



Monika Kørre

Motivation and Basic Needs Satisfaction of
Norwegian Nordic Skiers Attending NCAA
Division 1 Schools as Student-Athletes

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Abstract

Background:

Every year, Norwegian junior skiers travel to the United States to pursue athletic careers in combination with higher education as student-athletes at U.S. colleges. Yet, there is very little information on the phenomenon within the skiing community. This study was conducted to gain insight into college athletics through the actual experiences of Norwegian student-athletes in hopes of better assisting future talents as they explore this opportunity.

Objective:

The aim of the study was to better understand (1) the phenomenon of collegiate athletics and why Norwegian skiers are motivated to pursue careers as student-athletes at U.S. colleges, and (2) how these student athletes (SAs) perceived their basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness to have been satisfied during their time as student-athletes.

Method:

The phenomenon of collegiate athletics and why Norwegians are pursuing it was studied through a literature study and through semi-structured qualitative in-depth interviews with eight Norwegian SAs on Nordic skiing scholarships at American colleges. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) was the theoretical inspiration for this study.

Results:

Despite a challenging start all of the SAs of this study were highly satisfied with their year/years as SAs. Common positive traits that stood out to each of them were (i) how highly they valued the team structure within college sports and (ii) the need support they received through this system. The need for relatedness seemed to be satisfied more so than the other basic needs. Further, the personal growth the SAs experienced and the way they were able to integrate the American values associated with college sports were of great importance to the SAs. When it comes to the SAs' coaches, that aspect of their time as SAs was the greatest down side of their overall experience, with 6 of the 8 SAs being disappointed in their coaches' knowledge and ability to develop them as athletes. Despite that disappointment, all eight of the SAs recommend the opportunity to be a SA to others based upon their overall experience and not solely upon athletics alone.

Conclusion:

All of the SAs shared that they were highly motivated to be college student athletes, but that the motivation was attributable to the overall experience and not skiing alone. Being SAs gave them new perspectives and helped them realize there's more to life than athletics.

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1 Introduction and Background

This study is concentrating on the lived experiences of Norwegian Nordic skiers pursuing careers as Student-Athletes (SAs) at American colleges. The aim of the study is twofold: (1) to better understand the phenomenon of collegiate athletics and why Norwegian skiers are motivated to pursue careers as student-athletes (referred to as SAs), and (2) to better understand how these SAs perceive their basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness to be satisfied. Eight Norwegian junior skiers, each pursuing combined athletic and academic careers through The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), were assessed and analyzed in this study. Qualitative in-depth interviews were the method for data generation.

Aim one (1) of the study was to gain general knowledge about the phenomenon of college athletics in the United States, mainly through a literature study. This analysis can be read in sections 2-5. In addition, information was obtained through in-depth interviews with the Norwegian SAs, focusing on what it is like being a SA. The overall goals of these interviews were to better understand what life as a SA truly entails and what motivates the Norwegian SAs to become full time students and athletes at American colleges. To date, there is very limited information on this Norwegian athletic trend.

Aim two (2) of the study was to get under the surface and better understand how being an international SA in the U.S., under different social-contextual conditions than in Norway, influenced their motivation to be both athletes and students and how this, in turn, contributed to or diminished their overall well-being. The elements of (1) the level in which the SAs found their coaches needs supportive, (2) their perceived level of personal competence, (3) the level in which the SAs felt a sense of belonging at their respective colleges, and (4) The level in which the SAs felt their teammates to be needs supportive were studied. When satisfied, all of these elements contribute to psychological well-being and optimal functioning (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). This part of the study was inspired by the Self Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985). However, the interview guide was developed in such a way so that it wasn't entirely based on SDT, but was instead merely inspired by it. The interview guide was created so that information falling outside the scope of the theory would not get lost and so that the interview subjects would not infer that I only wanted information on basic needs. Therefore, I intended for the interview subjects to be unaware of the specific theory inspiring parts of the interview guide.

The reason why I gained interest in the phenomenon of U.S. college-athletics is because I work as a Nordic skiing coach, coaching Norwegian junior skiers. During my four years of coaching, this topic has been raised several times among my athletes and colleagues. Some athletes are showing interest in the opportunity, as they've perceived, through social media, other Norwegian skiers seemingly having a good time as student-athletes. However, they lack information and insight to the phenomenon and what it means to be a SA. The Norwegian Ski Federation similarly lacks adequate information, claiming that it has no formal contact with the colleges offering Nordic skiing programs and that it does not know much about what college athletics entails. As Per Nymoene, who has been employed with the Norwegian Ski Federation for the past 37 years, states: «The Norwegian Ski Federation has never had any involvement in this, there's always been a direct contact between the universities and the athletes themselves» (P. Nymoene, Personal communication, October 25th, 2017). He continues by explaining that he never really understood the idea of college-athletics, despite several visits to the American embassy in Norway in an attempt to better understand. Pål Rise, the current education consultant in the Norwegian Ski Federation, agrees with Nymoene's claim and confirms that there is no formal contact with the universities and that there is no existing information regarding Norwegian skiers on scholarships in the US. (P. Rise, Personal communication, October 25th, 2017). However, Rise expressed interest in learning more about college-athletics and whether there is a way in which the Norwegian Ski Federation can better assist Norwegian SAs in the future.

This project has the potential of providing valuable insight with respect to the phenomenon of U.S. college-athletics, which could prove valuable to prospective SAs, their coaches and the Norwegian Ski Federation.

2 Description of Topic: College Athletics

The aim of the study is to better understand U.S. collegiate athletics and the life of Norwegian student-athletes on Nordic skiing scholarships at American colleges. To better understand their experiences as student-athletes, we need to first consider the governing body controlling and overlooking college athletics in the United States. As an overview, college athletics in the U.S. are sanctioned by one of the following collegiate sport governing bodies: The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), The National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), or the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). The largest of them, and the most competitive, is the NCAA, with more than 1,100 member

institutions (NCAA, 2017c). All of the student-athletes interviewed for this study are enrolled at colleges governed by the NCAA; therefore, the NCAA will be the governing body of focus in this study.

2.1 Understanding The NCAA

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is a membership-driven, non-profit organization dedicated to the well-being of student-athletes and to equipping them with the skills to succeed on the playing field, in the classroom and throughout life (NCAA, 2004). When the NCAA was founded in 1906, the core of its mission and reason for existence was to keep college athletes safe (Smith, 2000). Facing more than eighteen deaths and one hundred major injuries in intercollegiate football the year before, concerns were rising regarding the need to control intercollegiate athletics. In response to this concern, President Roosevelt called for a White House conference, inviting officials from the major football programs to review football rules. This conference led to the formation of a rules committee, and the combined efforts of educators and the White House led to the reformation of football rules and to the formation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association (IAA). In 1910, the IAA was renamed the NCAA. Initially, the NCAA was formed to formulate rules that could be applied to the various intercollegiate sports for the safety of student-athletes (Smith, 2000). Today, this work continues, but the scope has been greatly expanded and noticeably improved since the initial foundation, all to ensure that students-athletes are protected, both physically and mentally, on and off the field (as I will get back to).

The term “student-athlete” refers to a student who is member of an intercollegiate squad that is under the jurisdiction of the institution’s athletics department (NCAA, 2017a). In other words, student-athletes are college students who also represent their colleges as athletes by being members of an organized competitive sports team sponsored by the educational institution in which he or she is enrolled. As implied by the term, student-athletes have to balance the dual roles of being a full-time-student and an athlete. Performing in both arenas simultaneously can be very difficult, as each role, standing on its own, requires hard work and demands a lot of time. This difficulty is reflected in the NCAA’s 2015 GOALS study, which concluded that mental health concerns, such as anxiety and depression, are increasing among student-athletes, with about 30 percent self-reporting that they had been intractably overwhelmed within the past month (NCAA, 2015). However, the NCAA is working to address this growing issue, as is reflected in the organization’s mission and core values.

Together with the approximately 1,100 member institutions, the NCAA national office works to support nearly half a million college athletes each year, with a primary focus on helping athletes succeed academically, enhancing their well-being and creating a fair and inclusive environment for student-athletes to flourish (NCAA, 2017a). The NCAA headquarters, located in Indianapolis, IN., is where the national office works to create policies and rules for member institutions, with the overriding goal to «govern competition in a fair, safe, equitable and sportsmanlike manner, and to integrate intercollegiate athletics into higher education so that the educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount» (NCAA, 2004, p.3). With some exceptions, the member institutions generally ultimately decide which rules to adopt and implement on their college campuses.

2.1.1 Core Values

To stay true to its mission, clearly defined values have been developed at the NCAA headquarters. These values are set forth in the NCAA's *Strategic Plan* (2004). In this document, the NCAA presents seven core values that permeate the policies and rules it develops from time to time: 1) *The collegiate model* serves as a guide of athletics in which students participate as an avocation, balancing their academic, social and athletics experiences; 2) The highest levels of integrity and sportsmanship; 3) The pursuit of excellence in both academics and athletics; 4) The supporting role that intercollegiate athletics plays in the higher education mission and in enhancing the sense of community and strengthening the identity of member institutions; 5) An inclusive culture that fosters equitable participation for student-athletes and career opportunities for coaches and administrators from diverse backgrounds; 6) Respect for institutional autonomy and philosophical differences; and 7) Presidential leadership of intercollegiate athletics at the campus, conference and national levels (p.3). In sum, The NCAA is an organization dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success of college athletes, on and off the field.

Knowing the governing organization's core values makes it obvious that college athletes need to be prepared to work hard both on the field and in the classroom. The two words "student" and "athlete" and their corresponding roles and demands cannot really be separated. SAs need to balance the two roles in order to desirably achieve excellence in both, as stated in the NCAA's core values (NCAA, 2004). However, it is worth mentioning that, between the two roles, it is clear that academics should receive top priority in the life of a college student-athlete. (as we will get back to in section 2.1.2 academics). Support, identity, respect and

autonomy are key characteristics for the member institutions to provide and achieve. These characteristics are key factors in helping to build a healthy and safe environment in which the student-athletes may flourish. To better understand how the NCAA works to stay true to its core values, I am now going to share the NCAA's top priorities with respect to its student-athletes: *academics, well-being and fairness.*

2.1.1.1 Academics

The NCAA emphasizes the importance of academic achievements and success in the classroom with the ultimate goal of graduating student-athletes. The reason why academics is one of its top priorities, the NCAA makes note of the hard reality of professional sports:

There are more than 480,000 NCAA student-athletes, and fewer than 2 percent will go pro in their sport. For the rest, the experiences of college athletics and the life lessons they learn along the way will help them as they pursue careers in business, education, athletics administration, communication, law, medicine and many more fields. Education is a vital part of the college athletics experience, and student-athletes treat it that way. (NCAA, 2017c, p.5).

As a reflection of the fact that academics are the top priority for athletes, and to ensure that student-athletes are prepared to succeed in college, the NCAA Division I set academic initial-eligibility standards that must be achieved in order for an athlete to be accepted as a student-athlete in college. These standards take into account GPA (grade point average), standardized test scores, core courses taken in high school and the grades earned in those core courses. (NCAA, 2017c). (more on this in section 2.1 Initial-eligibility standards).

While in college, student-athletes have to commit to academic achievement and the pursuit of a degree, and they are required to meet yearly standards in order to remain eligible to compete, called "progress-toward-degree" requirements. The aim of the progress-toward-degree requirements is to guide student-athletes towards graduation, ensuring that they take the appropriate steps to earn their degree. To control the student-athletes' academic progress, the following three measures are tracked: grades, minimum credit hours per year and progress toward earning a degree: «To be eligible to represent an institution in intercollegiate athletics competition, a student-athlete shall be enrolled in at least a minimum full-time program of studies, be in good academic standing and maintain progress toward a baccalaureate or equivalent degree» (NCAA, 2017a, p. 157). A heightened focus on academics and success in the classroom seems to be creating desirable results, as the NCAA (2017d) reports higher

graduating rates among student-athletes. The Division I Graduation Success Rate (GSR) was as high as 87 percent in 2017 (2017d), which is an increase of more than 13% since 2002 (NCAA, 2017b).

The factors influencing the rise in graduating rates can be many and varied, but what it does tell us is that the vast majority of student-athletes have been motivated to work hard both academically and athletically. Meeting the eligibility requirements in order to be able to compete and eventually graduate with a college degree does not come without a cost. The demands are very high to effectively balance the two roles of being a student and an athlete, but the NCAA is aware and works diligently, along with member universities, to assist throughout the process.

2.1.1.2 Student-Athlete Well-Being

To help student-athletes balance the two roles, the second core value of the NCAA is student-athlete well-being. It is clearly stated in the NCAA Division I manual that «Intercollegiate athletics programs shall be conducted in a manner designed to protect and enhance the physical and educational well-being of student-athletes» (2017a, p.15). One important tool in this regard is the regulation of the time required of student-athletes for participation in intercollegiate athletics so that it doesn't interfere with their academic pursuits. A Division I student-athlete's participation in athletically related activities are limited to a maximum of four hours per day and 20 hours per week (NCAA, 2017a). Despite this requirement, however, the NCAA's 2015 GOALS study showed that the reality of student-athletes' lives is somewhat different. This study showed that the median time actually spent on athletics for Division I student-athletes was 34 hours per week, well above the stated 20 hours maximum. This time, in combination with the reported median amount of time spent on academics of 38.5 hours per week, makes for a very busy life for most student athletes. These time commitments can be difficult to handle, and they can leave the SA's feeling there is not enough hours in a day. Despite NCAA regulations, coaches' expectations might influence student-athletes as well. A study by Eitzen (2012) showed that, in the eyes of many athletes and coaches, the athletic role supersedes the student role. Regardless, the pressure to perform in both arenas simultaneously is the reality of a student-athlete's life. The time demands are prevalent across the board. 66 percent of female student-athletes and 59 percent of male student-athletes reported they would prefer to spend more time on academics (NCAA, 2015). This desire persists despite the reported increased amount of time spent on both athletics and

academics since the 2010 GOALS study. The reported median time spent on academics in the 2010 Goals study was 35.5 hours per week (NCAA, 2010) compared to the reported 38.5 in 2015 (NCAA, 2015). The reported time spent on athletics also increased in this 5-year timephrame between the studies, increasing from 32 hours per week (NCAA, 2010) to 34 hours per week (NCAA, 2015). These increases have, in turn, resulted in a decreased amount of time for family, friends and just relaxing, with nearly two-thirds of men and three-quarters of women expressing a desire for more opportunities to visit home and family (NCAA, 2015).

With these statistics in mind, the establishment-and maintenance of a safe and supportive environment can be seen as possibly the NCAA's and their member institutions' most important work. Being the governing body of college-athletics, the NCAA states that it is the responsibility of each member institution to establish such environments to protect and enhance the physical and educational well-being of student-athletes. Positive athletic environments are to: value cultural diversity and gender equity; protect the health of, and provide a safe environment for, student-athletes; foster a positive relationship between the student-athlete and coach; value fairness, openness and honesty; and all coaches and administrators are to exhibit these values in their relationships with student-athletes; and involve student-athletes in matters that affect their lives (NCAA, 2017a). These two core values lead us to the third core value of the NCAA: fairness and integrity.

2.1.1.3 Fairness and Integrity

Fairness and integrity is the third core value / top priority of the organization. The NCAA states that «It is the responsibility of each member institution to conduct its athletics programs and manage its staff members, representatives and student-athletes in a manner that promotes the ideals of higher education and the integrity of intercollegiate athletics» (NCAA, 2017a, p.360). The ideals of higher education should promote respect, fairness, civility, honesty, responsibility, academic integrity and ethical conduct (NCAA, 2017a), which the NCAA, in turn, encourages its members to promote and which the NCAA regulates through its many recruiting, operations and other rules. These ideals are fundamental to the organization and they exist to be followed by all, with the ultimate goal of helping student-athletes succeed, not only during college, but after graduation as well. Success in life can be measured in many different ways, and the NCAA has chosen to measure success by focusing on lifelong well-being. To track former SAs' perception of well-being in life, the NCAA collaborated with Gallup Inc. to survey those who graduated from 1970-2014. Through web surveys, a random

sample of 29,560 former students earning a bachelor's degree in college responded. These respondents included 1,670 former NCAA student-athletes. Comparisons were made between the two groups, regular students and student-athletes, and the findings showed that former student athletes were more likely to be thriving in four out of the five well-being elements of focus in the study: 1) Purpose Well-Being (liking what you do each day and being motivated to achieve your goals); 2) Social Well-Being (Having strong and supportive relationships and love in your life); 3) Community Well-Being (The sense of engagement you have with the areas where you live, liking where you live and feeling safe and having pride in your community); and 4) Physical Well-Being (Having good health and enough energy to get things done on a daily basis) (Gallup, 2014). The results of the study are promising, so let's take a closer look at what exactly is being done by the NCAA in an attempt to enhance lifelong well-being among SAs.

One way in which the NCAA works in an attempt to enhance SA success in life is to focus on encouraging and enabling athletes to get the most out of their full college experience. To help SAs with this goal, and a change that might be a reaction to the results of the 2015 GOALS study, Division I recently, in 2017, increased the flexibility in eligibility rules (NCAA, 2017a). Among other things, this increased flexibility allows student-athletes to more easily pursue internships and opportunities to study abroad, giving them the freedom to pursue more life experiences while being SAs. Other ways in which the NCAA endeavors to provide a fair, inclusive and fulfilling environment while in college are through the many established programs at college campuses across the nation. NCAA student-athlete advisory committees (SAACs) exist at the campus, conference and national level. These committees are made up of student-athletes assembled to provide insight on the student-athlete experience and offer input on the rules, regulations and policies that affect student-athletes' lives on campus. Through SAACs SAs are given a voice in NCAA decision making processes, reflecting one of the NCAA core commitments of involving student-athletes in matters that affect their lives.

The NCAAs' focus on academics, student-athlete well-being, and fairness and integrity appears to be successful based on the NCAA 2015 survey that found that as many as 90 percent of former student-athletes, surveyed 10 years after finishing their eligibility, reported they were satisfied with their overall college experience (NCAA, 2015).

2.2 Why Play College Sports

As seen, the NCAA has programs and rules in place aimed at giving student-athletes a good college experience and preparing them for the future. Research shows that the vast majority of student-athletes are satisfied with their overall college experience (NCAA, 2015). We will now take a closer look at the potential benefits of playing college sports.

First and foremost, the most obvious benefit of playing college sports is that it provides student athletes with the opportunity to earn a college degree, which is a particularly valuable benefit for people who would not otherwise be able to get into college or who do not otherwise have the means to pay for college. A college degree can positively impact the future of student-athletes. Differences in the earnings and employment patterns of U.S. adults with different levels of education were documented in a report published by the College Board (2013) showing that the median lifetime earnings of bachelor's degree recipients are 65 percent higher than those of high school graduates (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013).

Second, and as already discussed, academic success is a top priority of the NCAA and higher graduation rates have recently been reported among student athletes (NCAA, 2017d). The high graduation rates can be, at least partially, a reflection of the available academic support student-athletes are given, which support is the second benefit in participating in collegiate athletics. Special Tutoring, preferred course selection, state-of-the-art technology and other academic support is provided to help student-athletes succeed in the classroom, which support services are generally not provided to regular students.

Third, financial assistance, through scholarships, stipends and other means, can be another benefit of playing college sports. Each year, the NCAA Divisions I and II schools provide more than \$2.7 billion in athletics scholarships to more than 150,000 student-athletes (NCAA, 2017c), which may be limited to books and other smaller expenses and can extend to full tuition, fees, lodging, books, meals and other expenses. In addition to direct financial support, these student-athletes have access to their institution's coaching services, to training facilities and equipment, and to treatment by the teams dedicated trainers and other health care providers. All of this financial and other support is provided to help the student-athlete attend the university, to help protect them, to lessen their stress, to enhance their ability to excel in the class room and to enhance their overall well-being. In addition, the NCAA is committed to student-athlete safety and to assisting student-athletes who experience catastrophic injuries

while playing or practicing their sports (NCAA, 2017a).

Fourth, being a student athlete provides a means by which the person, by being part of a team, can quickly develop friends and a place to belong in this new chapter in their life. College life, being away from home, can be a very challenging transition, and having a sport, friends and support can assist greatly in that transition. In addition, playing college sports may allow the athlete the opportunity to continue to do something they love, and it provides them with the chance to do it at the highest level in many cases.

Last, but not least, being a student-athlete can create exposure, relationships and experiences for a lifetime. As a student-athlete, you have the opportunity to travel across the country, and in some cases around the world, for regular-season contests, NCAA championships and foreign tours. These experiences can open doors for the few who will compete professionally and for the majority who will go pro in something other than sports. Results from the NCAA (2015) Goals study show that 90% of student-athletes felt their college athletic experience had a positive impact on increasing their personal responsibility, honing their teamwork skills, and enhancing their work ethic. High percentages also reported that college sports had a positive effect on their leadership skills, their values and ethics, self-confidence, time management, understanding of diverse cultures, study skills and commitment to volunteerism. Such learned skills can be significant tools for future success, on the field or in other areas of life.

3 Understanding the Process of Becoming a Student-Athlete

3.1 Initial-Eligibility Standards

As discussed, there can be many benefits from being a student-athlete, and not surprisingly, the competition and requirements to become one are high. In fact, only about 2 percent of high school athletes are awarded athletics scholarships to compete in college (NCAA, 2017c). Athletic talent and the interest of a college coach is not enough to qualify for a spot on a college team; academic and other requirements need to be met as well. As mentioned previously, to be able to play Division I college sports you have to meet initial-eligibility standards set by the NCAA. You have to graduate from high school where all of the following requirements are met: 1) Complete 16 NCAA core courses (only classes in English, math, natural or physical science, social science, foreign language, comparative religion or philosophy may be approved as NCAA core courses); 2) earn at least a 2.3 GPA (grade point

average, equivalent to letter grade C+) in these core courses; and 3) earn an SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) or ACT (American College Testing) score in which is matched with your core-course GPA to determine eligibility (NCAA, 2017c). The SAT and ACT are both standardized college admission tests in the United States. Students may take whichever test they prefer; however, the choice might be affected by the testing locations for the two tests. The aim of the tests is to show what the student has learned in high school and to determine whether the student has the skills colleges want and expect of the student. SAT and ACT test the same skills for the most part, except from one section. The SAT contains three sections: Reading, Math, and Writing and Language; while the ACT contains four sections: Reading, Math, English, and Science (NCAA, 2017c). If you have a low test score, you need a higher core-course GPA to be eligible. Conversely, if you have a low core-course GPA, you need a higher test score to be eligible. Prospective college student-athletes should keep these requirements in mind throughout high-school.

3.2 The Concept of Amateurism

To be eligible to play college sports, you also have to comply with the amateurism standards, meaning that, without exception, all incoming student-athletes must be certified as amateurs. «Student-athletes shall be amateurs in an intercollegiate sport, and their participation should be motivated primarily by education and by the physical, mental and social benefits to be derived» (NCAA, 2017a, p.4). It is the respective NCAA member schools that are responsible for certifying the amateur status of a prospective student-athlete.

The NCAA promotes amateurism to create a level playing field for all student-athletes, and they explicitly state that those who compete in college sports are students first and athletes second (NCAA, 2017a). The NCAA has, in recent years, implemented several academic reforms to increase student-athletes' academic achievement and degree progress, and these reforms have led to increased graduation rates (NCAA, 2015). However, satisfying academic achievements alone are not enough to obtain your amateur status. If you want to compete in NCAA sports at a Division I school, you also need to avoid the following activities: Signing a contract with a professional team; playing with professionals; participating in tryouts or practices with a professional team; accepting payments or preferential benefits for playing sports; accepting prize money above your expenses; accepting benefits from an agent or prospective agent; agreeing to be represented by an agent; and delaying your full-time college enrollment to play in organized sports competitions (NCAA, 2017c). The NCAA emphasizes

that college athletics is an avocation, and that student-athletes should be protected from exploitation by professional and commercial enterprises (NCAA, 2017a).

3.3 The Process of Becoming an International Student-Athlete

The Norwegian skiers included in this study are not the only international athletes pursuing careers as student-athletes. In total, across the three NCAA divisions, there are over 17,000 international student-athletes enrolled and competing at NCAA schools ("International Student-Athletes", 2017). For internationals to become student-athletes at U.S. colleges, the academic requirements (as presented in section 3.1) need to be met, and a non-immigrant status needs to be obtained. Obtaining this status can be a rather complex process; therefore, a brief overview of the process for prospective international SAs follows.

Once an international student begins the process of trying to become a student-athlete, whether after initiation by a college coach or initiation by an athlete pursuing the opportunity on his/her own, the NCAA Eligibility Center will be the organization facilitating the process of getting him/her approved/eligible to study in the U.S. (often mediated by the head or assistance coach of the prospective college team). This process can be long and confusing, and it is important to know that there is assistance available along the way. Once registered in the system as a prospective international student-athlete, the Eligibility Center sends out a welcome email to get you started with the initial-eligibility process and to provide specific information about the academic documents required from the athlete's country in order to be potentially accepted at a specific school ("International Student-Athletes", 2017). When applying to a school, the following academic documents must be submitted: 1) Transcripts for years nine and up in the native language; 2) proof of graduation in the native language, including certificates, diplomas or final leaving exams; and 3) certified, line-by-line, English translations of each of these documents if they are issued in a language other than English (NCAA, 2017c). In addition to academic credentials from years nine and up, international students also need to submit SAT or ACT scores as soon as they have been obtained. All international students are, just like any other student-athlete, required to adhere to the NCAA amateurism requirements to be eligible to compete in college sports.

