organisations do not subscribe to these programmes (or at least provide an indication that they intend to do so), they are deemed to be failing their athletes. There are overlaps here with the increased interest and pressure being placed within and across some organisations with respect to 'good governance' and, in particular, notions of ethical responsibility, transparency, accountability, and stakeholder representation and participation (i.e. greater inclusion of athletes within the organisation). This discourse has become reductionist and restrictive to thinking about welfare and care ethics in ways that may be more holistic and that exist beyond the current provision of formally prescribed programmes. We advocate for a broader understanding of athlete welfare and a conceptualisation of care that advances sport-sector welfare debates and approaches. Subscribing to more nuanced readings of care may be helpful, we suggest, in informing how we understand sport organisations' capacities and the limitations that may influence athlete transition experiences. The call now is to find ways that athlete-centred and responsible organisational welfare approaches may coalesce more *carefully*.

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