The process of seeking acceptance at a specific school, based on an athlete's academic and athletic achievements, is the first step towards becoming a student-athlete. Another important step, which should be commenced as soon as being accepted to a U.S. college, is the application process for the U.S. F-1 student visa. All international students must apply for a

visa at the U.S. embassy or consulate designated in their country of residence. This visa must be obtained in order to live in the U.S. as an international student-athlete. Once you have been accepted by the U.S. school you plan to attend, a so-called Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) certified school (these are the schools eligible to enroll F-1 students in the United States), you will be enrolled in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Once enrolled in this system, you will be notified to pay the SEVIS I-901 Fee. After this fee has been paid, you will receive a Form I-20 from the designated school official (DSO). DSOs are dedicated employees at SEVP-certified schools who assist and oversee the enrollment of international students.

The Form I-20 is the student's «Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status – For Academic and Language Students» ("What is the Form I-20?", 2017). This form proves that the student is legally enrolled in a program of study in the United States, hence allowing the student to apply for an F-1 student visa. International students will receive the initial Form I-20 from their prospective school upon program acceptance, based on academic achievements, SAT / ACT scores and athletic achievements, as previously discussed. Once the Form I-20 has been issued to a student from a university DSO, the student can apply for the F-1 student visa, which upon issuance will allow the student to enter and live in the U.S. while studying. To apply for the F-1 student visa, the student should access the website of the U.S. embassy of the student's country of residence and schedule an appointment for the visa interview. The Form I-20 must be presented to the consular officer when the student attends his/her visa interview at the embassy. In terms of timing, a student must apply for his/her F-1 student visa at least 120 days before the date listed on the student's Form I-20 (the startup date of your studies). With these academic and non-immigrant status requirements in mind, all international prospective SAs should start the eligibility process well ahead of the proposed college start date.

Once a student has completed the visa process and has been accepted as an international student-athlete at a U.S. college, the student needs to remember to have his/her Form I-20, passport and F-1 student visa on hand upon entry into the U.S. A U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer will instruct you to present your documentation once you arrive at the airport. You may arrive up to 30 days before the date listed on your Form I-20 ("What is the Form I-20?", 2017). The Form I-20 must be kept throughout a student's college career and brought whenever a student travels internationally and presented at the U.S. border.

Playing sports at a U.S. college isn't considered employment, and the F-1 student visa rules permit international students to receive stipends and/or scholarships (more on this in section 3.4). However, requirements in terms of admission eligibility, financial ability and academic status must be upheld in order to maintain your immigration status throughout a student's college career ("International Student-Athletes", 2017).

The NCAA Eligibility Center or the Department of Homeland Security can be contacted for further information and guidance on the eligibility process.

3.4 College Scholarships

College tuition can be costly, and athletic scholarships exist to help student-athletes by providing funds to help pay for their college expenses. A 100 percent scholarship, a so called full grant-in-aid, fully covers the student-athlete's tuition and fees, room and board, books and other expenses related to attendance at the institution up to the cost of attendance (NCAA, 2017a). Such financial assistance creates significant opportunities for young adults wanting to play sports in college, regardless of background or economical standing. 53 percent of all Division I student athletes receive some level of financial aid (NCAA, 2017c).

To better understand how the distribution of athletic scholarships works, we need to address the three divisions of the NCAA. As mentioned in section 2., the NCAA is divided into three separate divisions: Division I, Division II and Division III. This three-division structure was adopted in 1973 to create a fair playing field for teams from similar schools in the areas of philosophy, competition and opportunity, and to provide college athletes more opportunities to participate in national championships (NCAA, 2017c). Among the three divisions, Division I schools generally have the biggest student bodies, manage the largest athletics budgets and offer the highest number of athletic scholarships (NCAA, 2017c). These schools have to commit to maintaining a high academic standard for student-athletes and a wide range of other opportunities for athletics participation (NCAA, 2017a). To date, approximately 350 colleges and universities are members of Division I, providing opportunities for more than 180,000 student-athletes to compete in their respective sports each year (NCAA, 2017c). As this study is focused on SAs attending NCAA Division I schools only, this division will be further addressed in detail. Schools that are Division I members offering Nordic skiing programs are allowed to provide up to eleven scholarships in total, with a maximum of six scholarships for men and seven for women. These scholarships can either be given to the exact number of skiers, as full-ride scholarship where the student-athletes receive the funds to

pay for tuition, books, and all other costs incurred while in college, or they can be divided up between the team members as partial scholarship, in which case students receive scholarships for only a portion of their costs. Providing partial scholarships allows colleges to give scholarships to more students. ("College Scholarship Opportunities for Students Who Competitively Ski", 2017). All student athletes are free to choose whichever course of study they desire, just like the rest of the student body. Being a student-athlete thus is a unique opportunity to combine a career as an athlete while simultaneously earning a degree within a topic of interest, without, in many cases, the need to incur any form of student loans. Despite all of the benefits derived from receiving scholarships, it is important to be aware of how scholarships might also adversely affect SAs intrinsic motivation (Ryan, 1977, 1980; Medic, Mack, Wilson & Starkes, 2007). This potential adverse effect will be further addressed in section 7.2.6

4 Understanding the Game - The NCAA Skiing Rules

Another important element to consider, vis a vis Nordic skiing, are the NCAA rules that apply to all sports and then specifically to Nordic skiing. There is an array of rules that apply to Nordic skiing in college.

First, there are rules governing the length of the playing season. In the NCAA Division I manual (2017), it is stated that the length of the NCAA member schools' playing season shall be limited to a 144-day season, and no competition or organized practice prior to September 7th, or prior to the school's first day of class of the fall term, is allowed. In addition, the season needs to be concluded by the last date of final examinations of the regular academic year at each respective school (NCAA, 2017a). Final examinations normally take place in April. Each sport is also limited to the general rule limiting the time committed to sports to a maximum of 4 hours per day and 20 hours per week (NCAA, 2017a).

Second, rules govern the number of competitions in which the SAs are allowed to compete during the season. An individual student-athlete is not allowed to participate in more than 16 dates of competition in skiing each academic year. In terms of two-day competitions, those events will count as one date out of the 16 allowed. The season ending tournaments, the NCAA championship and the Conference Championships are excluded from this rule and do not count towards the maximum allowance of competition dates (NCAA, 2017a).

Third, there are rules for how the schools score points in competitions. We need to keep in mind that college skiing is somewhat different than professional skiing and the World Cup series. In College skiing, the individual SAs will score points, counting towards the overall team score, making it more of a team sport. For regular-season events (counting towards the 16 dates allowance), up to six men and six women from a team may compete in the individual events for the team score, with the top 3 finishers out of these six, in each event, counting in the team scoring. Top 30 finishers earn points based on a weighted scoring system ranging from 40 points to be awarded to the first finisher and down to 1 point to the 30th finisher (Landstedt, 2017).

As for the NCAA Skiing Championship, the rules are somewhat different. This championship is the main event of the year, crowning the national champions, individually and by team scores. For this particular event, only the highest ranked athletes from each region get to compete, and no more than three student-athletes are eligible per gender, per discipline, per team. The team with the highest scoring, based on the points scored by each of the six individuals representing the specific school (three men and three women), are awarded with the NCAA team national championship title (Landstedt, 2017). The first NCAA skiing championship was held in 1954. Since then, the University of Denver has won the most titles, winning a total of 23 times. The University of Colorado is second with 20 titles, and The University of Utah is third with 11 NCAA championship titles. (NCAA, 2017e).

5 Norwegian Nordic Skiers as Division I Student-Athletes

The focus of this study is Norwegian Nordic skiers pursuing careers as student-athletes in the United States and to learn about their lived experiences. In my search to find possible candidates to be included in the study, I initially made an attempt at finding databases where information on student-athletes by nation might exist. However, this information was not easily accessible. I then contacted the Norwegian Ski Federation in hopes for them to give me information on Norwegian skiers pursuing a career abroad. But, as described in section 1, the Norwegian Ski Federation did not have any involvement in or information on this topic.

The solution, in my search to determine who could possibly be candidates to be included in my study, was found by visiting the individual colleges' websites. A total of 26 U.S. colleges offer Nordic skiing programs. I visited each of their websites, located the Nordic skiing team rosters and found the Norwegian SAs by reading the team members' bios. From this information, I then found that 9 out of the 26 colleges having Nordic skiing programs have

Norwegian skiers on them, and that the total number of Norwegian Nordic skiers on U.S. college teams, as of the season 2017/2018, is 26. Eight Norwegian, former or current, student-athletes are included in this study.

6 Research Needs

To date, no studies with a focus on the phenomenon of U.S. college athletics and Norwegian student athletes has been conducted. Searches were conducted at databases such as Oria, PubMed, SPORTDiscus, MEDLINE, and PsycINFO, among others. The lack of any in depth studies on this topic is why I see it as particularly important to take a closer look at this phenomenon and to gain insight to the lived experiences of Norwegian SAs. Synne Skauge Oliversen (2013) conducted a qualitative study on the combination of a Nordic skiing career and higher education in Norway, but no such study has been conducted on Norwegian skiers studying and skiing at American colleges. Despite the lack of research and knowledge, every year Norwegian junior skiers travel to the United States to pursue athletic careers in combination with higher education. To better assist future talents exploring this opportunity, more research should be conducted.

7 Theoretical Background and Central Terms

The theoretical inspiration for my Master's Thesis is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Next, I will explain why I was inspired by this theory and its relation to my study, and I will provide a description of the basics of the theory and other research relevant to the findings of my study.

7.1 Why Self-Determination Theory?

«Motivation is the foundation of sports performance and achievement. Without it, even the most talented athlete is unlikely to reach his or her full potential» (Duda & Treasure, 2015, p.57). According to Roberts (2001), «the study of motivation and its effect on achievement behavior is the investigation of the energization, direction and the regulation of behavior» (p.3). Contemporary research on motivation in sports shows that motivation is dependent not only on the athletes themselves and their psychological disposition, but also on the social environment in which they interact. The SAs experiences simply cannot be properly understood without considering the social environment in which they live, study, train and compete. The impact of the social environment might, in fact, be at the very core of the findings of this study, as the life of an international student-athlete in the U.S. is most likely

quite different than their life back home in Norway. In fact, the American culture as a whole might have contributed to the SA's feelings of needs satisfaction, as we will get back to later. As previously discussed, the NCAA's top priorities are to help student-athletes succeed academically, to enhance their well-being and to create a fair and inclusive environment for student-athletes to flourish (NCAA, 2017a). Creating a positive social environment for student-athletes to personally grow is a key goal in the work of the NCAA. I was interested in figuring out whether this goal was obtained by investigating the SAs lived experiences and perceptions of needs satisfaction leading to motivation and well-being.

As aim (1) one of this study was to better understand the phenomenon of U.S. college-athletics and why Norwegian skiers are motivated to pursue careers as student-athletes, several motivational theories were studied and evaluated prior to directly exploring the 8 subject Norwegian athletes. Many theories explaining the phenomenon of motivation exist, but two stand out and have been the most employed to study the influence of the social context on athletic motivation, the Achievement Goal Theory (ACT; Nicholls, 1984, 1989) and the Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Common in both theories is that they emphasize the influence of social factors on motivation. More specifically, motivation is seen as a social cognitive process in which people become motivated or demotivated through the assessment of their own abilities in the achievement setting and of the meaning of the social environment in accordance to themselves (Roberts, 2001). While AGT focuses on how social factors interact with dispositional goals to influence cognition, affect and behavior, SDT focuses on how social factors influence motivation through basic needs satisfaction (Ntoumanis, 2001). The AGT applied to sports is focused on how athletes define and judge their competence and perceived success. It assumes that a prerequisite for motivation in humans is the desire to feel competent. According to Nicholls (1989), two goal orientations are evident in achievement settings such as sports: task-and ego orientation. The goal orientation athletes hold governs the way they think about achievement and, in turn, guides our decision making and action (Duda & Treasure, 2015). SDT, on the other hand, focuses on how social factors can influence various forms of motivation through satisfaction, or lack of thereof, of the basic human needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Mallett, 2005).

SDT, applied to sports, focuses on why athletes participate in their chosen activities. Ryan and Deci (2000b) state that «people are moved to act by very different types of factors, with

highly varied experiences and consequences. People can be motivated because they value an activity or because there is strong external coercion» (p.69). According to both theories, if the athlete feels competent, there is a greater likelihood that he/she will be motivated to act; however, in SDT, competence is only one out of three basic needs that has to be satisfied for an athlete to experience intrinsic motivation. In contrast to AGT, SDT is a multidimensional theory where the need for autonomy and relatedness are being viewed as equally important. In this way, claims can be made that AGT's exclusive focus of competence may lead to an incomplete understanding of motivation in sports (Ntoumanis, 2001). Also, of importance to this study, however, is the need to better understand motivational processes taking place outside of sports as well. The participants of this study are both students and athletes, and as we will learn, it isn't sports alone that motivates them to be student-athletes. Hence, because of the apparent varied motivational factors of these athletes, I made the decision to use SDT as the theory inspiring my project to better understand the SAs lived experiences and perceptions of needs satisfaction leading to motivation.

Aim (2) two of the study was to gain insight into what extent the skiers perceive their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness to be met in the social-contextual environment in which they live, train, compete and study, and how this perception influences their motivation and well-being. For this part of the study, I was specifically focused on needs satisfaction. I will now explain the theory in more detail and how it relates to my master's thesis.

7.2 Description of Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) is a major social-cognitive theory on motivation. It was developed by Dr. Edward L. Deci and Dr. Richard M. Ryan in 1985. The theory focuses on how social factors influence various forms of motivation by their influence on perceptions of the basic human needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Mallett, 2005). Social conditions can either support or undermine optimal functioning and well-being in people, depending on the degree in which the basic needs are satisfied. Further, self-motivation is seen as a natural process in all people that can be facilitated or diminished by social contextual conditions. Motivation is also seen as multidimensional, and the theory addresses how the different types of motivation lead to different outcomes (Duda & Treasure, 2015).

SDT is a macro theory that focuses on how social-contextual conditions can help facilitate the natural processes of self-motivation and healthy psychological development. The macro theory consists of the following six mini theories, each of which addresses one facet of motivation or personality functioning key to the theory; 1) Cognitive Evaluation Theory (addresses intrinsic motivation), 2) Organismic Integration Theory (addresses extrinsic motivation), 3) Causality Orientations Theory (describe the three causality orientations autonomy orientation, control orientation and amotivated orientation), 4) Basic Psychological Needs Theory (describe the three psychological needs autonomy, competence and relatedness), 5) Goal Contents Theory (describes the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic goals), and 6) Relationships Motivation Theory (addresses the need for relatedness). As addressing the details of each of the sub-theories is beyond the scope of, and irrelevant to, this study, I will instead only discuss the sub-theories that are relevant, in addition to other relevant theory. But first, let's take a closer look at the different types of motivation individuals might hold.

7.2.1 The Self-Determination Continuum

Ryan and Deci (2000b) state that «people are moved to act by very different types of factors, with highly varied experiences and consequences. People can be motivated because they value an activity or because there is strong external coercion» (p.69). In other words, SDT distinguishes between whether people participate in activities out of autonomous reasons or more controlling reasons. Where some forms of motivation reflect one's interests and values, others can be wholly external, as when one is pressured into doing something (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

There are different types of autonomous and controlled motivations, ranging on a continuum, more specifically the self-determination continuum (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). On one end is amotivation, in the middle is extrinsic motivation and on the opposite end is intrinsic motivation. These three types of motivations have different regulatory styles attached to them. Amotivation, with the regulatory style of non-regulation, is where the person sees no reason for engaging in the activity at all. The athlete will, in this case, not participate in the activity or just go through the motions without intent or perceived value. Extrinsic motivation consists of four different regulatory styles: external, introjected, identified, and integrated regulations, varying in the extent to which their regulation is autonomous (as we will take a closer look at in section 7.2.2). Intrinsic motivation has the regulatory style internal motivation. Internally

motivated athletes participate in the activity for its own sake, out of joy. This form of motivation is highly autonomous, and according to SDT, it can be labeled quality motivation, leading to needs satisfaction, with a variety of positive outcomes.

The process of goal pursuits—that is, whether pursuit and attainment of goals is autonomous versus controlled—does indeed make an important difference in terms of effectiveness and well-being because these different modes of regulation allow different amounts of need satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p.239).

As described by Deci and Ryan (2000), the different modes of regulation do provide differences in the perception of needs satisfaction. Intrinsic motivation is, of course, the preferred motivation in athletes, but this motivation is not always obtainable, or even realistic, in competitive sports at higher levels. Some days, even the best athletes have to rely on extrinsic motivations, such as the desire to win a specific race/competition in the future, to motivate themselves to complete their challenging workouts. People are not only more or less motivated, but they can be motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations at the same time (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Next, I will present the different regulatory styles of extrinsic motivation and their consequences.

7.2.2 Organismic Integration Theory, Culture and Internalization

OIT is the mini-theory focusing on extrinsic motivations. Extrinsic motivations are, as mentioned, represented by behaviors that are instrumental to separate consequences, such as external rewards, social approval, avoidance of punishment or the attainment of a valued outcome (i.e., winning in sports, or the acceptance of scholarships) (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Four different regulatory styles exist within extrinsic motivation; external, introjected, identified and integrated regulations, varying in the extent to which their regulation is autonomous. Ranging from least to most autonomous, external regulation reflects behaviors associated with external pressures, introjected regulation reflects behaviors associated with internal pressures to avoid guilt, identified regulation reflects behaviors that are undertaken by free choice as well as being associated with personal values and goals, and integrated regulation reflects behaviors that are synthesized with the self (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Due to its relevance to this study, we are now going to take a closer look at the style of integrated regulation. This regulation is the most autonomous type of external regulation, where feelings of autonomy are the result of regulations and identifications that have been brought into congruence with the personally endorsed values, goals and needs that are already a part of the

self (Ryan & Deci, 2017). We will find that the SAs interviewed in this study, being able to adjust to a new culture, are connected to OIT.

According to Ryan and Deci (2017), culture is perhaps the most pervasive influence on human behavior, as well as the most complex to conceptualize and measure. As humans, we emerge in culture, and we are participants in a cultural community no matter where we are from or where we reside. From an SDT viewpoint, culture and the individual are inseparable, as the self develops through the ongoing internalization and integration of ambient cultural practices, values and regulations (Ryan, 1993). Such cultural contents can be more or less well integrated by members of the culture, depending on the approach to socialization within the specific culture. From the organismic integration theory (OIT) viewpoint, to internalize and integrate social practices is an inherent human tendency, and how culture transmits its regulations and values affects how well they are internalized and integrated (Ryan & Deci, 2017). More autonomy supportive climates are conducive to openness in learning, fostering more integrated internalization of cultural norms and practices. More controlling climates, on the other hand, lead to more impoverished and unstable forms of internalization.

Further, as proposed by Ryan and Deci (2017), individuals are influenced by culture in every facet of life, both major and minor: «Cultural internalization concerns not only major life issues, such as taking on and assimilating afforded identities, roles, and relationships, but also the routine microhabits of everyday living, from personal hygiene to dietary preferences to manners of speaking» (p.564). Such cultural internalization provides individuals with a scaffolding for growth and a sense of meaning and purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

7.2.3 Basic Psychological Needs

I am now going to elaborate on the importance of basic needs satisfaction, as this is the essence of SDT and forms the basis for my master's thesis. According to SDT, people have three basic needs, the satisfaction of which leads to more self-determined reasons for engaging in activities, as well as positive personal outcomes: «Needs specify innate psychological nutrients that are essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being» (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p.229). The three basic needs are 1) the need to feel autonomous, 2) the need to feel competent and 3) the need to feel connected to others. When these needs are satisfied, self-motivation and mental health will be enhanced, and when thwarted, motivation and well-being will be diminished (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The need for autonomy refers to the individual's need for choice and participation in decision-making regarding one's developmental process (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). In a sports setting, athletes need to feel that their participation in sports is motivated by their own free will as opposed to external pressures. The need for competence refers to the need to feel as effective as possible in one's actions and the pleasure that follows this feeling (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). In regard to competence, athletes need to experience their competence in meeting the demands of their sport in order to be motivated to act. Important to note is that feelings of competence are concerned with both self-efficacy (one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations) (Bandura, 1989) and optimal challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Deci, 1975), both in which have to be present in order to lead to perceived competence. The need to feel connected to others refers to individuals' need to experience good relationships and to connect with significant others, such as peers, coaches, teachers etc. (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Whether or not these basic needs are met directly influences motivational quality. Also, thwarting of these basic needs will result in needs frustration, which, in in turn, is often associated with ill-being and impoverished functioning

There are three basic psychological needs, the satisfaction of which is essential to optimal development, integrity and well-being. These are the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. Failure to satisfy any of these needs will be manifested in diminished growth, integrity, and wellness. In addition, need frustration, typically due to the thwarting of these basic needs, is associated with greater ill-being and more impoverished functioning. (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p.242)

Ryan and Deci (2000b) address how numerous studies from the 1990s found that people who participate out of autonomous reasons, rather than being externally controlled to act, have more interest, excitement, and confidence, which, in turn, manifests itself both with enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity, as well as heightened vitality, self-esteem and general well-being. Based on such findings, the assumption is that different types of motivation result in different consequences for learning, performance, personal experience, and well-being. This assumption is confirmed in recent literature, concluding that «Individuals engaged in an activity by choice and intrinsic reasons will experience better consequences than those whose participation is less autonomous» (Duda & Treasure, 2015, p.67). Again, SDT points to how social and environmental factors can help or hinder intrinsic motivations. In this regard, and due to its relevance to this study, I will include extended sections on the topics of coaching styles and basic needs satisfaction, the effects of external events on intrinsic motivation, the importance of relationships and relatedness, and the effects

of nature on basic needs satisfaction and well-being. A section on eudaimonic well-being, which partly overlaps with the self-determination theory, will also be included.

7.2.4 Coaching Styles and Basic Needs Satisfaction

Although many factors can influence athletes' motivation, the coach-athlete relationship has been argued to be among the most critical (Langan, Lonsdale, Blake, & Toner, 2015). According to Ryan and Deci (2017), the orientation of coaches has a significant impact on need satisfaction and the motivation of athletes at all levels. In this regard, recent literature in sport psychology highlights the leadership style of transformational leadership (Starrett & Janssen, 2015). Transformational leadership is the form of leadership addressed in SDT literature as being the most needs supportive (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Transformational leadership was a concept first introduced by Burns (1978) and later expanded upon by Bass (1985). Burns saw leadership as being either transactional or transformational. While transactional leadership is based on social exchange where members of a group are motivated by rewards and/or punishments, transformational leadership, on the other hand, is focused on inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and common goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). More specifically, a transformational leader is one who will lead his/her followers through charisma, inspiration, stimulation, problem-solving, attending to their needs and treating them with individual consideration. We can now see the link between transformational leadership and needs support. In fact, Burns (1978) portrayed a transformational leader as one who «seeks to satisfy higher needs and engages the full potential of the follower» (p.4). In this sense, transformational leadership can be seen as a relationship-based approach, focusing on the importance of leaders and participants working together to raise one another to higher levels of motivation, moral reasoning and self-consciousness (Bass, 1985). Where a transactional leader would use controlling elements to lead a group, a transformational leader would rather inspire more autonomous work engagement and, in theory, facilitate SDT's basic need satisfaction (Gözükara & Şimşek, 2015). Also, a third leadership / coaching style, or rather lack of thereof, has been addressed in studies, laissez-faire coaching. Bass (1985) distinguished laissez-faire leadership from transformational- and transactional leadership by referring to it as a general failure to take responsibility for managing. In a sports setting, this style means the coach takes a passive, hands-off approach. According to Kirkbride (2006), essentially it means being a non-leader, withdrawing from the leadership role, offering little in terms of either direction or support. In turn, followers will seek direction elsewhere and may

try to take over the leader's role. However, a laissez-faire leader should not be confused with an autonomy supportive leader. Like an autonomous leader, a laissez-faire leader lets followers make decisions on their own, but unlike an autonomous leader, a laissez-faire leader is actually indifferent to the needs of followers. Typical traits of a laissez-faire leader include decision-making avoidance and apathy towards the task at hand and followers (Kirkbride, 2006). An autonomy supportive leader, on the other hand, will promote and realize fuller satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs.

Several studies have analyzed the effects of transformational leadership. Charbonneau, Barling, and Kelloway (2001) found that intrinsic motivation worked as a mediator of the relationship between transformational leadership and sports performance in university athletes. From this finding, they proposed that transformational leadership may enhance intrinsic interest in the task at hand. Rowold (2006) later tested which leadership styles were more related to coaching effectiveness (reflected by the ability to meet organizational requirements, ensure members' satisfaction, help athletes develop, and ensure high frequency of members' attendance) by examining students' perceptions. He found that transformational leadership behaviors, such as inspirational motivation, idealized influence and individual consideration, were positively related to measures of leaders' effectiveness. In contrast, transactional and nonleadership styles were not. Studies also show that peer transformational leadership has positive outcomes on motivation. Zacharatos, Barling, and Kelloway (2000) found that peer transformational leadership behaviors were positively related to athlete satisfaction, effort, team cohesion, and collective efficacy. Similarly, studies by Glenn (2003) and Price and Weiss (2011) showed that peer leaders who inspire, motivate, enhance creativity, solve problems and use contingent rewards by rewarding those who meet identified goals, were associated with teammates experiencing great joy and satisfaction playing their sports, being motivated to pursue challenges and interested in learning new skills.

Despite transformational leadership seemingly being the preferred coaching style, supporting athletes' basic psychological needs, we know that not all coaches will lead through charisma, inspiration and by attending to the athlete's needs. Some coaches are laissez-faire leaders while others are transactional leaders, or even a combination of the two. Transactional leaders are known for using controlling elements to lead a group towards desired outcomes. Studies show that such controlling elements and external coercion can negatively affect athletes' intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017), as will be addressed in the following section.

7.2.5 The Effects of External Events on Intrinsic Motivation

Offering trophies, prizes and other rewards in sports are common. However, important to know in this regard is that such external events can either enhance or diminish intrinsic motivation based on the nature of the contingency and how they are delivered. Plus, whenever rewards are given to individuals, there are also athletes not receiving them, potentially affecting their perceived competence and ongoing motivation negatively (Ryan & Deci, 2017). A lot of studies examining the impact of rewards on motivation have been conducted. One of them, the study by White and Sheldon (2014), followed professional basketball and baseball players over three years, a baseline year, a contract year and a post contract year. They were interested in finding out whether the salience of a player's monetary rewards highlighted during their contract year would influence their intrinsic motivation from pre- to post contract year. They found that performance was lower in the third year, suggesting that an emphasis on rewards in the contract year led to a decrease in intrinsic motivation during the following year, to levels lower than that of the precontract year. Ryan (1977, 1980) found similar results within college sports in regard to scholarships. He found that receiving scholarships impacted student-athletes' desires to play their sports after college. Comparing scholarship athletes to nonscholarship athletes, he found that those receiving scholarships listed more extrinsic reasons for participation and less enjoyment of the sport, intending to end their sport careers with the completion of their careers as student-athletes. In a subsequent study, he found that male scholarship athletes participating in sports where it was common to receive scholarships viewed them as being more controlling, as a way of buying athletes. Based on these findings, suggestions were made that athletes who receive scholarships in settings where it is common to receive them are likely to see them as controlling, leading to less intrinsic motivation (Ryan, 1977, 1980). Similarly, the Medic et al. (2007) study showed how student-athletes' motivation was affected by receiving athletic scholarships. They concluded that full athletic scholarships control student-athletes' behavior and cause feelings of pressure and guilt. Amorose and Horn (2000), on the other hand, found no difference between scholarship-and nonscholarship athletes in terms of the interest/enjoyment subscale of the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI; Ryan, Mims, & Koestner, 1983), but rather they found that scholarship athletes have higher feelings of competence and lower levels of tension compared to their nonscholarship peers. However, this same study also found that athletes having more controlling coaches had lower intrinsic motivation. Further, Medic et al., (2007)

also found in their study that the possibility of scholarships being retracted was associated with decreased intrinsic motivation.

Competitions, and the information they yield, is another element potentially influencing athletes' motivation. Studies show that losing a direct competition leads to less intrinsic motivation than winning (McAuley, Duncan, & Tammen, 1989; Reeve, Olson, & Cole, 1985). According to Ryan and Deci (2017), the reason for this correlation is due to the important information winning conveys in regard to the athletes' competence. Social comparison is critical as well. Further, findings in a study by Reeve and Deci (1996) showed that those who won the competition without pressure had the highest level of intrinsic motivation, compared to those who won in the pressuring condition or those who lost the competition. Research by Nix, Ryan, Manly, and Deci (1999) showed that succeeding at an activity while feeling pressured to do so resulted in happiness, but it did not result in vitality. In this way, coaches can help hinder the negative consequences of losing or enhance the positive outcomes of winning by being needs supportive.

In this regard, the feedback coaches provide their athletes, can be particularly important. According to Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), positive feedback, also called verbal rewards, are expected to enhance intrinsic motivation, whereas negative feedback is not (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Also, the kind of positive feedback given is of importance. In a comprehensive review of praise, conducted by Henderlong and Lepper (2002), praise that was informational facilitated intrinsic motivation, whereas praise that was saliently evaluative and/or controlling did not. Feedback and the approval of a coach can be highly important to an athlete, and in some instances, athletes can introject the feedback given—that is take in or adopt a regulation or value that is only a partial and incomplete transformation. An introject is experienced as an internal demanding or controlling force, a sense that one "should" or "must" do something, if not feelings such as anxiety, shame and guilt can result (Ryan & Deci, 2017). With this in mind, coaches should have a plan for the feedback given to their athletes, both with respect to learning, motivational and how athletes might internalize the feedback given.

7.2.6 Relationships Motivation Theory

A lot of literature on social support exist (e.g., Clark & Mills, 2011; Lieberman, 2013; Ryan & Solky, 1996), and claims have been made that humans have a basic need for belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), meaning we all have a need to maintain a psychological sense of

being connected to, and accepted by, others. Within SDT, this need is labeled relatedness, and it is seen as one of the three basic needs. It is also one of the six SDT mini-theories, the relationships motivation theory (RMT), and it involves the qualities of close relationships and their consequences. RMT proposes that satisfaction of all three basic psychological needs within relationships is associated with more secure attachment, authenticity, emotional reliance and a higher relationship-specific vitality and wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to RMT then, a sense of relatedness is not just seen as a function of contact, but instead, a relationship consisting of factors such as perceived autonomous and authentic caring between self and other. The experience of acceptance and support of the self and of both persons being motivated by an intrinsic caring for each other is central and leads to greater well-being. Caring for each other relationally means being willing to understand the other's perspective and to support his or her pursuit, interests and valued goals. Receiving autonomy support, in specific, within a relationship, is what allows the receiver to be more authentic, further facilitating all three basic needs, and leads to emotional reliance (Ryan & Deci, 2017). To be authentic means being both real and owning one's actions (Wild, 1965). In simple terms, autonomy support allows people to "be themselves" truthfully. The way all three basic needs are facilitated within quality relationships is partly based on them being mutually supportive of each other.

When people experience competence they tend to feel that they have the skills and ability necessary to get their other needs satisfied; when they experience autonomy, they tend to feel authentic, to more openly communicate with others, and explore ways of getting their other needs satisfied; and when they experience deep relatedness with others, they tend to feel at least distal, if not also the proximal, security that is necessary for them to venture out into the world in pursuit of greater confidence and agency (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p.302).

Another important concept in this regard is unconditional positive regard – that is, accepting a person without negative judgment of a person's basic worth (Rogers, 1951; Rogers & Dymond, 1954). Providing unconditional positive regard means accepting and loving someone for who they are, and it is not withdrawn if the person does something wrong or makes a mistake. Rogers (1951) claimed that we need to be regarded positively by others; we need to feel valued, respected, treated with affection and loved. The consequences of unconditional positive regard are that the person feels free to try new things without the fear of failure.

While autonomy support allows for individuals to be themselves truthfully, unconditional positive regard makes individuals feel valued for being who they are, independently of their actions, both of which lead to greater relationships and emotional reliance. Emotional reliance – that is, a person’s willingness to turn to or to rely on others in times of heightened emotions, has been shown to result in greater wellness, independent of age or cultural background (Ryan, La Guardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, and Kim, 2005). Not having to face challenges alone, but rather allowing others to help along the way, can make them easier to handle. Also, need-support from multiple sources simultaneously, such as parents, friends, and romantic partners, has been shown to be of importance (Ratelle, Simard, & Guay, 2013). This particular study by Ratelle et al., (2013) showed that students reported the highest levels of subjective well-being when all three sources were perceived to be highly autonomy supportive.

Last but not least, giving autonomy support to others is also satisfying to the giver’s basic needs, not only those of the receiver. RMT proposes:

Autonomy-supportive partners in close relationships tend to experience a sense of mutuality – that is, when one partner experiences autonomy or autonomy support, the other is more likely to experience it as well – and the greater the degree of mutuality in autonomy or autonomy support within a relationship, the greater is the relationship satisfaction, attachment security, and well-being of both partners (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p.310)

Studies show that giving, in fact, enhances well-being to levels over and above the enhancement that comes from receiving the support (Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner, & Ryan, 2006). In addition to relationships with people, exposure to natural elements can also enhance feelings of well-being and vitality, which we will now discuss.

7.2.7 Nature, Well-Being and Vitality

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in finding out whether there is a connection between the exposure to nature and feelings of vitality. Several researchers have researched the subject, including a series of studies by Ryan, Weinstein, Bernstein, Brown, Mistretta, and Gagné (2010). They conducted as many as five studies to assess the effects of being outdoors, or around natural elements, on subjective vitality. All of the methods applied in the varied studies pointed in the same direction: being outdoors or exposed to natural elements is associated with greater vitality, and the more natural the surroundings, the greater

the effect on subjective vitality. Studies have also looked into specific factors in nature contexts, such as exposure to daylight and its effect on vitality. Smolders, de Kort, and Van den Berg (2013) found that exposure to daylight significantly enhances a person's subjective vitality. Based on such studies, Ryan and Deci (2017) propose the following on nature's connection to basic psychological needs:

Other factors aside, meaningful exposure to living nature has a positive effect on subjective vitality relative to exposure to non-natural, built environments without living elements, and this relation is mediated in part by basic psychological needs (p.265).

They state that nature can have enhancing effects on both needs satisfaction and energy, but they suggest that more research is needed to understand just how elements in nature have such positive effects.

Another series of studies of interest are the studies by Weinstein, Przybylski, and Ryan (2009), which looked at the exposure to living nature and how it can influence human nature by enhancing peoples' relational and prosocial attitudes. In the first three studies, they looked at what difference it would make to peoples' intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations to look at images of natural environments compared to non-natural environments. The participants reported their aspirations both before and after, and results showed that those being exposed to images of nature increased their valuing of intrinsic goals and decreased their valuing of extrinsic goals. This result was not the case for those subjects exposed to non-natural images. In another study, they took it a step further and looked at how being exposed to living plants in a room, while making a decision on whether or not sharing money made available to them, would affect the participants' willingness to share. Findings showed that the participants in the room filled with plants were more willing to share than those making the decision in a room without living plants. They further found that feelings of autonomy and a sense of relatedness to nature were higher in the natural scenes of the study, suggesting that such feelings arose from the exposure to natural environments and that these feelings further promoted a focus on intrinsic values for social relationships and community, rather than on extrinsic values and personal gain.

7.3 Eudaimonic Well-Being

Due to its relevance to this study I decided to include a section on Ryff and Singer's (1998, 2000) lifespan theory of human flourishing. Their theory includes six core dimensions of

psychological well-being. I will propose that this theory goes beyond the needs addressed in SDT and other existing theories on well-being. A lot of literature on subjective well-being already existed, but Ryff and Singer (1998) challenged these models of being of limited scope as well-being often was seen as a somewhat narrow conception of positive functioning and healthy living. They claimed that emphasis had been given to short-term affective well-being, such as happiness, at the expense of more enduring life challenges, such as having a sense of purpose and direction, achieving satisfying relationships with others, and gaining a sense of self-realization (Ryff, 1989). Therefore, they saw the need to integrate previous conceptions into a more parsimonious summary, including more enduring life challenges. Ryff and Singer (1998) defined and included the following essential features of psychological well-being in their model: Self-acceptance (the knowledge and acceptance individuals have of themselves, including awareness of personal limitations); positive relations with others (the depth of connection individuals have in ties with significant others); autonomy (whether individuals view themselves to be living in accord with their own personal convictions); environmental mastery (how well individuals are managing their life situations); purpose in life (the extent to which individuals feel their lives having meaning, purpose and direction); and personal growth (the extent to which individuals are making use of their personal talents and potential). These indicators of psychological well-being were consistent with a eudaimonic perspective. Eudaimonia, is a term traceable back to the ancient Greeks, meaning to become what you are. This requires discerning one's unique talents and then working to bring them to reality (Ryff, 2014).

There are both similarities and differences between SDT and Ryff and Singer's (1998, 2000) approach. Both approaches agree on well-being consisting of being fully functioning, rather than as simply attaining desires. In this way SDT also subscribes to the eudaimonic view of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). They also agree on the following contents of being eudaimonic: being autonomous, competent, and related. However, within SDT these contents are the principal factors that foster well-being, whereas Ryff and Singer's approach uses them, and other essential features, to define psychological well-being. Certain contents of eudaimonic well-being is seen as basic needs within SDT. However, SDT states that there are different types of positive experiences and conditions that foster subjective well-being that do not promote eudaimonic well-being. The study by Nix et al., (1999) by example, showing that succeeding at an activity while feeling pressured to do so resulted in happiness, but not vitality (more closely aligned with eudaimonic well-being; feeling alive and energized). As

several of the features defined as essential for psychological well-being, presented by Ryff and Singer, appeared to be of importance to the SAs of this study, I saw the need to include this section in addition to the information on SDT.

8 Research Questions

Now that I have presented the relevant theory of this study, I will discuss how this theory relates to my master's thesis. I will transform my aims into research questions to create a better understanding of how SDT and other relevant theory relates to the experiences of the SA's included in this study. As previously discussed, the aim of the study was twofold. Aim one (1) was to better understand the phenomenon of college athletics and why Norwegian skiers are motivated to pursue careers as student-athletes, and aim (2) was to better understand how these SAs perceive their basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness to be satisfied. Aim one was meant to be uninfluenced by theory, whereas aim two was influenced by SDT. The research questions that drive this study are: a) What motivates Norwegian Nordic skiers to be Division I student-athletes? b) To what extent were the student-athletes included in this study satisfied with their year/years as Division I student-athletes? c) Do the student athletes perceive their coach/coaches to be needs supportive? d) Do the SAs perceive their teammates to be needs supportive? e) Being an international student athlete, does it challenge the SAs perceived level of personal competence? f) Do the student-athletes feel a sense of belonging at their respective colleges?

9 Methods

9.1 Design

To answer the research questions in the best manner, the appropriate research design needs to be carefully chosen and applied. Research design refers to the plan for conducting the study (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) states that the design can be conveyed in three components: 1) preliminary considerations that take place prior to beginning a study, 2) the steps to engage in during the conduct of the study, and 3) the elements that flow through all phases of the process of the study. The aspects that fall within each of these components in a qualitative research project vary from study to study, but it is important that the purposes, questions and methods of research all are interconnected and interrelated so that the study appears as a cohesive whole rather than as fragmented, isolated parts, a concept referred to as methodological congruence advanced by Morse and Richards (2002).

For the preliminary considerations of the study, I first focused on reviewing existing literature on the topic of college-athletics, as well as contemporary theories on motivation. The written results of this can be read in sections 2-7. I also considered the potential paradigms as well as my personal background and interests possibly influencing the study. In terms of the steps to engage in during the conduct of the study, I determined to apply qualitative methods in the following processes: Selection of participants; data generation; and analysis; The elements that flow through all phases of the study are the ethical considerations, as I attempted to always setting the participants' rights, needs and desires first. A presentation of the chosen research paradigm, application of qualitative methods and ethical considerations will follow.

9.2 Research Paradigm

As a researcher, I have placed myself in the interpretivist paradigm. This is a broad frame that places emphasis on understanding individuals' perspectives in the context of the conditions and circumstances of their lives (Ritchie, Lewis & Nicholls, 2014). Research method refers to how one produces data and thereof knowledge (Neumann & Neumann, 2012). The research method applied in my study is phenomenology, a qualitative research methodology within the interpretivist paradigm, that investigates the qualitatively different ways in which people experience something or think about something. According to Zahavi (2003) Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology as a theoretical philosophical movement, phenomenology is supposed to be neither more nor less than a faithful description of that which appears. Scholars of Husserl further developed his philosophy of phenomenology into an empirical method to investigate different phenomena in our lifeworld. Central to this method is that «we orient ourselves towards people's ideas about the world (or their experience of it) and we make statements about people's ideas about the world (or about their experience of it)» (Marton, 1981). In this sense we need to take an objective approach, not letting our feelings, opinions or personal filters decide what we choose to hear or convey. In this regard, and as a researcher and the person conveying this study, I have to point out that I think it is important that we keep in mind the limitation of phenomenology. Is it possible to be entirely objective, only giving faithful descriptions of that which appears? Researchers or not, we all have a life full of experiences that help shape us; to totally neglect this reality and the way in which it influences us and, in turn, our research, is in my eyes naive thinking. However, I do find this philosophical standpoint as the one most aligned with how I like to view the world and the experiences of others; through their eyes, without judgement. Denzin

and Lincoln (2000) claim that a research paradigm is defined as «a basic set of beliefs that guide action» (p.157). My understanding is that for a method to be authentic and well applied in a research project, it should align with personal values and beliefs, and it should be the right fit to answer the research questions. My aim of this study was to better understand the phenomenon of U.S. college athletics, through the eyes of current/former student-athletes, hence the method of phenomenology. The notion of experience, in the phenomenological realm, has been claimed to be a product of an intrinsic relationship between human beings and the world, and it cannot be reduced to the sphere of the mental, nor the sphere of the physical only (Polkinghorne, 1989). Experience should be seen as the reality that results from the openness of human awareness to the world. The participants in my research project have experiences from the past year, or years, being student-athletes, which they were willing to openly share with me during our face-to-face meetings.

10 The Application of Qualitative Methods

To explore the phenomenon of college athletics, I applied qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is said not be easily explained, and several authors of introductory books on the method seem to hold back on a fixed definition (Morse & Richards, 2002; Weis & Fine, 2000; Ritchie et al., 2014). In this regard, I find Creswell's (2013) working definition helpful, a definition that has been guiding me throughout the research process:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretative/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (p. 44)

Creswell acknowledges that qualitative research is a complex process. He chooses, therefore, to place emphasis on the design of research and the use of distinct approaches to inquiry (Creswell, 2013). I favor his approach in creating a working definition, guiding qualitative researchers in a rather complex process. However, I need to point out that I, in my research, chose to refrain from using the term *data collection* that he applies in his definition; instead, I use the phrase *data generation*. Data collection is in my eyes better applied to quantitative rather than qualitative research methods. Creswell further states that the analysis of qualitative

research can be both inductive and deductive designs. Inductive design is characteristically a "bottom up" process, whereby data is organized into increasingly more abstract forms of information (2013). While deductive design, on the other hand, is a "top-down" process, where previous theories' truthfulness is tested based on empirical data (Markula & Silk, 2011). My study is mainly inductive, as the analysis was a bottom up process. However, one can say that it is partly deductive as well, as the interview guide and the application of theoretical terms to the latter part of the analysis process were influenced by SDT.

The reason why I wanted my analysis to be mainly inductive is due to the lack of research on U.S. college-athletics in the context of international athletes' participation in general. I wanted all aspects of the various experiences of the SAs to be shared, not merely those experiences connected to basic needs and SDT. However, since the interview guide was inspired by certain aspects of SDT and some of the questions are formulated with the knowledge of basic needs in mind, the study can be said to be partly deductive as well. I decided to conduct the study in this manner, because I wanted to determine if the SAs included in the study viewed their basic needs as being met and if so, whether this belief contributed to inner motivation and well-being, factors at the very core of the NCAA's mission.

My intent in applying both an inductive and deductive approach was to reduce the risk of losing important information along the way. If I were to strictly view the SAs' experiences through the SDT perspective, there was a risk that other important information about their experiences would have been ignored and lost. Applying both methods may be viewed as a complicated process, but in my opinion, it was necessary to answer my research questions in the most trustworthy way possible. As Creswell (2013) states, «The inductive-deductive logic process means that the qualitative researcher uses complex reasoning skills throughout the process of research» (p.45). Utilizing both methods in one study might have required extra work, but I believe researchers need to rise to the challenge if they desire to determine trustworthy, and therefore useful, results.

10.1 Selection of Participants

Phenomenology requires that participants included in the study must be carefully chosen, as they need to have the shared experience of the phenomenon in the research question, so that the researcher, in the end, can forge a common understanding (Creswell, 2013). This selection

criterion might be challenging given the research topic and questions, something I got to experience. To start the process of finding potential individuals to participate in my study, I had to 1st determine how many Norwegian Nordic skiing SA's there are in the U.S. As discussed, the way I was able to find this information was by visiting the webpages of every college with a Nordic skiing program and viewing their team rosters. From this survey, I found that there were 26 Norwegian SAs attending Nordic Skiing programs at American colleges, located at 9 different colleges.

From these 26 SAs, only a selection of participants were included in the study. The participants were selected through purposive sampling strategies, meaning the individuals included were selected because they could purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2013). The purposive sampling strategies of criterion-and snowball-sampling were applied. These strategies are used to narrow the range of variation and focus on similarities (Palinkas, Horwitz & Green, 2015).

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a criterion sample refers to all cases that meet some criterion. The following inclusion criteria had to be met to be included in the study: 1) The interview subjects had to be in the age group of 20-25; 2) they must have completed at least one year at their respective college as SAs; 3) if graduated, they must have graduated within the last four months; and 4) their school of attendance had to be a NCAA Division I member school. I saw the one-year minimum as a SA as crucial, as I only wanted to include those individuals with enough experience as student athletes not to let their first impression paint their overall experience as SAs. It can take time to adjust to a new way of life in a different culture, and I wanted to allow for the majority of this process to have taken place prior to inclusion in this study. One of the limitations to qualitative interviews are the participants' ability to give rich descriptions due to limited memory of experiences. To account for this limitation, I set the maximum allowance since graduation to be four months. The NCAA Division I is the highest league of college sports, and the member schools have to commit to maintaining a high academic standard for student-athletes and a wide range of other opportunities for athletes' participation (NCAA, 2017a). To be accepted at a Division I school, a student athlete has to have met significant achievements, both academically and physically, implying that they most likely have had to invest great amounts of work, both on and off the field. By only including SAs at Division I schools, I was able to avoid some differences that may have arisen by including students in Divisions II or III programs, as there

are significant gaps in requirements and expectations between those schools and those in Division I. Plus, to date, the vast majority of Norwegian Nordic skiers have attended Division I schools, making that division more relevant at the moment.

According to Polkinghorne (1989) and Creswell (1998), phenomenological interview samples should include 5 to 25 people who have all experienced the phenomenon, while Morse (1994) states that at least six should be included. Due to my lack of research experience and the timeframe of my master's thesis, I decided to include a sampling of eight SAs.

Snowball sampling was applied as soon as I got started with the interview process. Snowball sampling is a method where individuals well suited for the study are asked about other well-suited participants (Markula & Silk, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I recruited three participants through my social network within the skiing community, and I asked them for referrals to recruit the final five. I got referrals to seven more SAs, five of which responded to my invitation to participate in the study. These five all met the inclusion criteria, and the sample of eight was established.

There was a 50/50 ratio between men and women included in the study. All of the SAs had grown up in different cities/regions of Norway, and they were students at three different NCAA Division I schools.

10.2 Data Generation

Data was generated through face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to be «an active participant in the interview process and probe further information or discuss issues that arise during the interview situation» (Markula & Silk, 2011, p.84). To get rich descriptions on the SAs' experiences, I needed both flexibility and structure in the interview process, hence the creation of a semi-structured interview guide. Open ended questions were asked, with the ultimate goal of gathering data that would lead to a textual description of the experiences, providing an understanding of the common experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013).

The interview guide was tested on peers, and adjusted in regard to feedback given, prior to the SA interviews. This testing was done to ensure that the questions met the purpose of the research (Markula & Silk, 2011), that the questions were understandable, and to get an idea of the time needed for each interview (with an understanding that this would vary from interview

to interview). A top priority during the interviews was to make the SAs feel comfortable in the interview setting, allowing them to openly share about their experiences. My focus was to let the interview unfold as a natural conversation between the interview subject and myself, and through this strategy, create an environment inviting honesty and openness about their experiences and feelings about their lives as SAs. As Silverman (2014) states, «qualitative research involves verbal descriptions of real-life situations» (p.4). However, it is important to acknowledge that limitations to honest answers and rich descriptions from the participants exist. First, they might not feel comfortable in the interview setting despite my intent to create a safe and welcoming environment. Second, they might hold back on information they fear will insult/reflect badly upon others or themselves. And third, they might not remember certain experiences well enough that would enable them to give vivid explanations of them. Finding the right balance in this regard, by in some cases helping them dig deeper after information and in other cases understanding and respecting their privacy and willingness to withhold certain information, is key. Ethical consideration, is to me, always a top priority (more on ethics in section 11).

A Dictaphone, model ZAP DVR-X3 was used to record the interviews. A log was written immediately after each interview, which included the date, place, ID-code for interview subject and observations/impressions gained during the interview. I spent quite a lot of time reflecting on notes as soon as I returned home from conducting the interviews. These notes were focused on the cues and vibes that were seen/felt during the interview to add an informational layer to the spoken words I could extract from the dictaphone. I saw this focus as important to help me in the analyzing process by better understanding the experiences shared during the interview, not merely by what was said, but also by the emotions shown.

After the reflection notes were drafted, I started the process of transcribing the interviews. In this process, the digital files created were uploaded to my personal MacBook Pro for transcription. Transcription is a process where the conversation between two people, who are physically present, is being transformed into written form (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This step makes it easier to analyze the interviews in the aftermath. I transcribed the digital files verbatim, starting the day the interviews took place, and finished them within a week after each interview. Even though this process was time consuming, I found it to be a valuable one. I learned a lot about my interview style, and I got to know my material well, helping me make progress as a qualitative interviewer and in the analyzing process.

10.3 Analysis

A thematic analysis was applied in this study, which is a theoretically flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns, referred to as themes, within the data. The analyzing process starts as soon as the analyst begins to notice, and/or look for patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While using semi-structured interviews, the analysis starts during the interview itself and ends with the written report presenting the content and meaning of patterns/themes generated.

Claims could be made that I should have used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in my research, as this method is attached to a phenomenological epistemology. However, as my study is influenced by SDT, I found the flexible thematic analysis to be a better fit. IPA is a method that aims to produce an account of lived experience in its own terms rather than one prescribed by pre-existing theoretical preconceptions (Smith & Osborn, 2004). If I were to solely follow IPA, my research would have been strictly inductive, which it is not. «What is important is that the theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher wants to know, and that they acknowledge these decisions, and recognize them as decisions» (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.80).

As explained, I did not want the research to be fully dependent on SDT in such a way that I didn't consider information falling outside the scope of this theory. To fully understand the phenomenon of college-athletics and the motivation to be SAs, I intended to be open-minded and to see all aspects of the SAs' experiences. Thematic analysis is simply not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework and there is no one right way to proceed with reading of theory for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allowed me to apply a combination of induction and deduction in my analysis. A more inductive approach is said to be enhanced by not engaging with literature in the early stages of analysis, whereas a deductive approach requires engagement with the literature prior to analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). My interview guide was partly inspired by SDT, but during the initial phases of the analysis, I set theory aside and analyzed inductively, categorizing the material in content-close terms, letting the codes and themes emerge bottom-up. It wasn't until phase five (phases will be presented next) that SDT terms were applied to the themes.

Another reason I used thematic analysis is because it is, according to Braun and Clarke

(2006), where unexperienced researchers should start: «It is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis» (p.78). With this in mind I decided to follow Braun and Clarke's 6-phase guide to performing thematic analysis: (1) Familiarizing yourself with your data; (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Reviewing themes; (5) Defining and naming themes and; (6) Producing the report.

Phase (1): Familiarizing yourself with your data. This phase was resolved by transcribing the interviews verbatim followed by countless times of re-reading the data. The reflection notes were also read over and over again to make more sense of the transcribed interviews. In this stage I kept a Master's Thesis journal in which I took notes on interesting information detected from the interviews.

Phase (2): Generating initial codes. To help conduct a structured data analysis the analysis-program 'NVivo 11' was applied. The first step analyzing the information gathered was by coding the entire data set by creating nodes (the term for codes in NVivo). Each node was labeled with a content-close term relevant to the subject of the information. The aim of this process was to stay close to the data and let the results emerge from a bottom up process. The inductive thematic analysis revealed a total of 464 coding units.

Phase (3): Searching for themes. During this stage the different nodes/codes were grouped into potential themes. I started off by considering how the different nodes could be combined to form overarching themes. 'NVivo 11' was extremely helpful in this phase as it allowed me to play around with the nodes, organizing them into a thematic map. Initially this map consisted of 35 themes, with all the nodes with related content being collected within each of these. Some of the nodes were disregarded due to its irrelevance to this study during this phase (the nodes only appearing once and / or being out of topic).

Phase (4): Reviewing themes. During this stage the refinement of themes took place. Making sure nodes were placed in the right theme-category the themes were reviewed several times, and some nodes were moved from one theme-category to another for a better fit. The total of 35 themes were reduced down to 30, as some of the themes were fused together due to similar content.

Phase (5): Defining and naming themes. Renaming of the themes took place in this stage, linking them to relevant theory. After giving the themes fitting names, I then started identifying the ‘story’ that each theme told standing on its own. Further I tried to find how these individual stories would fit into the broader overall ‘story’ to be shared in the written report. This stage required a lot of thinking and note-taking. Again, I created a thematic map. I listed the research question driving this study and grouped the 30 different themes under each of these, where they belonged in terms of content. Each of these 30 themes, after being renamed, are used as headlines in the written report. Some as main headlines and others as sub-headlines under a more theory laden main headline. To specify, all the 30 themes will appear as main- or sub-headlines in the written report. An illustration of the thematic map created follows. Here, the red bobbles are the research questions driving this study, and the blue bobbles are the 30 different themes that emerged from the analysis.

Phase (6): Producing the report. To be able to tell the SAs story in a trustworthy way relevant quotes were extracted from the theme-categories; quotes supporting the most interesting and relevant findings in the research project. These quotes were translated from Norwegian into English to be included in the final Master’s Thesis report. A more detailed account on the writing process follows after the illustration of the thematic map.



Figure 1 Illustration of the thematic map, showing the research questions in red and the themes emerged from analysis in blue.

10.4 Writing of Report

From the significant statements and themes found through the analysis process, the writing of the report describing the experiences of the SAs started. Textual descriptions were written, read through and edited over and over in search for the essence of the phenomenon of college athletics and the SAs motivation and well-being. The ultimate goal for me, as a qualitative researcher operating within the phenomenological realm, was to write a composite description that presents the essence of the phenomenon, called the essential, invariant structure (Creswell, 2013). I wanted to share their 'story'; their thoughts and feelings in regard to being SAs. And I want all of my readers to better understand what being a college student-athlete looks like. The readers of my study, as any other phenomenological study, should, according to Polkinghorne (1989), be left with this feeling «I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that» (p.46). The SAs' experiences will be shared in the results section (section 13).

11 Ethical Considerations – Respect for Human Dignity

Ethical considerations were established and permeated throughout the process working on my Master's Thesis. «Research ethics refers to guidelines that are developed to ensure that all research participants are treated with dignity and respect» (Markula & Silk, 2011, p.11). Every researcher should operate explicitly in the practice of ethical conduct and be able to articulate this conduct in writing to be shared in the resulting publications (Markula & Silk, 2011). Respect for human dignity is the base of ethical conduct, referring to principles such as: free and informed consent; privacy and confidentiality; justice and inclusiveness and the official approval by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) to conduct the research. I will now present each of these principles in more detail.

11.1 Free and Informed Consent

Free and informed consent refers to all «participants having to agree knowingly to take part in the research project» (Markula & Silk, 2011, p.16). This consent implies that all information has been given and understood in such a way that the participants can make an informed decision whether or not to participate. By phone or email prior to the interview, I informed the SAs of the following: The study's aims; what participation entails; the voluntary nature of participation; and how anonymity would be protected. I sent out the informed consent form, asked them to read it over and invited them to ask any questions they might have prior to our

face to face meeting. I printed and brought the same form to our interview, read the highlighted sections aloud and asked them to sign the contract, if all information given had been understood and they decided to participate. All participants gave their informed consent to participate.

11.2 Privacy and Confidentiality

Confidentiality refers to «the participants' right not to be identified in the research project» (Markula & Silk, 2011, p.18). To comply with this standard, I have used pseudonyms for each of the participants in the study. To better understand how far along as student-athletes the participants were at the times of the interviews, I applied pseudonyms in an alphabetical order corresponding with the number of years they have completed as SAs. The alphabetic letter a is the first letter in the names of all the SAs who have complete one year, the letter b for two years, the letter c for three years and the letter d for four years. The names are gender specific. The names of their schools of attendance and the other names mentioned in the interviews have also been protected. Here I've left out the specific names and explained what has been left out in Square brackets. To protect the participants' privacy, all research information has been kept confidential, and the participants were informed that only I have access to the audio taped and transcribed interviews. This data was kept on my password protected personal Mac under coded folders. Markula and Silk (2011) stresses the importance of informing the participants where the empirical material is being kept.

11.3 Justice and Inclusiveness

This principle concerns the importance of considering the benefits and harms of the research for its participants. There should be a clear purpose of the project, and no participants should be unfairly burdened by the research (Markula & Silk, 2011). I clearly addressed the aims of the project and how this may help inform prospective SAs about college-athletics through their sharing of experiences. Hence, the motivation to participate had to be linked to a desire to help guide others in regard to the opportunity to become SAs. The participants were informed about the time required of them to complete the interview and that no financial compensation would be given to participate. I made sure to show my gratitude towards them for the time spent on my research, and I respected and met their personal preferences on time and place for the interviews. I also let them know that towards the end of this project I would allow for member reflections and for my findings to be shared with them for their feedback prior to writing my conclusion (Smith & McGannon, 2017).

11.4 Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) Application

Prior to data generation, I am required to send in a notification form to, and for the research project to be accepted by, The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD): «If you, through interviews, questionnaires, observations or other means, are gathering, registering, processing or storing information about individuals (i.e. personal data), then your project is likely to be subject to notification» ("Privacy Ombudsman for Research", 2017). NSD is the data protection governing body for all Norwegian universities. NSD advises researchers to submit the obligated notification form at least 30 days prior to planned startup of data collection. The notification form has to be accepted prior to start up. My application was sent June 22nd and accepted on July 12th.

12 Increasing the Quality of Qualitative Studies

A variety of conceptions of the quality of qualitative research exist, and according to Sparkes and Smith (2009), just what criteria are to be used remains open to question. This uncertainty results in competing claims as to what counts as good-quality work. Due to the rapid growth of qualitative research within the field of sport and exercise psychology during the past three decades, claims have been made that there is a need for change on how rigor (the quality of the research process) is developed and judged rather than complying with how it has been commonly evaluated in the past (Smith & McGannon, 2017). In the phenomenological realm, the notion of experience has been claimed to be a product of an intrinsic relationship between human beings and the world, and it cannot be reduced to the sphere of the mental nor the sphere of the physical only (Polkinghorne, 1989). As a relativist complying with the paradigm of phenomenology, I accept that there is a physical world out there independent of myself, and I share the understanding of Sparkes and Smith (2009) that the world is not a creation of our minds. I cannot gain access to the experiences of the SAs in ways that are independent of my interests and purposes. Sparkes and Smith (2009) addresses this issue by pointing out that:

The reality itself cannot provide a referent point for sorting out claims to knowledge – or ‘good’ and ‘bad’ research... All we can do is appeal to time and place contingent lists of characteristics to sort out the good from the not so good (p.494).

According to Smith and McGannon (2017), within sport and exercise psychology, the term rigor has largely been described as: «A marker of excellence sought through method. Methods are techniques which, when properly applied, are said to provide rigor» (p.3). To increase the rigor and quality of my research, I focused on the above described ethical considerations,

reflexivity (as will be described in section 12.1) and the help of critical friends (as will be described in section 12.2).

12.1 Reflexivity

As addressed in the methods section, qualitative researchers «make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them» (Markula & Silk, 2011, p.5). In this sense, it is acknowledged that the researcher influences the research process and the results based on the interpretation of data. Because of this reality, it is important to carefully reflect upon personal background, educational background, and why the chosen topic is of interest, prior to commencing and to explicitly share this in the written paper. As described by Markula and Silk (2011), researchers «need to be open about their subjective influences and their reasons for engaging in research» (p.4). Finlay (2002) further states that to increase the integrity and trustworthiness of qualitative research, researchers need to evaluate how intersubjective elements influence data collection and analysis. She refers to the process of reflexivity, a process where I, as a researcher, need to engage in explicit, self-aware analysis of my own role throughout the entire research process. The following is an attempt to share the process I went through prior to commencing and throughout the time I worked on my Master's Thesis:

The first step in this process was for me to carefully reflect upon my own background as a former college track athlete. I attended Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX from 2008-2012. As long as my sport was track and field and my school was located in a different state, with a somewhat different culture, I didn't expect my personal experiences to be substantially similar to those of my interview subjects. And I believe, no matter how similar the circumstances / social environment might be, individual experiences and emotions connected to them will never be identical. An experience is unique to the person living it, and while shared it is worth listening to without judgment. This belief is my personal philosophy going about conversations, and I believe this perspective helped me as a social researcher as it made it easy for me to comply with the phenomenology paradigm. I also want to point out that I don't have any strong feelings attached to how my years being a SA influenced me one way or another. On the bright side, due to my background as a track and field SA, I found the interview process and the connection with the SAs to run smoothly. Knowing how the collegiate sports system works and what it means being a student-athlete truly helped me. My impression was that the way we connected around being SAs / former SAs led to a relaxed

interview setting where the interview felt more like a conversation between two peers. Further, my impression was that this connection helped the interview subjects feel comfortable and, in that way, probably helped them to openly and truthfully share their experiences.

The second step for me was to reflect upon my position as a cross country skiing coach. I don't think this position influenced the data generation in any way, but it is one of the main reasons why I wanted to focus on this particular topic. Due to the lack of research conducted on the topic, I wanted to generate data to help increase the information available to what it's like being a Norwegian SA in the US, and for this information to be shared with those gauging interest in the phenomenon, with a particularly directed focus towards the Norwegian Ski Federation, coaches and prospective student-athletes.

The third step was to carefully reflect upon my pre-existing knowledge and academic background. One of the most challenging parts of the study was not to ask any leading questions for the second part of the study. SDT is a theory that I've been familiar with for years, and it comes to mind as soon as I hear something that can be related to basic psychological needs. Even though a portion of my study was inspired by this theory, I wanted the questions to remain as open as possible, not leading the SAs in one direction or another.

The same was the case while analyzing the transcribed interviews. I made an attempt at not letting my theoretical background and knowledge about the Self-Determination Theory direct my search for interesting findings. I did not want the decision to use SDT as a theoretical inspiration for part 2 of my study to influence the process in such a way that I didn't open up for other perspectives or my ability to receive information not falling within the scope of SDT. I accounted for this potential issue by formulating all questions in such a way that they weren't entirely locked in on the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, but rather just inspired by the theory.

12.2 Critical Friends

Another element applied was the adoption of critical friends. Smith and McGannon (2017) views this method as an opportunity for dialogue and the reflexive acknowledgement of multiple truths, perspectives and results in the research process. I am grateful for my dedicated and clever peers at The Norwegian School of Sport Sciences (NIH) and the way we've been able to assist one another throughout the year working on our Master's Theses.

We have had endless discussions throughout the year, helping and pushing one another to widen our lenses, creating different perspectives and new and better understandings. I also added the element of member reflections towards the end of my project. I shared my findings with the SAs of the study and welcomed their feedback prior to writing my conclusion. This experience is said to help create a robust and intellectually enriched understanding through generating additional insight and dialogue (Smith & McGannon, 2017). I will now turn to the results of my study.

13 Results and Discussion

In this section the main findings of the study will be presented. As previously described, the theme names derived from the analysis are used as headlines (main- or sub-headlines) representing each of the main themes found in the analysis. These main themes are collected under each of the six research questions that drive this study: a) What motivates Norwegian Nordic skiers to be Division I student-athletes? b) To what extent were the student-athletes included in this study satisfied with their year/years as Division I student-athletes? c) Do the student-athletes perceive their coach/coaches to be needs supportive? d) Do the student-athletes perceive their teammates to be needs supportive? e) Being an international student-athlete, does it challenge the SAs perceived level of personal competence? f) Do the student-athletes feel a sense of belonging at their respective college?

13.1 What Motivates Norwegian Nordic Skiers to be Division I Student-Athletes?

The first results I will discuss are the main factors that motivate Norwegian Nordic skiers to be SAs. Several factors motivated the participants in the study to choose to be SAs, but several factors repeatedly appeared as key motivators. The following factors were consistently noted as motivating factors: (1) the opportunity to combine skiing and education; (2) the opportunity to experience something new and exciting; (3) the perceived increased value of higher education; (4) the opportunity to see new places; and (5) the opportunity to have access to top facilities and resources.

13.1.1 The Combination of Skiing and Education

One of the main findings of this study was how highly the SAs valued the opportunity to continue doing what they love, skiing, in combination with earning a degree. This ability was one of the main driving forces cited for the participants to choose to become student-athletes.

None of the participants were ready to quit skiing all together, but at the same time, none of them wanted skiing to be the only activity of focus in their lives. Several of the SAs addressed how difficult it was to combine a skiing career with higher education in Norway; this difficulty increased their interest in the American model of college-athletics through the NCAA.

One of the male SAs, Brian, explained how he, while in Norway, felt like it was all or nothing. He concluded that the choice was to either go pro or to quit all together. After accomplishing his highest goals as a junior skier, performing at the top international level, he was no longer motivated to become a professional skier, where eating, training and sleeping had to be the main priorities of his life. He then decided to end his skiing career to focus on academics instead, something he found to be no more than «medium fun». During this time, he travelled to attend some less serious skiing events, just for fun, such as Tour de Ski Kina and the Student Olympics. This participation made him realize that it wasn't necessarily the dream of a pro career that gave him feelings of joy and that motivated him to be a skier, but it was the activity in and of itself and the athletic environment. Life as a pro skier seemed boring to him. With that realization, college athletics peaked his interest. A year later, he became a student-athlete.

It's not a glamorous life because you have to train, sleep and eat, eh, no time for, shouldn't really do anything else. Should not do anything that can steal of your energy, and that means socializing with few people, have a lot of routines, rarely new things in your everyday life, and that I thought seemed boring... I really enjoyed the skiing environment and the act of skiing itself, it didn't necessarily require a professional career to be able to be a part of that or to experience the joy... And then the US was tempting, it being a great combination of education and skiing. (Brian)

Just like Brian, Caroline felt that she didn't have the motivation to continue her career as a top national skier, and she gave up her spot on the junior national team. However, she wanted to continue skiing, even competing, but in a way that was different from what she was used to back home in Norway. The combination of higher education and being on a college team seemed perfect to her.

I didn't quite know what I wanted to study, and I didn't want to go after a professional skiing career, but at the same time I've spent so many years skiing and so much time, and it's not that I don't like skiing, not at all, it's just that I couldn't handle all that effort, that hustle, and that I apparently was going to try to become a world champion, because that I didn't want to. And then it was like, that combo, it seemed absolutely perfect. (Caroline)

Claire also felt, just like Brian, that in Norway, it is this *all or nothing* attitude towards being an athlete. Either you go for it 100% or you quit altogether. She thinks that if you decide to combine a skiing career with higher education in Norway, you easily fall behind, because the norm in Norway is to focus on your athletic career only, which a lot of skiers do after graduating from high school. She also felt that you might not be taken as seriously as an athlete if you decide to prioritize education in combination with competitive skiing. Becoming a student-athlete seemed like a better fit for her, as she wasn't ready to focus all of her efforts on just skiing or education.

I felt it was all or nothing, either I'm going to become a world champion and just stay at home, and train only, and qualify for a team here and go all in. Maybe study some, but that would have been stupid... But I wasn't ready to give up on skiing entirely. So, it was a lot about me feeling it was all or nothing, and over there I found a good, a good in-between solution. (Claire)

Both Alice and Adam also knew that they wanted to continue skiing, but not at the expense of earning a degree.

I knew I was going to study and I knew that I wasn't ready to quit all together, putting the skies on the shelf. And that's almost impossible in Norway... Then you have to be a part time student, and if you then are going to take a 5-year master's degree, in ten years, that's no fun. (Alice)

I had nothing to lose because I didn't want to stop studying nor skiing, so I figured it would be cool to try combining the two over there. (Adam)

To Aaron, earning a degree was the main motivating factor to become a SA, and when he was given the opportunity, he felt like he had to grab it with both hands. Despite academics being the main factor for him becoming a SA in the US, he felt motivated to give everything he got as a student-athlete skier as well.

[...] That's what triggered me, the opportunity to earn a master's degree over there... But I had made up my mind, I didn't want to quit skiing. When I got there, I was going to give everything I got, just as I had done here, to perform well. (Aaron)

Clearly, from their responses, academics was one of the main motivating factors that led them to choose to become student-athletes. Focusing all of their effort on skiing also was simply not an option to any of them. Can this be an indicator that skiing alone, in and of itself, was not sufficiently meeting their basic needs? Being both students and athletes, on the other hand, might have met their basic needs to a greater extent. Performing academically leads to

feelings of mastery and competence, just as performing athletically does, and when people feel competent there is a greater likelihood that he/she will be motivated to act (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Academics might be a second arena providing the SAs with feelings of competence.

13.1.2 The Opportunity to Experience Something New and Exciting

Another driving force, shared by all the SAs, to become student-athletes, was their desire for a change in life. They all wanted to get away from the familiar and instead, to experience something new and exciting. It seems like they had grown out of the roles of being skiers only; they wanted to be more, experience more, and by becoming SAs, they were welcoming such new challenges into their lives.

As described, Brian explained how just being an athlete seemed boring, but he also experienced that just being a student was equally not satisfying to him. After one year as a student only in Norway, he was tired of the school in which he studied, and he became more interested in the opportunity to become a student-athlete in the US. His initial plan was to take one year as an exchange student, but then he liked it so much that he ended up staying. He shared why he was motivated to become a student athlete and why he decided to stay:

I was very tired of [name of Norwegian school]. And maybe one of the reasons why I went was because I had heard a lot of great things about it from friends. I received a good scholarship, so economically it was all set... And I thought it was really nice arriving at a place where I had enough Norwegians to have a great time and not to miss Norway at all. But, at the same time it being abroad and to get impulses from a different culture and to experience something different than what you do at home.
(Brian)

Caroline also explained how she needed something new and exciting in her life. After ending her career as a top national skier in Norway, she felt ready to take on new challenges. A lot of her friends took a year off after high school, but she knew she wanted to continue studying; however, she wasn't entirely sure what to study. Despite ending her pro career as a skier, she still loved skiing, and she figured becoming a student-athlete would help her continue doing what she loved, while also giving her the opportunity of figuring out what direction she wanted academically. She shared why she decided to become a student-athlete:

It was because I wanted something new... Yes, something exciting... And I didn't know what I wanted to study, and I didn't want to continue a pro skiing career... So, it was like, that combo just seemed absolutely perfect. And I wanted to travel, but I really

enjoy skiing, and then I thought I would give it a shot and maybe I would figure out more of what I wanted. (Caroline)

Alice shared how she focused all of her energy on developing as a skier during her last years of high school in Norway. She attended a high school of sports, where the course of study, originally taking three years, was spread out over four years, enabling them to spend more time training. She shared how skiing was all that she cared about back then, and how every plan she made was based on optimizing her performance. After experiencing what focusing on skiing only did to her personally during high school, Alice figured she needed something new in her life, something completely new.

[...] Back then skiing meant everything, it was like nothing was more important, I deprioritized every social event, don't think I got any new friends during high school... I took that last year of high school, focusing on skiing only, and I didn't like myself as a person that year because I didn't have enough going on and it was all about skiing. And I've figured out that I perform better when I have more strings to my bow, and I also highly value education. I hadn't thought of skiing scholarship at all. Eh, but in a way, deep down I had made up my mind. I needed something completely new, I had spent four years on high school, only staying at home... Home with mum and dad. I needed something new, something completely new... A change of environment and the whole ordeal, so I think that's why it seemed like such a great opportunity. (Alice)

Despite Aaron's main motivation to become a SA being the course of study, he also addressed the great opportunity to experience something new. Skiing in itself wasn't what triggered him to take this opportunity, education and the journey was.

When you receive such an educational opportunity and on top of that get to experience something new. So, it wasn't primarily the skiing part of it, it was more about education and the journey. (Aaron)

As seen, in addition to the opportunity to earn a degree while skiing competitively, participants in the study were also motivated to become SAs due to the opportunity to experience something new in their lives. Can this be a reflection of them seeking new challenges in order to experience the positive feelings of perceived competence? Feelings of competence are concerned with both self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989) and optimal challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Deci, 1975), both of which have to be present in order to lead to perceived competence. Their sense of self-efficacy, one would think, would have played a central role in the way they made the decision to welcome such a challenge into their lives, as it said to play a major role in how one approaches goals, tasks, and challenges. And, from my

understanding, pursuing such an opportunity, even though it seemed scary at first, was viewed as an optimal challenge. They needed something new in their lives to avoid boredom, implying that the familiar life they had lived the past years probably wasn't optimally challenging anymore. They felt ready to venture out into the world seeking new challenges.

13.1.3 The Increased Value of Higher Education

Not only was earning a degree a motivating factor to become SAs in the first place (as already discussed), but it also seems as if this factor grew stronger with time. In fact, several of the SAs shared how their motivation to be student athletes only had grown stronger since the day they first arrived, not due to athletics in particular, but from their increased interest in the subjects of study. From my understanding, it seems as though the weight of the two roles they had to balance as SAs (NCAA, 2017a) were reversed over time. While they viewed themselves primarily as athletes when they first arrived, as time passed, they became more and more focused on their course of study. As stated in the NCAA Division I manual, «Intercollegiate athletics programs shall be conducted in a manner designed to protect and enhance the physical and educational well-being of student-athletes» (2017a, p.15). Student athletes' participation in intercollegiate athletics should not interfere with their academic pursuits, but rather enhance it. It seems like the SAs' perspectives and priorities grew to become in line with the NCAA's top priorities. Without exception, they all expressed how great their schools were and how their motivation to perform as students grew stronger with time.

Two of the SAs, Adam and Ann, had made up their minds, prior to arriving in the US, to return back home to Norway after their freshman year (freshman year denotes the first year of study). They were determined to do so in order to be able to continue their careers as professional skiers in Norway post-college. However strong the dream to become professional skiers was, after experiencing what it means being a SA and how great their schools were, the return back to Norway became much tougher than expected and left them reflecting on their decision a few months later.

The education is really great, everything was up to date and great and those who graduated often got good jobs right away. (Adam)

There's a lot of things that keeps pulling me back. Especially the people there and the fact that it isn't too serious, and the school too, the school was really great. (Ann)

The rest of the SAs included in this study were on track to graduate from college with a completed degree, meaning they would/will stay in college a total of 2 years in terms of earning a master's degree (as Aaron was) or 3-4 years for the rest, earning their bachelor's degrees. They were all united in the way their interests in their course of study grew stronger during college. The more knowledge they gained, the more they enjoyed being students, and in turn the better they performed. Several of them addressed how American colleges really help their students succeed in the way that you have to be present at lectures and you have to perform academically throughout the year, not letting the final exam be detrimental to your overall grade. They felt like they were constantly being monitored with respect to their preparation and progress on the assignments, quizzes and smaller exams they had to complete. Because of this oversight, they had to stay on top of their academic game at all times, and if they performed poorly, they were offered tutoring. The way such academic assistance was made available to them, helping them whenever they needed guidance, was of great value to the SAs. The structure of the academic program, the monitoring and assistance motivated the SAs to perform well in the classroom.

I am so happy about how the education was over there. Since I didn't do so great at [name of Norwegian school], but I've done great in the U.S... So, I just think it's been great receiving that assistance and everything about the school with private lecturing through the athletic department, and that extra follow-up. (Brian)

[...] It has become more and more important to me to focus on education, I think it's so incredibly interesting what I am studying... Yes, I've become really motivated. They are really good at motivating students towards it and I think it's really exciting. I didn't think it would be this interesting when I started, and that I would find something as fitting. But the school over there is really great, and something I think they're doing a lot better over there than in Norway, is the way you are followed-up on all the time. It is, you have to be present at all lectures, you have to take all exams, you have to do your homework and you earn points throughout the semester and the final doesn't count for too high a percentage of your final grade... In simple terms, I think it's a great way helping students succeed... You have to do everything you can to stay on track at all times. That's been helping me become a better student. (Claire)

The reason why I have good grades is because I've put in the work required, attended every class possible, and I've been completing every assignment and paper, and spent time on it, prioritized it every day. And if I hadn't done so I think I would have failed... If I had done like I did at [name of Norwegian school] there's not a chance I would have made it.. (Aaron)

Aaron's initial plan was, just like Adam's and Ann's, to stay for one year only, but he decided to stay longer as he found it to be so much fun and he found the school to be so great. He addressed how his overall motivation to ski had remained fairly stable, but academics

contributing to a greater portion of him being motivated to remain in the US as a student-athlete. It seems like he became open to welcoming new interests into his life from being a student-athlete, something he wanted to continue exploring by staying longer than first planned.

I was supposed to stay for a year only, but now I'm taking another because I thought it was fun and exciting and I get a great education and all of that. So, the motivation is fairly stable, I've just pushed it in a new direction... I don't think it's stronger to continue skiing, because I have realized that I have a great interest for other things as well, what I am studying by example... You can make your degree as specific as you prefer, you can take single courses, you can change your degree, you can find your interests in a whole different way than you possible can at universities in Norway.
(Aaron)

As a reminder, Division I schools generally have bigger student bodies, manage the largest athletics budgets and offer the highest number of athletics scholarships (NCAA, 2017c). These schools have to commit to maintaining a high academic standard for their student-athletes (NCAA, 2017a), as they appear to do. Linking the SAs' academic motivation to theory, according to SDT, when basic needs are satisfied, self-motivation and mental health will be enhanced (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The SAs' increased interest in academics is most likely linked to their need to feel competent. They all expressed that their self-motivation to perform academically grew stronger during the course of their SA career, and they also shared feeling more competent with time. In my perception, a link to OIT can also be drawn as the SAs, with time, seemed to incorporate and internalize the cultural values connected with being college student-athletes. As stated by the NCAA, student athletes' participation in intercollegiate athletics should not interfere with their academic pursuits, but rather should enhance it; students first, athletes second (NCAA, 2017a). Also, the assistance received academically appeared to be of great value to the study participants, motivating them to academic achievements and possibly providing them with feelings of relatedness and perceived competence. Aaron mentioned that his ability to pick and choose classes in which he has a personal interest made it much more interesting to him, reflecting feelings of perceived autonomy as well. Considering SAs' success in the classroom being one of the NCAA's top priorities (NCAA, 2017c), the NCAA seems to stay true to its core values in this regard. The way the SAs are monitored, followed up with, offered academic assistance, as well as their ability to create their own class schedules, likely provides them with feelings of relatedness, autonomy and enhanced competence, which in turn, should motivate them to academic achievements.

13.1.4 Seeing New Places

An additional factor that motivated the participants to be SAs was the ability to see and experience new places while in college. First of all, they clearly valued the cities in which their colleges were located, surrounded by beautiful nature, nice weather and overall great training conditions.

What brings me back is the city... The nature there is absolutely amazing, and the atmosphere. (Alice)

[...] And the weather of course, it was absolutely, I mean we trained in great weather all the time. (Ann)

I'm living at a really, really pretty place, it's one of the greatest places in the U.S. in my opinion, in so many ways. We have 360 sunny days a year and we just enjoy it to the fullest. (Claire)

And it's just so incredible pretty there... I think the climate there is so nice. I've never liked the fall in Norway, I know a lot find it to be their favorite time of the year. But I've never liked roller skiing in the cold and rain... In October and November, it's 30C and sunny every day, and it's just amazing. And then you got the mountains no more than an hour away, where I can downhill ski in the best mountains in the world. (Caroline)

All of the students highly valued the pretty nature and the ability to train outdoors in great weather and in daylight. Being outdoors and/or exposed to natural elements has been found to be associated with greater vitality (Ryan et al., 2010), and exposure to daylight, in particular, has been found to positively impact feelings of subjective vitality (Smolders et al., 2013). Vitality is said to be more than a state of happiness, it is a fuller, more enduring, and deeper sense of well-being described by the term eudaimonia (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The exposure to natural elements and daylight might have provided the SAs with feelings of increased energy and aliveness.

Whether the exposure to natural environments helped promote the SAs' focus on intrinsic values for social relationships and community, as found in the studies by Weinstein et al., (2009), it is hard to say. But what we do know is that the SAs uniformly highly valued both the opportunity to be outdoors, surrounded by beautiful nature, and to be connected with their teammates.

In addition to the college location, the opportunity to travel with the team to different destinations for skiing meets and training-camps were repeatedly mentioned among all the SAs as being of high value. The fact that they were able to travel across the country, free of charge, due to being student-athletes, was seen as a unique opportunity given to them.

It's just to see, and the opportunity to experience all those places and experience the culture and getting to know people from all over the world... If you want to try something new this is a unique opportunity. (Adam)

The traveling, you get the opportunity to travel around, in a new country, or several countries even, and it being free of charge. And you get to see so many amazing places. (Aaron)

Everything about the team is sponsored, all the clothing, all the trips, all the food while we're on training camps, trips to Alaska, in super nice hotels and restaurants and all. It's quite unique that we get to travel around like that. (Alice)

As seen from their responses, athletic scholarships are of high value to the SAs. Not only do scholarships provide for their tuition, fees, room, board, books and other expenses related to academics, but they also give them experiences of a lifetime through exposure to numerous other beautiful places around the U.S. and the world. However, as will be discussed in section 13.5.2.2, scholarships can also have a down side.

While travelling for the most part was seen as something positive, it was also presented as being challenging at times, particularly when it involved long trips to destinations like Alaska. The stress arose due to the classes missed and the SAs' inability to stay on top of their games academically during these trips. Despite valuing the opportunity to see new places, Ann addressed the challenge that came along with such long trips. She normally liked spending the weekends catching up on homework, as the academic demands were high.

We didn't really compete that often, but when we first did, left for meets, we traveled far. So, we were gone for about five days... And there was a lot of school, so it felt good having quite a few weekends off really. (Ann)

Ann was not the only SA with a desire to catch up on homework over the weekends. Based on NCAA's 2015 GOALS Study, as many as 66 percent of female and 59 percent of male student-athletes reported that they would prefer to spend more time on academics (NCAA, 2015). Ann's and the others' concerns related to the time commitment in sports interfering with their academic pursuits were most likely posing a threat to their need for perceived

competence in the classroom. Missing out on lectures, and their ability to catch up on homework during the weekends, made it more challenging to achieve their desired goals.

Several of the SAs also mentioned how the requirement to attend all of the scheduled skiing meets could be a stressor. From my understanding, this stress arose primarily as a result of the fact that they had no say in this process. The need for autonomy refers to the individual's possibility for choice and participation in decision making regarding one's developmental process (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). The SAs' inability to decide on their own what races to attend could adversely affect such feelings of autonomy, which, in turn, will likely result in greater ill-being and more impoverished functioning. (Ryan & Deci, 2017). On top of the lack of autonomy as to race selection, there was also little autonomy in terms of missing events for health reasons. There is an expectation to always give it all for the team, no matter if one wanted to race or not, and no matter what health condition one must be in. Ann shared how her coach tried to push her to race, even though she felt ill and the corresponding health risk

It was so cold, and I have asthma, and yeah, it was like borderline cold, and I felt like it was a health risk to race, and I was coughing a whole lot, I had raced once already, and my throat was so sore, but then she really wanted to push me to race even though I said no. (Ann)

On the other hand, related to their perceived autonomy, several of the SAs spoke of the opportunity for them to travel on their own during their off-seasons. During these time periods, they had the freedom to decide on their own what to do and travelling seemed to be one of their top priorities. This opportunity was of great value to them, as it allowed them to train at new places, try out new activities and gain new life experiences.

There's always so many new things you can try out and things to do. And it's crazy how much you get to experience, travelling around to attend skiing meets all over the U.S... And the days we were off, like I was there over Christmas, and then we went to a new place to train there and yes, there's so many things pulling me back there. (Ann)

I've done so many things that I never would have done in Norway. I've experienced, I've been backcountry skiing, I've been on cycling trips, I've been riding in some of the U.S.'s most known national parks. We do a lot, rafting and all kinds of stuff... I've experienced so much, and it is, it is something that should pull a lot of people there I think. I just don't understand why more people don't go. (Claire)

The way the NCAA focuses on student-athlete well-being, and the attempt to enhance SA success in life by enabling them to get the most out of their full college experience (NCAA, 2017a), seem to be of great value to the SAs of this study. The way they shared how highly

they value the opportunity to travel and experience new places and activities is a reflection of this conclusion. It seems like there's a lot more to being a student athlete than just studying and skiing only. That being said, it seems as though some flexibility in their busy competition schedule and the opportunity to have some say in terms of when and where to compete would have been preferred.

13.1.5 Having Access to Top Facilities and Resources

The way in which everything was structured in a way that maximized the SAs' ability to develop as athletes, right there at their college campus, was repeatedly mentioned as an important motivating factor. They shared how they had access to great training facilities and resources in terms of athletic trainers and healthcare providers. It seems as if everything was organized in such a great way to help them succeed. They were all highly satisfied with how this structure helped them to optimize their training and to recover quickly from sickness or injuries. In times of such setbacks, help was soon to be received, whether it was a visit to the medical center, the physical therapist, the nutritionist, the psychologist or their team's dedicated trainer. Plus, the way everything was planned and organized for them, in terms of the logistics and arrangements of practice and competitions, made it easy for them just to show up and remain focused on their athletic performances at all times. The SAs were all in awe of how great of an athletic program they got to be a part of as NCAA Division I athletes:

We had three physical therapists on our team, available whenever we wanted, and we had, the weight room was amazing, and we had access to food, free of charge, at our school, like, healthy food, and yes, we could go see a doctor whenever we wanted to and other medical personnel... And whenever we trained prior to skiing season it was great for running and it was great for roller-skiing and. So, like that, it was almost better than what I'm used to at home. And when skiing, we were lucky this winter, the trails were great, prepared almost every day and it was just, yes, we were lucky like that. (Adam)

It is very simple because everything is planned, and you get a ride out to practice and you know, you don't even have to think... And I especially notice this now during the summer break, where I don't have a lot going on, it's a lot harder to get up in the morning and out for a workout, because like, I can stay in bed another half an hour and nobody cares you know. But over there you have to be on time, if not the bus will leave you... It's both positive and negative, but to get that extra push to get out, and when you are done it's such a great feeling you know, and you're done early, and you never have to think, everything is fixed for you. (Aaron)

The way the SAs felt they were taken such good care of, and how everything was facilitated for them, might have positively impacted their feelings of being of value. The need for

relatedness is centered on just this: to feel connected to others and to feel valued for who you are (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). The experience of acceptance and support of the self is central and what leads to greater well-being. Further, caring relationally means being willing to understand and support a person's pursuit or interests and valued goals (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The way the SAs felt cared for, and the way they received the help needed in pursuit of their goals, most likely created such feelings of being of value. Help was being offered to them, not only to uphold their athletic or academic achievements, but also for their well-being by attending to their personal needs (NCAA, 2017a). This help might have created feelings of being valued for being who they are, not merely due to their performances. In accordance to Rogers (1951), such perceptions of unconditional positive regard make individuals feel free to try new things without the fear of failure. Similarly, autonomy support leaves the person with less sense of being contingently valued, controlled, or pressured to think, feel or behave in particular ways (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

As discussed, the NCAA is sensitive to the fact that student athletes have to balance the roles of being fulltime students and fulltime athletes, and regulations are in place to help student athletes maintain a healthy balance. In this regard, the NCAA states that it is the responsibility of each member institution to establish a safe and supportive college-athletic environment to protect and enhance the physical and educational well-being of student-athletes (NCAA, 2017a). The support the SAs of this study felt might be a reflection of these regulations at work.

13.2 To what extent were the student-athletes included in this study satisfied with their year/years as division I student-athletes?

Next, I will present the extent in which the SAs were satisfied with their year/years as SAs. I was interested in learning about their overall experience, as well as their perception of the pros and cons of being a SA. The following conclusions were commonly raised by the SAs with respect to their overall experience: 1) They found it to be a tough start; 2) they were grateful for all the help they received; 3) they learned a lot along the way and grew as people; and 4) their motivation took on a new direction while being SAs.

13.2.1 Tough Start

Despite being highly satisfied with their overall experience as SAs, they all shared how it was a journey, consisting of many ups and downs along the way, particularly during their

freshman year. It seems as if it took them some time to figure out just how to deal with the high demands of being international student-athletes. The requirement to perform academically, in combination with the time commitments involved in representing a college team, was a lot to handle in the beginning. Also, everything being new and unfamiliar might have added extra stress and left the SAs feeling somewhat unable to meet the demands. However, the demands and balance became easier to handle as soon as they got some experience being SAs and understood how to better structure their days. In turn, the way they were able to overcome these initial challenges seems to have led to feelings of mastery, as will be addressed more in section 13.5.1.1. But first, let's take a closer look at the challenges they faced.

Alice shared how she found her first semester being particularly challenging. When asked about what she felt in regard to her own performance since she made the move to the U.S., she shared how she was satisfied, especially when thinking about just how tough it was in the beginning.

Better than what I expected really... I had a really rough time during the fall. I didn't feel good and it is at high altitudes of course. And the transition to become a fulltime student was just huge...I didn't feel, I was last at practice, I was always in the back... Tiered, a lot. (Alice)

Just like Alice, Claire was happy about her athletic performances, despite a challenging start.

Yes, I am satisfied. I had, the first year was a little hard because I was sick a lot and it is a great transition moving to the U.S. and living by yourself for the first time, learning a new language for the first time, starting to study, a lot of new things, so I think that transition was pretty hard, so I got sick a lot and I just struggled with it all being too much. Just the total load, I couldn't quite control it. (Claire)

Caroline had been unable to compete for about a year prior to arriving in the U.S., which made her start extra challenging. However, despite all the hard work she had to put in to get back in shape, while at the same time adjusting to a new country, language and way of living, she felt like it was all worth it.

It's a tough start, I thought it was really hard. It's not a bed of roses and solely fun, you work your butt off... A lot more training than what I thought. A lot more school than what I thought... An extremely stressful everyday life, compared to my sisters studying in Norway. It's high loads every day ... But it's worth it in a way. Because it is so much fun. (Caroline)

All of the SAs shared this perspective: the beginning was difficult. Can one of the reasons why they found life as international SAs to be extra challenging in the beginning be due to needs frustration? According to Ryan and Deci (2017), thwarting of basic needs is associated with greater ill-being and more impoverished functioning. It is likely that the SAs experienced needs thwarting in the beginning, especially in terms of the needs for relatedness and competence. Based on their responses, it was tough leaving the familiarity of life back home in Norway and arriving at a new place without knowing anyone. That it took them some time to feel connected to their coaches and teammates was completely to be expected. This experience might have caused their need for relatedness to suffer in the beginning. Also, the language barriers and the meeting with a new culture might have made it even more challenging meeting the high demands being SAs. As a result, their need for competence might have been negatively affected. Ryff and Singer's (1998, 2000) perspective on eudaimonic well-being might also come to play in this regard. Two of the essential features of psychological well-being presented in their model, self-acceptance (the knowledge and acceptance individuals have of themselves, including awareness of personal limitations) and environmental mastery (how well individuals are managing their life situations) I would propose is of importance as well. As the SAs acknowledged their limitations in terms of language and cultural differences, and they learned how to ask for help (as we will get back to in the following section) the adjustment became easier. Also, them learning how to make personal adjustments and structuring their days in such a way to more easily meet the demands is a reflection of their ability to manage their life situation. Despite a challenging start, they worked their way through it, and as we soon will learn, grew from it.

While there are certainly some variables that make the transition more difficult for international students, meeting the high demands required of a SA seems to be a challenge for all, not only international SAs. As presented in the NCAA's 2015 GOALS study, the median time spent on athletics for Division I student-athletes was 34 hours per week, and the reported median time spent on academics was 38.5 hours per week. Being a SA requires hard work, on and off the field, but as will be discuss next, there is help to be received, something that was of great value to the SAs of this study.

13.2.2 Grateful for the Help Received

One of the reasons why the SAs felt like it was worth it to put in all that hard work and to not give up on their careers as SAs right away was because of all the help they received along the way. The transition, the move from the familiar back home in Norway to a new and different

culture, without their regular network of support, made their first few months hard. However, the way they were taken care of by their coaches, teammates and the school's athletic department's faculty and staff, were of high value and one of the main reasons they overcame these initial challenges.

Caroline addressed how being far away from home made the challenges any student-athlete would face extra challenging as her emotions were all over the place, and stronger than what they normally would be.

It's hard in the beginning, I thought it was really difficult. And it's very far from home. So, I noticed, whenever I was sad over there I felt sadder, but when I'm happy over there I feel even more satisfied. So, it's like highs are high and lows are low.
(Caroline)

However, while addressing this issue, she turned her focus to her coaches and praised them for the way they helped her through her most challenging days by seeing her as a person. The close relationship they eventually developed made her feel valued for being more than just an athlete. They proved to her that she was worth more than her performances, constantly encouraging her and even routinely adjusting her training to help her feel better.

If I struggle with something academically they help me as well, it's not just about skiing, and if there's a lot going on at school then they're like, go easy on training... They care about more, or they care about other things than training only... They understand that being a student-athlete is challenging and that, okay, if it's the week of finals we need to train less, sleep more. (Caroline)

Aaron was also particularly satisfied with how his coaches made an effort to help them in handling their busy lives as SAs. To ensure quality at practice, and to help them perform in the classroom, several options of practice times were offered.

And often, on days where we are short on time due to school, they often offer, on Wednesdays and Fridays by example, we got two options, we can either attend a morning workout or an evening workout. (Aaron)

Looking back at his years as a SA, David addressed how prospective SAs can better handle the initial challenges as international student-athletes by taking advantage of all the resources made available to them. The value of these resources was something he became increasingly aware of during his years as a student-athlete. As he learned how to ask for help and share the

burden of a busy life with his network of support, he was able to enjoy the full college experience more.

Make a plan and be structured, because it is a lot of school, but a lot of training too. And the social life. So, it's all about taking advantage of all the resources you are provided with and ask, and in a way just enjoy it, because it is an amazing time, Yes, yes, everything is lined up like nowhere else so just enjoy it. (David)

Claire also gave advice to prospective SAs on how to handle the demands of the busy everyday life. Based on her own experiences, she recommended leaning on others, because there's always help to be received

I would have told them to prepare for something that is completely new. To be, to plan a little and be good at asking for help and taking advantage of the resources you got. It is, they have people for everything. Within the athletic department we have nutritionists, we have academic advisors, we have everything so there's always someone to ask for help... And the team, everyone is there to help you out... And just to have fun and really enjoying that you are there. Time flies. (Claire)

How they were able to open up and ask for help signals feelings of emotional reliance. They were able to trust and rely on others for help, a trait that has been shown to result in greater wellness (Ryan et al., 2005). As it took them some time to open up for help, they truly felt like they benefitted from it when they finally did. Overall, it seems from the SAs' responses that their need to experience good relationships and to connect with significant others were soon to be fulfilled due to the Autonomy supportive climate they became a part of as SAs. From the day they arrived on campus, they were part of a team, meaning that a network of support was already in place for them, and it was not something they had to establish on their own. Teammates, coaches and all the other resources made available to them were listed as being of high value to all of them, and as Claire stated, «everyone is there to help you out». Through this support, they felt like they were being taken care of, despite being a long way from home. Studies show that autonomy supportive climates conduces to openness to learning, fostering more integrated internalization of cultural norms and practices (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Due to the climate the SAs became a part of being such supportive of the SAs needs, it was most likely easier for the them to adopt, and in turn feelings of greater relatedness and sense of belonging might have resulted (Ryan & Deci, 2017). It seems as if the need-support they were provided with, from multiple sources simultaneously, were of value. This conclusion is consistent with studies showing that the highest levels of subjective

well-being are reported when several sources are perceived to be highly autonomy supportive (Ratelle et al., 2013).

Not to undermine the value of the help and support they were given, but I do believe we need to keep in mind that the participants of this study are competitive athletes in the challenging sport of Nordic skiing, something that requires hard work and determination. They are used to working hard to achieve their goals, and they don't give up easily. The fact that they remained in the game, competing as junior skiers in Norway prior to becoming SAs, is an indicator of their determination. So, as the help received was of great value to the SAs, I think the persistence and ability to face challenges head on, understanding that hard work is a prerequisite to success, is another reason for them making it past the initial challenges as SAs.

13.2.3 Motivation Took on a New Direction

Another element all the SAs addressed was how their motivation had been affected and taken on a new direction while in the U.S., which they explained was due to the whole experience of being international college student athletes and all they got to learn and enjoy. When I asked if and/or how their year/years as SAs had affected their motivation to be Nordic skiers, they all responded in more general terms, explaining how motivating it had been being SAs, and how this motivation had given them new perspectives and a realization that there's more to life. The opportunities to travel and see new places, to study interesting subjects, to learn about a new culture and to meet new interesting people were of value. It seems as if this exposure helped broaden their horizons and motivated them to do more than just be skiers. All of the SAs shared that they were highly motivated to be college student athletes, but that the motivation was attributable to the overall experience and not skiing alone. Claire explained how there's a tendency among many international SAs to plan for a year but to then stay longer as soon as they realize how much fun it is

I remember meeting two of the Norwegian boys that were there. I met them before I started there and then I told one of them that I was going to be there for one year then return back home. And then he just started to laugh. Then he said "you say that now, everyone else have said that as well, and I'm now at my fourth year, so..." And that's exactly how it was for me too. (Claire)

David's response is in line with the other SAs', focusing on how much fun he had as a SA due to all he was able to experience

It's been so much fun, and we have lived at amazing places and visited cool places and been skiing at many cool places and lived in amazing houses and. It's been really, really great. And not just in terms of skiing, but the whole motivation, because everything has been amazing. (David)

Despite feeling a little disappointed about the shape he was in during his year as a SA, Adam was highly satisfied with the overall experience. He explained how his motivation to ski in particular had remained fairly stable, but how all the other aspects of being a SA, made it all so much fun and his time worthwhile

The motivation is pretty much the same, it's always been pretty good. What challenged my motivation the most was that I didn't feel on top in terms of my own shape. But that had nothing to do with the team or the place, but more with how the experience was at practice. But it was so much fun trying something new, and yes, the whole year has just been exciting; we traveled around and went skiing at new places, and everything was completely different, and the climate and the training conditions and the people and the culture and the skiing culture and, yes. (Adam)

When asked about their future plans, only two out of the eight SAs shared that they had plans to go pro post college, Adam and Ann. They had both made up their minds prior to becoming SAs; they would stay in the U.S. for one year then move back home to Norway to continue their skiing careers. Unlike many others, they were able to stick to their plan despite it being hard to leave. Since they were determined to follow their dreams to become professional skiers, they felt like Norway was the only right place to be. Adam shared how he felt he had to return to Norway to give a professional career a shot, but he also felt like he had gained important experiences during his year as a SA that he would benefit from in the future.

It's worth a shoot. But to have trained at altitude, it's a great experience to take from this. Just to compete at altitude and to train, you learn from it, you learn about your body, to know your body better... (Adam)

Despite being determined to do so, it was hard for him to leave after his freshman year.

It was hard, but I had made up my mind. I realized early on that it was so much fun being there... (Adam)

Ann had an even harder time leaving after her freshman year, but she felt Norway was the only right place to be to reach her potential as a skier. Being back in Norway she reflects upon her time in the US.

I had such a great time. At least now, looking back, it must have been my best year... I had such a great time, oh my God. Did so much fun and I have experienced a lot. Yes, it was almost so that I didn't return back home. (Ann)

She continues explaining how motivated she was while there, but she felt like she had to return, mainly due to all the knowledge and the great coaches in Norway, the things that she missed as a SA in the U.S.

I was so motivated while there. And after I had been there for a year I just wanted to stay for another, like crazy much. But I knew, if I had stayed longer, most likely I wouldn't have continued skiing. I would have skied still, but I would have focused more on school and I wouldn't have been able to ski professionally in Norway again. There's too grate of a gap in terms of level. I think it's possible to develop as a skiing there, but maybe for a year or two, but if you stay longer I think it will affect you. Norway is the country that has developed the most, I mean we have such great recourses here. Coaches, all that knowledge, the equipment and other people, the level is crazy high here in Norway and just that will do, yes. I mean, I think one has a great potential to become good in Norway. (Ann)

But, Ann also felt that a year in the U.S. had done her well, in terms of her developing as an athlete, and as a person. It gave her perspectives and helped her realize there's more to life.

But I think to break up the training you are used to, experience something new, that is healthy. To me, I think it did me well to be in the USA. But I did feel that I really wanted to stay for another year. After being in the USA for one year there's other things that I want to do as well. It ignited that spark in me, I realized that there's more than just skiing. There's a lot of other things to do that can make you feel good. (Ann)

Just like Ann, the other SAs seem to have realized life is about more than skiing only, and because of that, the direction of their motivation shifted, or broadened in a way. As a result of being SAs, they are now motivated to do more than to perform as skiers only. To perform as students is one of them.

I think it's fun, fun to study learning new things, to become good at something... And you get that same feeling that motivates you to ski, good results academically motivate you in the same way you know. (Aaron)

I have a different kind of motivation this year than what I had the year prior. Because last year, or I had the goal last year to qualify for the NCAA, and I still do, so that's the same really. But I have a more relaxed attitude towards it this year I think. Because it's like, I think the studies are so much fun, so I would like to focus just as much on them. (Alice)

David, who just had graduated with a bachelor's degree when the interview took place, had

decided to end his career as a skier post college. Now he felt ready to move on, focusing all of his energy on earning a master's degree in combination with working as an assistance coach at another university in the U.S.

No, Now I'm done... It's been so great. Now I'm more motivated to focus on education really. And if I were to continue skiing professionally I would have needed to move back home, and I don't want to, I want to be in the USA and because of that it was over in a way. And luckily I got that job as an assistance coach at [name of university], and in that way I can continue studying, be in the skiing community and that is really great. (David)

As seen from David's response, he is not motivated to live life as a professional skier post college. However, he shared being grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the skiing community still, through his new job as an assistance coach. His perspective is similar to David's, Claire's and Caroline's, who explained that they had no plans going pro post college, despite their love of skiing being just as strong as before. They've come to terms with it being ok skiing just for fun, without having goals to become a world champion one day. Without the pressure to constantly develop and perform at a high level, they felt like they were able to enjoy it more.

I enjoy it more now... Yes, I think it's so much fun, not at a high level, I still don't want to become a world champion... But I just think it's so much fun to be skiing, to be able to go camping, and just be in a good shape so that I can do whatever I want to do. And I can perform, I can do well and challenge others and compete with them and I can still be good... I was a little tiered of skiing as a graduated from high school really, and it really helped my motivation to get over there as it is something completely different; you have to get used to new forms of training, new people to relate to, new, everything is new... The joy of training has grown noticeably. (Claire)

Caroline wanted to hold on to the love of skiing, and if she attempted to push it further competitively, she feared her love for the sport would have suffered

But, but now I've been doing this for so long that I don't have energy for it any longer. I've been thinking every year, maybe now I will make it, maybe now, but, yes, I don't want to continue until I hate skiing. Because I love skiing. So, I don't want to push it until I can't take it anymore. (Caroline)

Alice also shared how she will definitively not pursue skiing competitively after college, but, at the same time, she is highly motivated to do her very best while in college. Brian shared, in the same way, that he has no intentions of going pro post college and that he now focuses more short term. Instead of planning to reach long term goals, he focuses on his performance

here and now, having fun in the present. He enjoys it more because of this perspective, and as a consequence, he thinks life as a professional skier seems boring

Well, it's not a glamorous life... Because you have to train, sleep and eat, ehm, no time for, you really shouldn't do anything else. Shouldn't do anything that can take off of your energy, and that means being around few people, eh, having a lot of routines, lack of new experiences in your everyday life, and I think that seems boring. (Brian)

I found it interesting how the SAs could be highly motivated to perform while in college despite knowing that they soon were to end their skiing careers. But, from what I learned, this fact seemed to be due to the value of a team structure in college sports, as we will get back to in section 13.4.1. In addition to the realization there's more to life, they seem to have realized there's more ways of skiing as well. In Norway, they saw skiing as an individual sport, where the focus always would be on individual performances. As SAs, on the other hand, they felt like they weren't only skiing and performing for their own sake, but they saw the importance of being present at practice and racing at their very best for their teammates as well. This feature, in particular, seems to have motivated the SAs to perform here and now, despite professional careers not being part of their future plans. Also, the way they shared being able to compete without a perceived pressure to develop into professional athletes might be a reflection of the negative consequences external events such as pressure can yield. Studies show that winning without pressure is associated with the highest level of intrinsic motivation (Reeve and Deci, 1996) and succeeding at an activity while feeling pressured to do so result in happiness, but not vitality (Nix et al., 1999). It seems as the SAs now are able to enjoy the activity in itself more and that the overall experience of being Nordic skiers are more rewarding due to the team structure and a decreased sense of pressure. Also, the strong sense of support they felt, from teammates and the community as a whole, made it even more fun to perform well.

I think I want to perform even better now... To succeed, because you don't just perform for your own sake. There's a lot that think it's cool when you succeed... It has made me, maybe more open to it being more than one way of skiing... Because, while I before was very black or white in terms of the way one should be skiing, or in the understanding of how one should be skiing... To become a professional or not. Either to go all in, be all serious, do whatever it takes, or not to, not to do anything at all. Do something different. Now, I see the value of skiing in the way one would like to be skiing, as long as one has fun all along. (Brian)

Yes, it motivates me how everyone else wants me to succeed. And especially during that last competition, I always do extra well, and that I think is because I feel that

extra support from the team even more and the importance of, now we trust you and that you do well, then I normally perform better, luckily. (Claire)

Aaron also shared how he experienced a new sense of joy connected to training while in college, and at the same time, he felt like the whole college experience helped him widen his lenses, making him understand there's more that he wants to accomplish in life than just being a skier.

I've become super motivated, I think it is, it's almost like I've gained, like I've gained a, almost a new sense of joy in terms of training... To train with new people and to train a little, to learn how to handle being exposed to new impressions, figuring out what works, like training at altitude by example. Hikes and stuff like that, trying out new things, that I think has been really good for the motivation. But, on the other hand, I've learned that I also think it's exciting doing other things... It's like widening my lenses on all that I want to accomplish in life. (Aaron)

To be taken from the SAs' responses, the desire to experience more than what life as a professional skier in Norway may offer appears to be a consequence of their experiences of being SAs in the U.S. They've realized there are more ways of skiing, there is more to life and ways to live, and they can become more than skiers only. Can one of the reasons why their motivation seemed to have taken on a new direction be due to them adjusting to a new culture, and integrating the American values and ways of thinking? More autonomy supportive climates conduces an openness to learning, hence fostering more integrated internalization of cultural norms and practices. (Ryan & Deci, 2017). From the SAs' descriptions, they seem to have internalized the American values, specific practices and norms, and these values seem, in turn, to be supportive of the SAs' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to OIT, autonomy supportive cultural contents are expected to be more easily internalized and integrated, and, in turn, foster greater wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The SAs shared having become more openminded and appreciative of the American culture, valuing team effort and the belief that you can be anything you want to be. As their minds used to be focused on being skiers only, they have now widened their horizons and realized there's more to life and more that they can become. The internalization of the American culture may have given their life new direction and purpose. Such cultural internalization provides individuals with scaffolding for growth and a sense of meaning and purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Seen from an eudaimonic perspective, where the key is to become what one are by discerning one's unique talents and working to bring them to reality (Ryff, 2014), the essential features of environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth seems to be of importance to the SAs. According to Ryff and Singer these features defines psychological well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1998, 2000). The way the SAs internalized the American values, adjusting to a new culture, indicates environmental mastery. The way they've come to realize there's more to life and more that they can become, reflects both personal growth and them finding purpose and direction in being SAs. In addition to being motivated to stay in the U.S. as SAs they all seemed to have flourished as people reflecting feelings of vitality and psychological well-being. The SAs reflections of personal growth are in line with the results of the NCAA (2015) Goals study showing that 90% of student-athletes felt their college athletic experience had a positive impact on personal growth. High percentages also reported that college sports had a positive effect on their leadership skills, their values and ethics, self-confidence, time management, understanding of diverse cultures, study skills and commitment to volunteerism.

Going back to the SAs' desire to experience more now, it is worthy to take into consideration the fact that all the SAs included in this study made the decision to leave life as they knew it back home in Norway and to move to the United States to become SAs. This reality tells us that they were ready to venture out into the world in search of new experiences and challenges to begin with. This fact might be a sign of them having experienced deep relatedness with others during their upbringing, as this experience tends to leave people with perceptions of security that are necessary to venture out into the world in this way (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In this sense, the desire to experience more, and to take on new challenges in life, might have been strongly installed in them prior to becoming SAs. However, regardless, it seems as if the American culture has affected them by widening their horizons, making their desire to experience more grow even stronger.

13.3 Do the student-athletes perceive their coach/coaches to be needs supportive?

This part of the study is where the greatest gaps were found among the SAs' responses. On one end of the spectrum, you have two of the SAs being highly satisfied with their coaches. On the other end, you have the rest of the SAs, not being very satisfied. Let's first take a closer look at the elements that the two who were satisfied with their coaches focused on, then move on to the responses of those who were not satisfied.

13.3.1 SAs Perceiving their Coaches to be Needs Supportive

The two who found their coaches to be needs supportive focused on the following: the coaches' ability to make them feel valued; frequent contact; their ability to make adjustments to training whenever needed; and their ability to let the SAs take part in the decision-making process on when and how to train. I've grouped these findings where I felt they belonged in terms of meeting the three basic needs for *relatedness*, *competence* and *autonomy*.

13.3.1.1 *The Need for Relatedness Being Met*

13.3.1.1.1 The Coach Making Them Feel Valued as a Person

Caroline was one of the SAs who couldn't stop praising her coaches. She shared that she had two male coaches, both pretty young, and how she just couldn't thank them enough for how they had helped her from the day she first arrived in the US as a student-athlete. She used terms like uncles and buddies while talking about them, and she truly felt like they cared about her.

There's a great difference between the schools and what is their strengths and weaknesses, where they are located or how great of a school it is academically and stuff like that, and I would say our coaches, that's really where my school is the best. Everyone is jealous at us, I mean, they are just fantastic, they are kind of like my uncles... So, they are just, very good and they care a lot about their athletes and very understanding and very relaxed and just, no, just great guys... (Caroline)

Caroline's response might help us understand the great gap in the level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction amongst the SAs in relation to their coaches. To be taken from her, and the other SAs' responses, there's a big difference on the quality of college Nordic skiing coaches. Maybe there is time to let new and younger coaches take over (as we will get back to). Caroline was lucky with her coach, being young, up to date and supportive of her needs.

13.3.1.1.2 Ability to See Academic and Athletic Load and Make Individual Adjustments

Caroline also talked about how her coaches made her feel valued due to their ability to see her, not just the athlete. She said that they cared about more than their skiing performance, and they would make adjustments to training to make sure they could handle the total load of their everyday life as student-athletes

They care about more, or they care about other things than training only... If I struggle with something at school they will help me too, it's not just about skiing in a way, and if there's a lot going on at school they're just like, go easy on training... Because there's a lot of coaches that's just like, I'm a coach and that's all I am, just at practice, while they are more like, they understand that being a student-athlete is pretty demanding and that, okay, if it's finals week then we need to cut down on training, you have to sleep more. (Caroline)

To be seen and valued for who you truly are, and not just for your accomplishments, can be viewed as a core ingredient in order to experience good relationships. Within RMT, a sense of relatedness is not just seen as a function of contact, but by an intrinsic caring for each other, consisting of the experience of acceptance and support of the self (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In this way, Caroline's coaches seem to be needs supportive, providing Caroline with the love and support she needed to feel valued and closely related to them. The way she appreciated them seeing her needs, even by helping her with homework when needed, tells us something about their relationship; she is more than just an athlete to them, and they are more than just coaches to her.

13.3.1.1.3 Coach Contact

Aaron was the other SA who was highly satisfied with his coaches. He addressed how he was grateful for his coaches' ability to follow up on each and every one of them in such an individual way, seeing their strengths and weaknesses, and helping them make personal improvements as athletes.

The coaching team there is, it is really popular like that. Because it is known for being a highly inviting environment and really good at making things happen and seeing weaknesses and stuff like that... (Aaron)

To be seen as an athlete, and as a person, is of great value. Aaron's perception of his coaches is consistent with Caroline's. His coaches seem to be needs supportive in the same way, adhering to the SAs' need for relatedness. As discussed, the need for relatedness refers to an individual's need to experience good relationships and to connect with significant others (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). To be seen and receive personal feedback like he did might have helped him to feel valued. His description of how his coaches created a highly inviting environment tells us something about how he views his coaches' relational skills, and how he connected with them.

13.3.1.2 *The Need for Competence Being Met*

13.3.1.2.1 Coaches Giving Informational Praise

Caroline further explained how her coaches supported her during challenging times and how much this meant to her. Because of her health issues prior to arriving in the US, she was unable to perform as desired and she felt like she was letting her coaches down. However, as she shared how frustrating this experience was to her, her coaches would tell her that they saw how she gave everything she had and that they were proud of her for it. They gave her working tasks to focus on while racing, instead of focusing on the end results, something that might have enhanced her feelings of mastery and perceived competence.

Even if I race badly they manage to tell me the things I did well. Like, "this is what you were supposed to work on and you did". But then I'm like, "but I raced horribly". "But you managed to keep your hips high, just like you've worked on". (Caroline)

Even in times when she felt badly about herself, they helped her feel better. According to Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), the need for competence refers to being as effective as possible in one's actions and the pleasure following this effort. The way they helped Caroline focus on her effort and working tasks, followed by affirmation, might have helped her feel better equipped at mastering skiing all together, raising feelings of personal competence. Also, according to Henderlong and Lepper (2002), such informational praise is what facilitates intrinsic motivation. The way they focused on how she was able to keep her hips high, is valuable, informative feedback as it confirms to her that her technique work payed of. Also, the way she acknowledged how her coaches helped her in times when she struggled in the classroom might have led to an enhanced perception of competence in regard to her academic achievements. Caroline further shared that everyone on the team received this same kind of support and personal feedback, regardless of how they performed.

13.3.1.3 *The Need for Autonomy Being Met*

13.3.1.3.1 *The Possibility for Choice and Participation in the Decision-Making Process Regarding One's Own Training*

Aaron shared how he had heard stories from student athletes at other schools regarding how they had to follow their coaches' plan strictly, them having no say in it. At his school, however, the coaches would allow for them to take part in the decision-making processes, and

they were flexible in terms of training. In this sense, it seems as if he found his coaches to be autonomy supportive in terms of their training, something he really appreciated. However, at times, he thinks he may have benefitted from having someone that was a little harder on him, requiring more from him than what his coach did

I have a really good personal relation to him, he is not the one that pushes the most; he is very, like, kind and understanding. And that can be both positive and negative. What I see as positive, because I've lived by myself a lot, I'm from a farm you know, so I've lived by myself a lot and I've trained by myself a whole lot, all of my life, that's pretty much where I've done all of the work... So, I like to be in charge. So, I don't need that, "now you have to decide for me what to train". But I just like the reassurance that what I do is within reason for what he thinks is ok. And like that, I might have benefitted from having someone who is a little stricter and more critical of what I do. (Aaron)

Due to his background, Aaron liked being in charge of his own training. In that sense, his coach seemed to be needs supportive, providing him with feelings of autonomy. However, it should be taken into consideration that a coach being autonomy supportive shouldn't be confused with a hands-off approach. As Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) state, the need for autonomy refers to an individual's possibility for choice and participation in decision making processes, which doesn't necessarily mean Aaron should have to make all the decisions on his own without a coach's critical voice guiding him in his work. As discussed, feelings of competence are concerned with both self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989) and optimal challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Deci, 1975). From my understanding, Aaron would have benefitted from some push back/critical thoughts from his coach, giving him more of an optimal challenge as an athlete in terms of his own development. However, overall, Caroline's and Aaron's experiences with their coaches seem to be the preferred way, meeting their basic psychological needs.

13.3.2 SAs Perceiving their Coaches Not to be Needs Supportive

The majority of the SAs on the other hand, were not very happy with their coaches. What was especially apparent from their responses was their coaches' inability to help them develop as athletes and individuals. The six SAs not being satisfied focused on the following criticisms: a general lack of coaching; a tendency to let the best athletes decide; a general lack of knowledge; and being results oriented. While analyzing their responses, more and more elements pointed towards their coaching styles falling within the category of laissez faire coaching. As discussed, the coaching style of "transformational leadership" is the type of

coaching being considered as needs supportive in recent literature (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Charbonneau et al., 2001; Gözükara & Şimşek, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2017) and related to coaching effectiveness (Rowold, 2006), whereas transactional and non-leadership/laissez faire coaching are not (Rowold, 2006). Let's take a closer look at the SAs' responses and why I see the term laissez faire coaching to be the most fitting description of their coaching styles.

13.3.2.1 Need for Relatedness from Coaches Not Met

13.3.2.1.1 Coaches Didn't Really Care

All six of the SAs who were dissatisfied with their coaches pointed to how poorly they were followed up with, addressing factors such as lack of individual meetings, lack of training plans, lack of technique training and lack of personal feedback. A common trait found in their responses was how they felt like their coaches didn't really care, because they would never do more than the bare minimum. Several of the SAs felt like the coaches' main motivation for coaching was their income. Coach bonuses were brought up in this regard, which were often paid when the team performed well at certain competitions. This fact, in and of itself, might be cause for concern, as such extrinsic factors might negatively affect the coaches' intrinsic motivation to coach (Ryan 1977, 1980; White & Sheldon, 2014). However, addressing the coaches' needs further is beyond the scope of this paper. In short, this style of coaching is not generally associated with coaching effectiveness. Moreover, consistent with Rowold's study (2006), the athletes' satisfaction and the coaches' abilities to help the athletes develop their physical and mental abilities seemed to suffer from it. If the SAs believed their coaches didn't really care, such a belief likely negatively affected their perceptions of being of value, and in turn, negatively affecting their relationship.

Adam explained how he saw it as a benefit that he wasn't a young, inexperienced skier when he went to the U.S., because he had to do most of the training and development planning on his own. He said there simply wasn't much help available. To him, it seemed like the coaches didn't really care about spending time to help them develop as athletes. The coaches were more self-centered than what he had experienced in Norway. Being back in Norway he reflects on his coaches over there.

The greatest difference on a coach I had over there and a coach here is that the coaches here often put their athletes first; they are more willing to sacrifice themselves, while over there they may be more self-centered I think. (Adam)

He shared that the coaches had a plan for team practice, but other than that, the SAs were left on their own to plan the rest of their training sessions of the week. Team practice only made up about half of Adam's training. Individual meetings with the athletes, as Adam was used to having in Norway, were not something his coach would initiate. Adam was also disappointed with how the coaches wouldn't offer to help more with preparing their skis prior to competitions, thinking about all the time they had available as they were hired as full-time coaches. The SAs had to do everything in regard to ski preparation, with the exception of applying the grip wax close to race start.

Adam wasn't the only one disappointed with his coaches. Ann seemed even more disappointed, sharing that she found her coach to be really bad.

Puh, yes, it's terrible to say, but the head coach was a really bad coach. Yes, she was very selfish and had a lot of strange workouts and yes, it was very few of the athletes who liked her and it was a lot of dissatisfaction. (Ann)

Like Adam, Ann shared that if they wanted to have individual meetings with their coach they were the ones who had to take the initiative. In particular, she noticed how even the youngest and least experienced athletes on her team didn't receive much support or coaching. To Ann, it seemed like her coach didn't really care at all, something she summed up perfectly by explaining how her coach suddenly depart for a cup of coffee in the middle of team practice.

Brian was equally dissatisfied with his coaches and their lack of coaching, pointing to them as being more organizers than coaches.

Ehm, so what I can say about the coaches is that I don't think they are really, they are not good coaches, because they follow-up way too little to be hired as full-time coaches. Other schools might be better at this, but what we could have done, we could have had individual meetings, we could have made plans, they could have read our training logs... Ehm, they might look at their roles more as organizers then coaches, in a way. (Brian)

As proposed by Charbonneau et al., (2001), transformational leadership may enhance intrinsic interest in the task at hand. Unfortunately, by the way the SAs described their coaches, they seemed to rather be falling within the coaching style of laissez faire coaching. Laissez faire leaders avoid taking responsibility and show little interest in what is actually going on (Kirkbride, 2006). Such coaches are being indifferent to the needs of their athletes and, in turn, this attitude can have critical consequences for the motivation of athletes (Deci & Ryan,

2000). Langan et al., proposed, based on their study, that the coach-athlete relationship are amongst the most critical influencing athletes' motivation. Based on such studies, and theory, we should have seen negative consequences in the SAs' motivation, due to their coaches being indifferent to their needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and their laissez faire style of coaching not being associated with coaching effectiveness (Rowold, 2006), this consequence, however, appears not to be the case in this study. All of the SAs were highly motivated to attend team practice and to perform well at skiing meets. Their motivation appears to derive from an intrinsic motivation to ski, and it seems as though their motivation arose from their teammates making up for this general lack of coaching. Where the coaches seemed to fail, individual athletes on the teams took charge and took on the role as unofficial team leaders.

13.3.2.1.2 Need for Relatedness Made up for by Teammates

It seems as though team leaders made up for the lack of leadership from designated coaches at all three of the colleges the SAs attended. They all said that the more experienced SAs provided needed leadership, guiding the newcomers in particular and assisting all of the SAs in terms of technique training and in the creation of individual training plans. From my understanding, the best and most experienced SAs practically worked as team leaders, replacing the coaches in several ways. Claire said that two boys on her team practically worked as her coaches.

For me it worked out nicely, because I have two Norwegian boys on my team who, good skiers, who have been very nice coaching me, and taken over the coaches' role really... The logistics and all the head coach is still in charge of, how to get to skiing meets and how to register for skiing meets, but functioning as a coach, the boys have been more of that. (Claire)

Being one of the oldest and best on his team, David ended up being one of the team leaders himself, helping the newcomers with everything from getting around campus to the creation of individual training plans. He addressed how everything seemed to be uncontrolled from the coaches' side and how he ended up taking charge by helping/discussing with them what to do at team practice. He also felt badly for the young and inexperienced skiers on his team, and therefore ended up helping them with their individual plans as well. He reflected upon when he first arrived on campus and how he also had received this kind of help from one of the more experienced SAs and how much he had appreciated it.

For the skiing team, it's very uncontrolled. We have team practices where everyone does the same, but I've also been a part of the discussion of what we should do here... And other than that, I've pretty much done everything on my own. It's been like, for me it's been ok, but there's been a lot of critique within the team in regard to poor follow-up, especially for the youngest. And those who doesn't have as much knowledge and stuff... I arrived as a 21-year old, so that's like, I had some years in Norway where I've learned a lot already, so I got by in a good way, and I had a boy, Erik, who had two years left when I arrived, who helped me a lot and who, at least showed me where to train and all of that, so that was really good for me... (David)

The way they helped each other within the team seemed to make up for the lack of well-functioning coaches. The more experienced SAs were especially of high value to the team, as they helped lead the team and shared their experiences and knowledge with the newcomers. These team leaders helped out in many different ways, including by solving everyday challenges met by the newcomers, creating individual training plans and assisting with technique training. Team leaders simply took charge and led the group through transformational leadership. Several studies show how peer transformational leadership behaviors positively affect athlete satisfaction, joy, effort, team cohesion and collective efficacy (Zacharatos et al., 2000; Glenn, 2003; Price & Weiss, 2011). It seems as if peer leadership was of great value to the SAs, especially in creating a great team environment (as we will discuss further in section 13.4). Also, all the support they were given from their school's athletic department, faculty and staff were of value. Again, studies show that need-support from multiple sources might be of importance in leading to subjective well-being (Ratelle et al., 2013). The support given by teammates and their extended network of support seemed to be sufficient to meet the SAs' basic needs, making up for the lack of effective coaching.

13.3.2.2 Lack of Autonomy Support for All

13.3.2.2.1 Tendency to Let the Best Athletes Decide

Several of the SAs shared how they got to do pretty much as they wanted in terms of training, especially if they were one of the better skiers on the team. It seems like the best athletes / the unofficial "team leaders" took over for the coaches in many ways. As David shared, not only did he help individual SAs with the planning of their training, but he also helped the coach in the planning of the whole team's training and team practices. Several others of the SAs had similar experiences, functioning as team leaders at their schools.

While talking about her coach, Alice explained how he was anything but authoritarian and that he, instead, would let the best athletes control it all rather than taking charge himself. While trying to get a picture of his coaching style, I asked her if she felt like he was controlling and to that she responded with the following:

No, no, no, no, that's funny, because, in a way it's the best boy who, on our team I mean, who controls it all, and that's been David. So, its David who has been in control of our training. Or that's my impression at least. (Alice)

Further, she shared that they had a lot of freedom on her team, or at least the best athletes. She then explained how the best girl on her team didn't even have to show up at team practices, because her coach just knew that she would perform when she needed to, and that's all he cared about. As for the rest of the SAs on the team, he expected them to show up at every practice, clearly treating his athletes differently based on results.

Brian, being one of the best on his team, explained how he was free to do pretty much as he wanted and how he was happy about that freedom. He also shared how he had a big influence on the team's training, just like David.

And I have to say that, eh, the only reason why I think the program is good, is because I get to do pretty much as I want... And it's been like that for most of the Norwegians. I think, since they've worked hard on recruiting good Europeans, and maybe specifically Norwegians, half of those at [name of university], or [name of university] ski team are Norwegian, so they've gotten used to, if they may do their own things, it turns out to be the best. And like that, it's very like, just let it be and hope for the best, kind of attitude from the coach. And he asks me and, or me first prior to putting together the plan, on what I want to include. And that typically ends up being the plan. (Brian)

I needed Brian to clarify if everyone had this kind of influence on the training plan, but he then explained that definitely was not the case. The fact that he was one of the best skiers on the team, with personal opinions on how to best plan their training, was the determining factor here. This kind of special treatment of the best athletes could be a source of tension within the team. However, as we will discuss in section 13.4.1.5, clearly defined roles and respect for one another within the team seemed to stop such feelings from developing.

At first glance, the coaches might seem to be autonomy supportive, especially towards the best athletes, allowing them to decide what and when to train, as long as they performed well. But, is this kind of special treatment really a sign of coaches being autonomy supportive? In consideration of the way they the best athletes of this study complained about a general lack

of coaching, with the coaches being unable or unwilling to provide the best athletes with optimal challenges, the coaches generally appear to be more in the laissez faire category rather than that of them being needs supportive.

13.3.2.3 Need for Competence Not Met

13.3.2.3.1 Lack of Knowledge

Another indication that their coaching style was laissez faire was their lack of knowledge and unwillingness to update their way of coaching in accordance with the developments within the sport. The SAs were disappointed by the lack of knowledge of their coaches. Their inability to help assist them in the planning of training, in improving technique, in designing good workouts and generally in being up to date with the sport of Nordic skiing and its developments were mentioned. The SAs' lack of trust in their coaches' competence, in combination with the coaches' high expectations of them to always perform on top, might have negatively affected the SAs' perceived level of personal competence.

As Ann reflected upon her coach, she concluded that her coach simply didn't have enough knowledge about the sport nor motivation for the job. All she appeared to care about was for them to perform well and to win the NCAA. To make that happen, it seems like she trusted the best athletes on the team to do the work for her, both by guiding the other SAs and by scoring crucial points for the team. Her coach's competence was disappointing to Ann, who expected and wanted help to improve her skiing technique while in the US.

There wasn't much technique at all, I had no technique sessions. So, on that part I think they were completely, they didn't have much knowledge at all. I didn't get to develop my technique at all. (Ann)

Not having coaches that were able to help the SAs develop might have created feelings of insecurity and worries about falling behind their competitors, which impacted Ann's decision to move back home to Norway to further her career as a skier.

As mentioned by several of the SAs, the level of college Nordic skiing has improved tremendously during the past 7-8 years; however, as addressed by David, the level of the coaches is not following this same trend. As better, more experienced skiers arrive from Europe, the sport is developing both in terms of the knowledge they bring with them and by the way they raise the level of competition. Nonetheless, the older coaches hesitate to make

changes to their program and way of coaching. David addressed how his coaches would do the bare minimum; they wouldn't take any initiative to help the SAs more than necessary, and they didn't seek personal growth as coaches. He felt like he had more knowledge than his coaches, making it difficult for them to give him any useful feedback to help him grow as an athlete. While reflecting on this perception, he shared that he felt there was time for a replacement of all the old coaches in the US who are not willing to follow the developments of the sport or to improve their coaching to help the SAs develop as skiers.

It's still like the same coaches even if the level has improved a lot... So, they might not have been able to stay up to date on the development... I would think that some of the older coaches needs to be replaced soon anyways and then I think new ones will arrive, that might have more, eh, guts especially. And also, knowledge at a whole different level, because Nordic skiing has developed a lot during the recent years, that's for sure. (David)

Claire also felt the same, sharing that it was time for some younger coaches to replace the old ones.

I haven't been satisfied with the coaches in the USA, unfortunately... We have very old coaches that've been there for a long time... And there's a need for replacement... So, they are good, but not like I'm used to nor what I want in a coach, they would have benefitted from getting someone new; some new ways of thinking over there. (Claire)

Referring back to Caroline and Aaron's responses, the two who were highly satisfied with their coaches, one of the things they truly valued was how their coaches were young and up to date on everything. This gave them the benefit of receiving "expertise coaching," with their coaches providing them with optimal challenges and with a sense of trust in their abilities to help them further develop as athletes.

Adam also shared his dissatisfaction with his coaches. He stated that they were not up to date on the developments within the sport at all, something he realized right away. In Norway, Adam had witnessed the developments within the technique of double-poling for a while, and he had followed the discussion on whether this technique would take over as the only classic skiing technique. Along with his teammates and competitors back in Norway, he had developed this more intensive form of double-poling technique, a technique that proved to be superior to diagonal striding in most terrains. He was surprised when he realized how far behind they were on such developments in the US.

[...] in relation to training-philosophy it was just like going years back...back home in Norway this whole, by example, this whole double-poling thing had been going on for

some years, and then I got there, and they had barely heard about it. They were still following the same training plans as had been followed probably 20 years back. It was very like, the same deal every year it seemed like. (Adam)

Further, Adam shared that most of the SAs, especially the oldest, knew more about skiing and training than his coaches. Whenever his coaches were challenged on why they did what they did, they didn't have much of an answer. Coaching, he felt, was where college Nordic skiing programs needed to improve the most. Ann also saw room for improvement in this regard and she often questioned her coach's workouts.

It was like, in relation to traditional training in Norway, we had some strange workouts... intervals where we would run up and down a hill, then we would throw our poles away, then we would hop sideways, and in the middle of the interval it was zone 3, then it was, it was just strange, I didn't understand the reason for that workout at all. (Ann)

When Ann wanted to better understand why they completed this type of workouts, her coach was unable to explain why. But, worthy to mention, despite Ann being dissatisfied with this experience, she could see the benefit of her coach's workouts in relation to motivating all of the SAs, regardless of level. Accordingly, she appreciated how they kept the sport more down to earth in the US compared to Norway, not making it all too serious.

13.3.2.3.2 Coaches being Result Oriented

The last element several of the SAs touched on in regard to their coaches was how they were almost solely results oriented. The coaches generally prioritized the best athletes first, and the level of support/feedback given seemed to be influenced by how well they performed. Also, in times where the SAs were unable to attend skiing meets, the coaches were not pleased. To win the NCAA seemed to be the only thing that truly mattered to them.

A clear sign of the coaches being result oriented was discussed by Ann. She shared how her coach would be smiling and friendly whenever they performed well, but during challenging times, she would show a completely different side

Whenever I was struggling over there, when I was, or I got sick during US nationals, so I was unable to compete, I got sick prior to it and then I really got yelled at basically... Yes, how many mistakes I had made and like, yes, she asked if I took it seriously. Adam also got sick and then she called all of us that had gotten sick and she was really upset... She started blaming us right. (Ann)

Also, on days when Ann was struggling with her asthma, due to the temperature dropping too low, her coach would tell her to race, despite knowing the health risk, all in an effort to win the NCAA. This kind of treatment might have diminished Ann's feelings of her coach being needs supportive. In spite of the pressure to race regardless of health, due to her age and experience as a skier, she felt confident enough to stand up against her coach, refusing to race while dealing with asthma.

Alice addressed how her coaches favored the best in terms of race preparations. While discussing how the SAs did most of the work themselves in preparing their skis for competitions, Alice mentioned how her coach clearly ranked the SAs by performance and always prioritized helping the best first. In terms of ski waxing, they would always do the base prep themselves, while their coach would help out by adding the grip wax shortly before race start. These times were one of the ways that led Alice to conclude that her coach prioritized the best

He will add the last layer of grip wax in competitions... But if you are the slowest one on the team you might risk not getting any, or he won't do as good of a job and stuff, and then, one of the girls on our team, she got her skis two minutes prior to start because he prioritized her last. (Alice)

On the other hand, Claire shared that, while her coach clearly cared the most about the best skiers on the team, the SAs would make up for this shortfall and bias within the team by including all, regardless of level. Within the team, they took good care of each other, just like any family would have.

We've had some problems with that on our team, with our coach favoring the best. But luckily, within the team there's this great culture and people are really good at taking good care of one another and give each other good advice and you really get to know those on your team, it's like having a family. (Claire)

Despite being indifferent to the needs of their athletes, the coaches were not indifferent to how the SAs would perform. Even though my understanding, as presented, was that the coaches fell within the coaching style of laissez faire, they also had some controlling elements to their coaching, moving them towards a transactional leadership style. Although the coaches seemed not to care that much at practice, or in terms of making good training plans for their athletes, they really did care about the results in the big competitions. Whether this desire had something to do with them earning bonuses based on the team's results remains a question.

But what we do know is that the coaches were controlling in the way they decided when and where their athletes would race, even in times where the SAs themselves felt like they shouldn't have raced due to health issues. Using such controlling elements to lead a group towards desired outcomes can negatively affect athletes' intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). It affects both the best and those lower down on the result lists; winning without pressure, on the other hand, is what leads to the highest level of intrinsic motivation (Reeve & Deci, 1996). Knowing that their form of coaching was primarily laissez faire and that their coaches often used controlling elements, one would expect the SAs' motivation and well-being to have been greatly affected. However, such was not the findings of this study. The way in which the SAs' basic need for relatedness was met, from their network of support at their respective colleges and from their teammates, might have decreased the negative effects of their coaches not being needs supportive, which we will now discuss further.

13.4 Do the student-athletes perceive their teammates to be needs supportive?

13.4.1 The Need for Relatedness Being Met

One of the positive experiences of particular note that was shared by all SAs was how important the team and their teammates were to each of them. The SAs all indicated that it was the team that helped them through the initial challenges; when the coaches were effectively absent, it was their teammates who motivated them to attend and perform at practices and races. While talking about their teams, the following elements were expressed as being of importance with respect to their teammates: 1) the team feeling like a family; 2) team commitment; 3) team spirit; 4) feeling valued regardless of results; and 5) clearly defined roles and respect.

13.4.1.1 Just Like a Family

From my understanding, the following was the most important finding of this study: How high of a value the SAs placed to their team and the way they considered their teammates as family. It was this perception and the way they felt taken care of by their teammates that seems to be the main reason why the international student-athletes had a great experience as SAs. Several of the SAs talked about the initial challenges of leaving home, moving to a new country alone, and adjusting to a new way of life while getting to know new people. This transition, they explained, would be challenging to almost everyone; however, they all shared

how becoming members of a well-functioning team right away helped tremendously in this process.

Adam and Ann, despite staying for one year only, both described that they felt like their team became their family towards the end of their stay.

Those who had been on the team the longest, they described it as a family... Yes, I felt that towards the end too really. (Adam)

I felt that the team, it became just like a little family. Yes, I had such a blast with them. And I miss it, miss them... Overall, I had such a good time. And all we did was so much fun. (Ann)

Claire also referred to her team as a family and spoke highly of the great culture and how they took care of one another.

Within the team, there's such great culture, and people are really good at taking care of each other and give good advice and you really get to know everyone on the team; it's just like having a family. We travel, we drive 15 hours in a car together and then you really get to know each other, so there's a thin line between hate and love, so one can hate each other from time to time. But we really, really love each other, everyone, and we take good care of each other. (Claire)

Caroline talked about how they truly were a team, on and off the field. They hung out during their spare time, and many of them even lived together. Her team was her safety net and formed the core of her social network.

We really are a team, and it's like that with all the sports. It's like, the hockey guys and the football guys and the swimmers and I have other friends too, but they are my core, my family. (Caroline)

The need for relatedness seemed to be met, and to be of high value to all the SAs, providing them with feelings of safety and being of value.

13.4.1.2 Team Commitment

All of the SAs also spoke of the importance of team commitment in college sports and how this collective commitment contributed to a great team environment. This commitment was something they found to be quite different from what they were used to back home in Norway. While individual plans to optimize one's personal training was considered the top priority in Norway, team commitment and completing similar workouts for the benefit of the

team was of primary focus in the US. It was interesting to learn about how the SAs seemed to have adopted this "American way of thinking", highly valuing team commitment.

Caroline talked about how, in the beginning, along with other Europeans, she had a hard time adjusting to team practices and the idea that everyone was supposed to do the same training. They were used to a more individualistic way of thinking in terms of training. With time, she better understood the value of team commitment and she grew to love it. She said that it created a sense of belonging to the team.

It is a kind of team spirit that I simply love now, now it's like, if someone is missing from practice we're all like, what, where is she, what is going on?... You really have to tell if you're not going to show up at practice... But I feel a sense of responsibility too... That I should attend practice and I should do what's planned and I need to have a good excuse if I'm not going... But I kind of like that. (Caroline)

Caroline raised two important factors that might have contributed to feelings of relatedness here. First, she felt seen and valued. They looked after one another within the team, and if someone was missing at a team practice, they would quickly work to figure out why. This commitment and caring might have created a sense of safety, as they all believed their teammates would look after them if something was to happen. This belief might have been particularly important to the Norwegian SAs, being so far from their families and friends. Second, knowing that the team cared when someone was absent might have created feelings of being an important contributor to the team, enhancing feelings of self-worth.

While Caroline, in the beginning, had a hard time adjusting to this American way of thinking and the concept of team commitment, she gradually adjusted and grew to appreciate it.

We always take our van out to practice. And it's like, ok, I just show up at practice and I know that everyone will be there, and I know that everyone is going to do the same, and in that way, it ends up being so much better than what I have experienced before where some want to do short intervals, or some want to classic ski, and for some it fits better to do a stretching session or go running, and then it's like, suddenly you end up being half the group. But instead, over there, it's like, «no we pay for you to be here, you are lucky to be on this team, you are going to attend practice». (Caroline)

One might raise a question in regard to the «we pay for you to be here» part, as it potentially can be perceived as added pressure (this we will get back to while addressing scholarships in section 13.5.2.2). However, Caroline seemed to have internalized the American values as her own and learned to appreciate them.

Both Brian and Alice also shared how they valued the team environment and team commitment in the US. Brian stated that he felt the American way, with team focus, was better than the individualistic approach in Norway. In the U.S., there was simply an expectation that everyone would show up at team practices. It was important.

It is expected that you show up at practice... It isn't always like that in Norway. It is expected that you follow the same plan as the others. Even though we are pretty free. Eh, and we have five practices together every week, and that means that we see each other often. And I think that does a lot. (Brian)

Alice also addressed the importance of team commitment and how absences and the lack of it would create bad vibes. She shared how she could skip practice if she was really tired, but if she did so, it was not very well received by her teammates.

It ends up being a bad atmosphere within the team if you never show up at practice... Because we are a team... And that's a big part of the reason why I wanted to go there. It is because I love to be a part of a team. And to push each other at practice and, yes. (Alice)

One of the reasons why skipping team practice created negative vibes might be due to the importance of performing as a team in college sports. The NCAA championship is the main event of the year, with the best school being awarded with the NCAA champion title. David explained just how important winning the title is.

It is incredibly important to win it, in a way, the over all, the NCAA. It is, you know, it is huge. I just won it once, with the team, and I won it four times individually, I think. But I only won it once with the team, and that was just incredibly cool. It was just this crazy, like, I don't even know how to explain. It was this hype around the team when we won. It is so much fun, people really noticed and it's a lot in the media and stuff, so it's really, really cool. And it's like, even if it is an individual sport, that aspect creates an amazing team spirit... That it's really important in a way. It does matter if you are number five or six in a way. Because that can be the three points that determines the result. So, it creates a great, a great team spirit. One creates strong bounds, in an attempt to win, together. (David)

Just as Caroline addressed how she liked the sense of responsibility and feelings of contributing to the team, David stated similarly, noting that it does matter if you place number five or six in competitions. In college Nordic skiing, every point for the team counts; so, it's not just about the top three reaching the podium. This team focus might create a sense of relatedness, and of being of value to the team, even if you're not the team's best skier. For the team to succeed, every team member is of importance. This fact might also contribute to

feelings of perceived competence, as every point scored for the team will be of importance and recognized, not just those skiers who reach the podium.

The way the SAs seem to have adopted and internalized the American values with respect to college sports will, according to OIT, provide them with scaffolding for growth and a sense of meaning and purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This result definitely seems to be true in this study. As the SAs were skeptical at first in adhering to this form of team commitment, they soon saw the value of it, as it is benefitting the greatest good of the team. They internalized the American values connected to college sports, and as it turned out, they liked it better than the Norwegian method and its focus on individual performances and results only.

13.4.1.3 Team Spirit

Similar to team commitment is the concept of team spirit. The SAs shared that the establishment of well-functioning teams is top priority within college sports, and to that end, their teams had events such as team-building sessions and team meetings with psychologists to work on their team spirit.

We had team-building meetings and in the fall, once a week, we had a yoga session followed by half an hour with a psychologist where we sat down to work on team spirit, we were given tasks on strategy and so on. (Ann)

From the SAs' responses, it appears that the time invested on team-building exercises created the desired results. Without exception, all of the SAs praised how positive of an environment they had within their teams. In good times and bad times, they felt like their teammates were supportive and able to see and meet their needs.

Ann believes that her college team functioned much better than her team in Norway, which she thinks is at least partly due to the climate within Norwegian skiing being tougher and more competitive. College skiing, on the other hand, she views as a more fun atmosphere, where team results matter most, making it all less serious.

Like that it's a great difference from Norway. I felt like one was truly happy for each other and that there's less of a competition over there than it is here... And, of course, it's together as a team we shall perform. We won the NCAA and everyone on the team were just trilled... It wasn't about performing as an individual. And in that way it's much more, we truly wanted the others to ski well and that I think is healthy... In the USA the schools compete against one another, in all kinds of sports. It's all about team sports. And that I think contributes to us being more teammates. (Ann)

Ann really enjoyed the college sports atmosphere, with its focus on team results, which caused them to celebrate each other's victories in a whole different way. She believes this focus contributed to them being better teammates. Caroline also talked about how much she enjoyed the American way of skiing, where it's all about the team. In Norway, it all seems more serious, as the focus is on the individual.

In Norway, it is an individual sport, and it is very like, very serious... While over there it's more about the team, we push each other and we are completing the same type of workouts. And it doesn't matter if you win if your teammate doesn't perform well, because then the team won't perform, and that's, that's what matters. So that's been a whole new experience to me that I really enjoy... It's that whole college circus that I think is so much fun. Over there we are a team, prior to competitions all the girls put glitter on their face, we wear the same uniforms, we cheer on each other, a lot, and after it is so much fun, and we meet all the other schools and it's just this college atmosphere that's very, and it's just so much fun. While in Norway, it's more like, you stay at the hotel room, you get to start, you race, and you go back home to sleep. (Caroline)

It was interesting to hear how the SAs talked about the importance of performing as a team, with the American focus on team results just as much as their individual results.

It's fun to see how I've been able to perform individually but also with the team... Feelings of it being really important how the team performs together has grown in me. And it motivates. I remember one year where I didn't do so well the last competition, but I knew the girl from Utah was right ahead of me so I had to catch up on her. So, it's all about the whole team, they are right there cheering you on and then you have to speed up a little extra... (Claire)

Claire continued by explaining how she had a great team and coach back home in Norway and that she was used to being part of a great team environment; however, being on a college team took this team environment to a whole different level.

But still, there's something different to compete as a team and even more so it's important to work together. It's the team that performs, it's not just individual results that counts... And that I think is great, really. (Claire)

Caroline also shared how much fun it was attending skiing meets due to the strong team spirit. She focused on how they would wear similar uniforms, put on glitter and stashes in their team's colors, and how they would cheer each other on while racing.

The girls, we put on glitter, we are the [nickname of athletic team], we are [colors associated with team], so we put on two [color] stripes of glitter on our faces, and we

have this [colors] hairband in our hairs. And then we have, everyone has the same uniforms... And if there's a mass start we all group together and wish one another good luck and then we tell everyone go [nickname of athletic team], it's really like, cheering for each other... I love that team spirit and just the cheering, always, and always someone that will clap your shoulder, telling you good job. (Caroline)

In the same way the SAs adopted the value of team commitment, they also adopted the value of team unity. Team spirit, being proud of one's team and showing it by wearing team uniforms and cheering each other on, were aspects that came to be important to the SAs. Again, this change in perspective is a sign that they were able to internalize American values. From an SDT viewpoint, culture and individual are inseparable as the self develops through the ongoing internalization and integration of ambient cultural practices, values and regulations (Ryan, 1993). It seems as if the more the SAs were able to internalize the American values associated with college sports, the more fun they had. Also, the priority of team commitment and team spirit seemed to be supportive of the SAs needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, something that made them more easily internalized and integrated. This support will in turn foster greater wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

13.4.1.4 Unconditional Positive Regard

Another important element addressed by the SAs with respect to their team was the way they felt an unconditional positive regard; a basic acceptance and support regardless of their actions or results (Rogers, 1951; Rogers & Dymond 1954). They truly felt accepted and valued for who they were, and in times of heightened emotions, their teammates were there to support and guide them. The way Caroline addressed the "claps on the shoulder" she received, regardless of how she performed, might have been extra important to her. Being one of the best Norwegian skiers as a junior, it was tough for her to return back to skiing after a long break due to illness. Skiing meets used to be an arena where she felt good about herself, but then suddenly it ended up being a place where she felt inadequate. She then decided to move to the US to become a SA. She had heard that the level in college skiing was lower, and she expected, therefore, to win college races when she arrived. However, she soon discovered that the level wasn't as low as she expected, and it was a challenge not to perform as she had hoped. Her teammates and coaches soon helped her change her way of thinking by giving her unconditional positive regard. Through this she learned that winning isn't the only factor that can make you feel good.

It's all about the team, I truly love, they are my family you know. And they are so nice, all the girls and the coaches and it's like, yes when I first came there I was used to winning, and then suddenly I placed 15th and everyone says the level at college is low, so I just didn't understand, I thought I would win everything... But then, if I place 10th, then everyone is like, oh my God you raced so great, and then I feel really good for being number 10. So, it's just small things like that that makes you feel better. You don't have to win to feel good. So now, if I end up as number 10 I'm just really happy about it. Or if I beat the girls I haven't beaten previously. Or if I manage something we've worked on, so it's been great like that. It's not just winning that can make you feel good at competitions. (Caroline)

In fact, Caroline shared more feelings of being of value now, as a person, even though she didn't perform as desired. She learned a lot from the process, and she realized that how you perform doesn't really matter in regard to feeling valued as a person; instead, a sense of belonging and unconditional positive regard is what truly matters.

More actually, because I haven't performed as well...I won't say that I have a different personality now in the US, but I belong somewhere, because I've always been on that team while there. But I do think I have, I have changed from being there... In a positive way, yes, all since high school I've been there, so they've had a great influence on who I am today. But I'm myself completely, and I do give a lot when I'm with the others, and I feel everyone does and that matters a lot... How fast you race doesn't really matter... It's just like, of course during meets you notice, but other than that, it's not something we care about. It's more like, you are best and stuff like that, but those who are best are incredible humble. Those who win actually care the least about that on my team. (Caroline)

David also shared how he felt valued for being who he is and not merely for his performances. He shared that this feeling was true for everyone on the team and how much this meant to all of them.

There's no doubt about that. It is a completely different feeling than in Norway. You truly feel valued; everyone on the team feels it. (David)

The way he felt like he truly belonged somewhere and that he had value apart from his performances strongly impacted David's decision to remain in the U.S., where he took on the new role as a college skiing coach after graduation.

The way the SAs described feeling valued and loved for being who they are, independent of their results, points to them receiving autonomy support and unconditional positive regard within their teams. Receiving autonomy support within a relationship is what allows the receiver to be more authentic, further facilitating all three basic needs as are associated with

more secure attachment, authenticity, emotional reliance and a higher relationship-specific vitality and wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Also, being provided with unconditional positive regard makes individuals feel free to try new things without the fear of failure (Rogers, 1951). These elements indicate that the SAs received both autonomy support and unconditional positive regard. They felt like they were of value to their teammates and as if they truly belonged somewhere. They were able to lean on each other in challenging times, finding it fun to compete despite many challenges along their way.

13.4.1.5 Clearly Defined Roles and Respect

Another interesting finding in this study was how each of the SAs all seemed to have clearly defined roles within the team, and how this structure contributed to the team functioning as one unit working towards common goals, despite the great gap in terms of skiing level. These roles were not officially assigned to them, but rather, they developed naturally, with everyone finding a role with the team's structure to best contribute to the team as a whole. As shared by several of the athletes, these roles were a form of ranking of the skiers based on performance. The best athletes naturally became team leaders, while those not performing as well would take on roles to help assist their teammates performing better.

Adam shared how it's normal to have official team captains in college athletics. His team had one male captain and one female captain. The elected captains, however, served primarily as a formality and as the channel for communication between the team and the coaches. David had a similar experience, where they had a captain on their team, but since David himself was the best skier, he was the one who naturally stepped into the role as a team leader.

After my first year it clearly was a defined role in the group... Yes, it just happened to be that way. If it is, I don't want to say I took that role, but in a way, it just ended up like that. (David)

Due to his position within the team, David had great influence on the team's training, and his coach would let him decide a lot, as discussed in section 13.3.2.2.

Also, being one of the best on his team, Brian had this same kind of position. He felt like he had taken on the role as a team captain, and that he had great influence on the team's training. He further described how a clearly defined ranking of the individual skiers within the team existed.

It is, especially for the boys, there's been a clear ranking of the skiers. People have accepted their rank... And that has, in a way, really created a nice atmosphere since everyone wish for each other to perform well, within reason for where we are. (Brian)

One would think that such rankings could be a source of tension within the team, but this tension did not appear to occur. From the SAs' responses, it seems like they all wanted what was best for the team. As a result, they were motivated to contribute in the best way possible based on their skills, whether that was by winning races or by helping others on the team to race fast. Regardless of rank, they all seem to hold a kind of mutual respect and gratefulness for how everyone contributed to the team. Caroline shared how she took on a different kind of role on the team due to her inability to perform as desired, and she accepted this role without holding any kind of grudges

Eh, since I haven't raced that well, I've felt an increased responsibility to stay positive and help out. To take on a different role. Like, we have roles on the team; he who is the best on the team and is crazy good doesn't need to cook dinner that often or be a friend all the time or clean as much or, I mean, he might, but it's almost like that. Yes, like we have one on our team who isn't that good of a skier, he is a boy, but he fixes everything about our van, he fixes everything about the hotels we're staying at or the houses we live in, if there's a light bulb or bags or anything else. An incredible teammate who keeps the team together like glue. So, people have different roles, and I felt, since I'm not racing as fast, that I should be more of a teammate and be positive and help out more. (Caroline)

Having defined roles appears to be another way the needs for relatedness and unconditional positive regard seem to be met within the teams. Everyone is of value no matter what role they serve within the team. In being so structured, everyone is also recognized for how they contribute, irrespective of results. This structure might in fact be extra important to the SAs on the team not holding the highest ranks. Comparing themselves to the best athletes, they could possibly feel a lack of personal competence; however, knowing their worth and how they are of value to the team, regardless, allows such feelings to pass. They all know that they are of value and can contribute to the team in one way or another, causing their team to be as good as possible. It's all about team effort, and every member of the team is of equal value.

13.5 Being an international student-athlete, does it challenge the SAs' perceived level of personal competence?

13.5.1 Factors Leading to Feelings of Perceived Competence

13.5.1.1 Overcoming Initial Challenges

As discussed in section 13.2.1, the SAs experienced a difficult start as international student-athletes; however, as they got in to the rhythm of things and learned how to manage their time better and to lean on others, they felt more comfortable. It seems like the way they experienced this progress led to an increased sense of personal competence. Gradually, they handled the everyday challenges better, and with time, they mastered the challenges that in the beginning seemed impossible. This progress might, in turn, have led to feelings of personal growth.

Claire shared how she couldn't quite figure out how to handle the load of being a first-year student-athlete, but by the second year, things changed. She rose above the challenges and contributed to the teams' NCAA championship victory.

The total load, I couldn't quite figure out how to control it. But by the second year I learned how to. And after that I've been really satisfied by the way I have, well I've been sick some, I've been unfortunate the last couple of years, but generally it's been really good, and I am satisfied about my performances over there. What is a lot of fun, whenever you perform well over there, you really become aware of it. It was acknowledged big time when we won the NCAA Championship that first year. That's one of the coolest things I've ever experienced. (Claire)

The way her accomplishments were acknowledged might also have contributed to her feeling competent to master the tasks at hand.

Alice also discussed how the initial challenges were a lot to handle. To handle the transition and the extra load of the studies, she decided that she had to make adjustments in her training. She couldn't follow her team's practice strictly, as the total load then ended up being too much. As she lowered the amount of her training, she started feeling better.

What I think saved me was that I had made up my mind prior to leaving that I would listen to my body... The year prior I was sick every other week, while during the fall or this whole year I haven't been sick at all. And I think the reason is me being so good at training less than the others... I figured, if I wanted to be good I had to do less than the rest. Often, during training camps, I had to end the workout earlier than the rest and that wasn't a good feeling, and I had to go sit in the car prior to the rest of the

group on our long training days, but I do think that's what saved me... Quality, my motto became quality rather than quantity and that I think was the key. (Alice)

Just like Alice, Aaron saw the need to make personal adjustments to training loads in order to cope better with the demands of everyday life as a student-athlete. Aaron was also able to see how academics and sports can be a combination that provides energy if you learn how to balance it right.

Honestly, I partly get energy from it. To work like that, I like to alternate with homework, I've always liked that really... I have to study every day so that's been a transition. I knew it was going to be a lot, so it wasn't a complete shock in that way, but still, there's a transition right...It does take of your energy, but that's ok, it also takes of your time right, so you cannot train as much... And then there's the altitude, so it might not be necessary to train as much. (Aaron)

Lowering his training load made it possible for Aaron to spend more time studying, and he also felt like he had more energy at training and life in general. The extra time he invested in studying gave him positive results. He earned top grades in all of his classes, something that seemed to be very important to him by the way he lit up while talking about it. To Aaron, perceived competence as a SA wasn't just tied to performance within skiing, but to academics as well.

Ann was prepared for it to be a challenging start as an international student-athlete, as she had been given advice by former SAs. With this in mind, she took her precautions and lowered her total training load as soon as she arrived. She thought this strategy helped her to perform well. She was very satisfied with both her skiing and academic results, the way she handled training and racing at high altitudes, and the way in which she felt more energized in the US compared to Norway. She also shared how much fun it was to compete as a college skier due to all the hype surrounding it and how she was acknowledged for it.

I felt like I did surprisingly well really. My first race, it went really well, I placed number two and that was like, most of the American skiers were racing. That was a lot of fun, a really good race... And I was up there, I was fighting in the top and I won several of the college races and I ended up second at NCAA... (Ann)

The way Ann performed well and felt more energized in the US, despite the rather hectic life as a SA, raises the question as to why. Perhaps the extra energy she felt was due to her having a great time as a student-athlete, feeling competent enough to meet the demands of both academics and skiing, while also being extra acknowledged for it?

13.5.1.2 Lessons Learned from New Experiences

Another element that seemed to foster feelings of personal competence in the SAs was all they were able to learn due to their exposure to a variety of new experiences. All of the lessons learned from the exposure to a new culture, from traveling and seeing new places, from the way they regularly had to step out of their comfort zone and become more independent, were of high value. Everything they learned along the way led to feelings of personal growth.

Claire reflected upon how she felt like she grew a lot during her time as a SA. When asked if she felt like the years as a SA had affected her personally, she responded with the following:

A lot! There's no doubt, I've grown a lot during these three years. I've been used to my family fixing everything... Very rewarding in that sense, I think it's been a lot of fun to experience how to do things on my own and to be independent. To understand the importance of education, to understand how to, everything from eating right to time management to training right, you learn a lot about yourself and just the ability to be on your own, away from Norway and everything that is familiar... I am very satisfied by the way I've become more independent. Grown, I've become more like a grown up really. (Claire)

Ann and Caroline had similar experiences, saying that their time in the U.S. as student-athletes gave them new perspectives and changed them for the better.

I learned a lot while I was there. I feel that I developed a lot as a person... I got to learn English and I had to do things that I find uncomfortable doing and challenge myself. Just to speak English and to study over there and, yes, getting to know a lot of new people and to be outgoing and just to jump into it all in a way. And yes, I do feel like I've changed the way I look at things too. I've broadened my perspectives on everything. And I'm so, so happy that I've been there, I wouldn't have missed it... I think it has changed me as a person, for the better. (Ann)

I just think about things in a different way now. I don't know if I had grown in the same way had I been in Norway, but I doubt it... My sister is studying in Norway, and it's just like safe and sound, and she is kind of the same, while I really have gotten new perspectives. Look at things differently, eh, yes, just the way I'm not scared of things anymore. (Caroline)

Alice also addressed how she grew personally, stating that she became a more open-minded person by living in a new culture and having to push her boundaries on a regular basis in the U.S.

I was pretty judgmental towards American culture prior to leaving, but you become more liberal I would say... And the experiences and the ability to step out of your

comfort zone on a regular basis. To push myself, getting to know new people and, yes.
(Alice)

Similarly, Claire felt like she developed as a person by trying something new, overcoming the initial fear of leaving home and everything that was familiar to her.

I am just so happy having received this opportunity. It is, it is so pretty there and so much fun developing, seeing how great of an influence it has trying something completely new and to take that chance for what it is. Of course, it's scary to leave that first time... But you gain a lot by doing so. I've had such a blast. (Claire)

According to Deci and Ryan (2000), satisfaction of the basic needs is essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, health and well-being. The way the SAs focused on how they experienced personal growth while there is an indicator that their basic needs were met, in one way or another, to a satisfying degree. The way they allowed for that to happen, considering the initial challenges and how they confidently met them, reveals something about how the SAs must have felt secure enough to emotionally rely on their network of support as SAs. Their ability to turn to, and rely on, others in times of heightened emotions might have laid the groundwork for them being able to experience these positive outcomes based on perceived personal growth (Ryan et al., 2005). Also, of importance here is Ryff and Singer's eudaimonic perspective (1989; 2000). They propose that personal growth (the extent to which individuals are making use of their personal talents and potential) is an essential feature of psychological well-being. As SAs they were challenged to step out of their comfort zone on a regular basis, and as they mastered it, they grew from it. Such personal growth and use of one's potentials are, according to Ryff and Singer (1989, 2000) not only a basic need, but an essential feature of psychological well-being.

13.5.1.3 The Level of College Nordic Skiing

Another factor that might have contributed to the SAs feeling competent is the fact that college skiing is generally less competitive than skiing in Norway and that the sport in the U.S. is more down to earth and not as serious. The way the SAs placed better in races while in college compared to Norway, and the way they were acknowledged for their performances in the U.S., might have led to increased feelings of competence. David explained how this was the case for him.

In four years, I've been dominating in four years, so I would say that's been good. So, it's not like I won every skiing meet, but I've always been up there, so it has been really good. (David)

David elaborated, explaining how he placed around 15th at national races in Norway and how, with such results, he was just one of the rest. In the U.S., however, he was able to compete for victories, which helped motivate him.

You get a whole different approach to the competitions, you know that you are capable of fighting over the victory, it's a different, it's a different position in a way, that's for sure, so that's a lot of fun. You are contributing to the race, and of course that's fun. It's not always as fun to be something like 27th in Norway. Or a 100 even... (David)

Studies show that losing a direct competition typically leads to less intrinsic motivation than winning (McAuley et al., 1989; Reeve et al., 1985). This consequence might be one of the reasons why David found it more rewarding to race in college. Further, he shared how they made a big deal of it all in the U.S., really acknowledging those who raced well for their colleges. Even if you placed number 15 in the U.S., you were of importance because you contributed to the teams' overall score. This structure was something he and the rest of the SAs really appreciated, as it made racing more fun for more athletes.

Caroline shared David's perspective, and she thought, due to the level being generally lower in the U.S. and the way they were acknowledged to a greater extent for their accomplishments, it all ended up being more motivating. She believes this is one of the main reasons why talented Norwegian skiers decide to take the opportunity to become student-athletes.

I think more and more Europeans realize that it's not so cool being number 20 in Norway, even if you are a really good skier. By example, I know a guy named David, he is a crazy good skier, but in Scan-cup he is still just number 20, and you are really good then, but who cares? But over here, he is the king, he wins every race. So, I think a lot have realized how much cooler that is. (Caroline)

I raised the question whether the effect of winning versus losing on motivation (McAuley et al., 1989; Reeve et al., 1985) would be of equal importance, knowing that the level within college skiing was lower than what the SAs were used to in Norway. Despite knowing the competitive differences between the U.S. and Norway, they felt more motivated to train and compete while in the U.S. due to the fact that they were able to compete for victories, individually or as a team.

It is important to mention that despite the SAs sharing the level being generally lower within college skiing compared to Norway, they also all stated that the quality of skiing in the U.S. is getting better and better.

The level in college is a lot higher now than what it was before... That's what my coaches tells us too, that the level has become insane. I absolutely think that the girls winning over there could have done really well in Norway. (Caroline)

According to Caroline, one of the reasons for this rise in competition in the U.S. is due to Europeans realizing how rewarding it is to be SAs, as they tend to end up higher on the result lists than back home. The other reason, according to her, for the increase in quality is due to the American SAs raising their level to meet the European standards of skiing. She addressed how great European skiers, like David, find it more rewarding to be student-athletes than to be competing in Europe, which in turn helps set a whole new standard for the level of college skiing.

David also addressed this phenomenon. He shared how there has been a lot of skepticism and critique in Norway about college skiing in the U.S., mainly due to people thinking the level is so low; however, he states that this view is far from the reality of college skiing today.

There's been a lot of critique right, because the level over there it has, yes, it has improved like crazy during the past five-six years. From about 2010-2011 the level has sky rocked compared to what it used to be. Earlier, a lot would often go there to earn a degree and take skiing on the side, but then people have, have really started to train well and ski fast. (David)

Similarly, Claire explained that the level of college skiing is improving and how she has witnessed this development during her years as a SA. She also found it important to mention how much individual SAs tend to improve during their college career, which she thinks is due to personal growth and getting familiar with how everything works.

I've noticed that it's been quite a gap in terms of level, now it's getting smaller and smaller. The quality of the skiers is getting better and better and people perform better... It is a lot of recruiting. We had a big shift this year. We had three girls that's done... So, it's a change of athletes pretty often. But people also improve, pretty much from the first year on where everything is new and difficult, to when they get everything under control and become more mature and understand better how everything works. (Claire)

The SAs uniformly spoke of how the level of college skiing is generally lower than in Norway, but how skiing has improved tremendously during recent years. In terms of level adding or ridding the SAs of feelings of perceived competence, I think Claire sums it up well. She says that the reason why she feels good about herself at training and in competitions, is because they have the whole range of levels within their teams. She and her teammates have different strengths and weaknesses and because of that fact, they can always push each other and help each other grow. This experience creates not only feelings of mastery and competence, but also feelings of relatedness.

I always have people around my level and we have different people being good at different things. So, it's like, some are good runners, some are good roller-skiers, and some are good at classic-skiing and some are good at skate-skiing, and it's like, we got it all... I'm rarely the best and I'm rarely the slowest, there's always someone to compete with and that I think is great. (Claire)

The SAs working together as a team and help raise one another to new and higher levels, might, in itself, give rise to positive emotions and motivation. Studies show that giving, in fact, enhances well-being to levels over and above the enhancement that comes from receiving the support (Deci et al., 2006).

13.5.2 Factors Threatening Feelings of Perceived Personal Competence

Two factors potentially threatening the SAs' perceived personal competence need to be addressed as well, as they were repeatedly mentioned by the SAs: 1) high expectations from the coaches to perform and 2) the additional pressure to perform due to the receipt of athletic scholarships.

13.5.2.1 High Expectations from Coaches

Several of the SAs spoke about the high expectations for them to perform well. Some said it was within reason, whereas others said that the expectations were unrealistically high. Overly high expectations may create stress due to feelings of being unable to fulfill the coaches' expectations and, in turn, feelings of perceived competence may suffer. When underperforming (in the coaches' eyes), several of the SAs mentioned that their coach would punish them by the use of negative feedback or silent treatment.

It's like, often after skiing meets, when we are out traveling and stuff, then we have team meetings at night and then it's often like, those who performed well they are being acknowledged big time with applause, and the rest he just ignores. (Alice)

In sport-related tasks, it has been found that positive feedback increases, and negative feedback decreases, intrinsic motivation (Weinberg & Jackson, 1979; Weinberg & Ragan, 1979). In this regard, it is not hard to understand that being ignored by the coach, when unable to perform as desired, negatively affects the SAs' motivation. Alice shared that her team's head coach had high expectations of them, and that she really wanted to make him happy.

One wants to make him satisfied... It is important... Because it's not a good feeling when he just ignores you in a way. But then, it's equally irritating when you perform really well and then he suddenly likes you and then he is satisfied. (Alice)

It seems that Alice takes her head coach's feedback very personally, as she described how he suddenly likes her when she performs well. It's like her value is connected to her performances. She feels the pressure to satisfy him to be accepted. Hence, it is important to her to perform in accordance with his expectations of her. However, when she does, it still doesn't make her happy. Her responses seem to be in line with the findings in the study by Reeve and Deci (1996) showing that those who win the competition without pressure have the highest level of intrinsic motivation, compared to those who win under pressuring conditions. Due to the high pressure to perform, and the negative feedback given when underperforming (in the coaches' eyes), Alice might end up performing for his approval rather than out of intrinsic motivation. According to Ryan and Deci (2017), even if sports participation is intrinsically motivated to start with, the social context, typically represented by coaches and parents, often involves both direct extrinsic incentives and contingencies of approval that can influence the athletes' attributions, motivations and subjective experiences. Maybe one of the reasons why it is so important for Alice to satisfy- and be accepted by her coach is because she is at the beginning of her college career. All of the transitional challenges might still contribute to feelings of lack of relatedness and insecurity, as the coach-athlete relationship (and maybe even the feelings of belongingness within the team) hasn't quite been developed yet.

Brian also mentioned the high expectations from the head coach and how he would ignore them if they didn't race well. In contrast to Alice, however, he didn't really care about the

head coach treating him like that, because he knew, regardless of results, he was being highly valued by his teammates and the other coaches.

There's definitely expectations... If you don't race fast enough then, then you get, hehe, then you're not very popular... So, he, I remember last year, I raced, I was in the lead during the NCAA, but then I ended up finishing 9th or something... And then he didn't talk to me after the race. (Brian)

The way Brian feels valued, both by his teammates and his other coaches, and the way they tell him that they value him for being more than just an athlete, may create a sense of belonging and safety, so that the negative feedback from the head coach doesn't affect him in the same way it seems to affect Alice.

13.5.2.2 Additional Perceived Pressure due to Scholarships

Creating an additional perception of pressure to perform was the receipt of athletic scholarships. All of the SAs included in this study received some form of athletic scholarship to help pay for their college expenses. Such extrinsic factors can potentially undermine sport motivation, participation and enjoyment (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Medic et al., 2007; Ryan, 1977, 1980; White & Sheldon, 2014). A study conducted by Ryan (1980) revealed that scholarship athletes receiving scholarships in environments where it was common to receive them saw them as a way of "buying" athletes, experiencing them as controlling, and therefore diminishing their intrinsic motivation. Caroline was one of the athletes who felt pressure to perform because they "paid" for her to be there.

I feel it is a lot of money that the school pays for me to be there. And that I haven't performed in three years, I think that's a really bad feeling. So, if I'm sick, and I am sick over there all the time, ehm, then I feel like I still should perform because they are paying for me to be there. And I'm on a team that many others dream to be a part of... So, I feel like I fail, I get feelings of guilt. (Caroline)

However, her coaches might have helped her combat these feelings and contributed to her remaining intrinsically motivated despite her struggles. According to Amorose and Horn (2000), receiving scholarship, in combination with having autocratic or controlling coaches, leads to lower intrinsic motivation. Caroline's coaches, on the other hand, were highly supportive and understanding, telling her that she shouldn't think like that at all and that she had great value to the team in the way she always attended team practices and contributed to improving the quality of their workouts and team environment.

Aaron also discussed the challenge of perceived pressure due to scholarships. He found it particularly challenging in times where he was out due to sickness.

I would think that if you underperform you would feel kind of useless, when you receive values like those I receive... There was a period where I was sick and stuff and then I was thinking like, now I really need to work to prove that I am worthy of my scholarship. Because it is huge values you receive right, on a full ride scholarship.
(Aaron)

Financial rewards for sport participation, such as scholarships, can potentially be seen as controlling and undermine sport motivation (Ryan, 1980). The way underperforming made them feel useless, creating feelings of guilt, and the way they had to work hard to prove that they were worthy of their scholarships, sounds threatening to their motivation. They might even fear losing them, as also have been found to be associated with decreased intrinsic motivation. (Medic et al., 2007). While focusing on the receipt of scholarships, they have extrinsic reasons for participating/performing; they work hard for their coaches' approval, and they might fear losing their scholarships. According to Ryan and Deci (2017), such extrinsic contingencies of approval can influence athlete's motivations and subjective experiences. It seems as though the SAs have introjected the values connected to earning their scholarships, as they explain feelings of guilt to appear when they underperform due to sickness. However, for both Caroline and Aaron, it seems that the strong relationship they had with, and the support they received from, their coaches helped them combat such negative experiences or feelings. Both were highly motivated to stay, despite the challenges they met on their way and the resulting guilt they often felt.

All that being said, none of the SAs who stayed in the U.S. longer than one year were motivated to continue skiing competitively after college. If these findings are in line with Ryan's findings (1977), examining the impact of receiving scholarships on student-athletes' desires to play their sport after college remains a question. He found that scholarship athletes listed more extrinsic reasons for sport participation and experienced less enjoyment in their sport than their comparable non-scholarship athletes. Can the way the SAs of this study, with time, focused more on academics and the overall experience of being student-athletes than on the interest in, or enjoyment of, skiing alone be such an indicator? In one way, it seems like it, thinking about skiing only not being enough in and of itself to the SAs anymore. On the other hand, they shared being highly motivated both to train and compete while in college,

indicating an intrinsic motivation to ski. The way I view it, we have to relate these experiences with the very core of SDT and the fact that self-motivation is seen as a natural process in all people that can be facilitated or diminished by social contextual conditions (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Motivation is dependent not only on the SAs themselves and their psychological disposition, but also on the social environment in which they interact. The autonomy supportive climate they get to be a part of as SAs motivate them to ski, with and for their teammates. However, when considering a future as professional skiers, in a whole different social environment, does not sound encouraging to them in the same way.

13.6 Do the Student-Athletes Feel a Sense of Belonging at Their Respective Colleges?

The last research question to be answered is whether the SAs felt a sense of belonging at their respective colleges and cultures in which they were apart. This aspect of their college student-athlete careers stood out as solely positive, providing them with feelings of relatedness and resulting well-being.

13.6.1 Need for Relatedness Being Met

13.6.1.1 School Spirit

School spirit seems to be an important aspect of college and college athletics. To be proud of one's school and to perform for one's school seems to be of high value. The SAs all saw themselves as representing their colleges as athletes and as students. Almost all U.S. colleges have a school mascot or nickname, such as Mustangs, Eagles, Dukes, Buffs, Coyotes, Pioneers and so on, just to mention a few. These mascots are used to refer to all of the athletic teams at a specific school. The SAs included in this study used their athletic nicknames repeatedly throughout the interviews, indicating a sense of belonging and/or pride to be a SA representing their respective colleges.

Claire expressed how she felt a strong sense of belonging to her school and how much this feeling meant to her.

To both the school and the team and the place, I've gained a strong sense of belongingness and that it is something I can be proud of, to be there. And I think that is great, to be proud of one's team and to be proud of the place and the school.
(Claire)

Caroline explained, in a similar manner, how she truly felt like she belonged somewhere as a SA. She praised the strong school spirit and the importance it was to them. She expressed how important it is to be loyal to your team as a SA and how beating their big rivals, mainly the neighboring schools, was something that brought them closer together, both to their team and to the broader school.

First and foremost, it's this school spirit that's like, we are [name of university], we are a team and we win together and we lose together, but it is hard competition between the schools. And even if some of my best friends are students at the neighboring school, they are still the enemy. And to be beaten by them is the worst. And to transfer from one team to another is totally unacceptable... It's this team spirit that's, yes, that I think is unique. (Caroline)

Brian also felt a strong sense of belonging to his school, which he believes is due to all the different school events they attend as student athletes, and how they are reminded, over and over, that they are the Pios, the Buffs, the Pioneers and so on. He shared that they were repeatedly told, by their coaches and other members of their school's faculty and staff, that they were representing their school as athletes and as students, creating a sense of team focus as well as a sense of rivalry towards other schools. He found the school spirit and rivalries to be a big part of what makes the overall experience so much fun.

Aaron shared how he felt the sense of belonging to be much stronger in the US compared to what he was used to from his school and team in Norway. He explained this by the way all college sports really are looked upon as team sports in the U.S., despite their individualistic nature.

It's like everyone says, that they get that typical college feel. In the U.S. you are much more a team, because you ski, or you compete as a team in the end, and because of that, you are a team. The way others perform counts just as much as the way you perform. (Aaron)

The way they depended on each other to perform as a team, and how every result was of importance united them in a way he hadn't experienced prior to becoming a SA. Further, he addressed the role of banquets, meets and greets, team-cheers, team uniforms, and mascots contributing to the American team-spirit and a sense of belonging.

It made it more exotic in a way. It was what I wanted to experience... That typical American, yes, mhm. And especially the football games, that's when you experienced

most of it. You get to see the way they cheer on their teams and all that with mascots and pets and it's just like the movies. It was fun. (Adam)

It is, it is hard to describe it really. That experience, it's just insane. It is so much fun. Like, you never get to experience anything like it. You won't even experience something like that being part of the national team. All that stuff going on... A whole different environment that you'll experience anywhere else. That college environment, it's been so much fun. (David)

It is this typical American hype around it. Everyone is wearing the school clothing, and at skiing meets and stuff, it is the schools competing against each other... You notice that there's an American culture where everyone is very, very proud of what they do and what they've accomplished... And it transmits... Americans are very including and nice... (Claire)

Claire continued by explaining how they always would create a strong team spirit at their skiing meets and how much fun it was being part of it.

At skiing meets too very, you notice that everyone is proud of their team, and we show that we are the [nickname of athletic team]. So, it is, it's not like, "what club team are you representing"? That is obvious over there, you wear the same uniforms, you cheer on one another, you put stickers on your face, haha, and flags and everything. It is a lot of fun. And go [nickname of athletic team], you hear all around while racing... It's so cool. All that stuff going on, and we make the most of it. (Claire)

Also, the way Americans are passionate about college sports, and really do care about how they perform, affected the SAs and created feelings of pride. While talking about school spirit, Aaron shared that he didn't necessarily believe he would gain such feelings when he first arrived, but while talking about it, he realized that he had. He went on by telling, with enthusiasm, how much fun it was when their schools' hockey team won the NCAA championship and the whole school was there to support them.

Just like Aaron, Alice also mentioned the importance of school banquets and award ceremonies enhancing feelings of belongingness. She further shared that the awards weren't just given out to those with great skiing performances, but also to those who performed in the classroom, those showing good team spirit, and those being great leaders.

We have different awards ceremonies for all kinds of stuff, arranged by the school, or by the skiing team. And they give out awards and are really good at appreciating that you perform well, so if you perform well at a skiing meet it will be much appreciated. (Alice)

The way they were acknowledged and appreciated in this sense, not only for their athletic performances, but also for their personal qualities, likely created feelings of self-worth and that they are of value to the school, for more than just their athletic abilities.

Other elements that seemed to be of importance to the SAs, creating feelings of being of value and connecting them to their school, was the way they received help whenever needed. Of particular focus was the academic help and the way they had access to top facilities and resources in terms of medical needs and issues. They shared how there is always someone looking after you and people there to help you, on and off the field, creating a network of support and feelings of security.

You get access to resources you're not even close to, Olympiatoppen in Norway is not even close, in comparison to what we got. It's crazy to think about... It's a system that takes care of you and that will do everything to help you succeed, both within your sport and in the classroom. And you have resources available to help you achieve your goals. So, it's very, very good. (David)

It seems as if the way their need for relatedness as SAs surpassed everything else. They developed an identity as SAs; they are proud of representing their schools; they feel valued and taken care of, all representing feelings of belongingness. According to (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), humans have a basic need for belongingness, meaning we all have a need to maintain a psychological sense of being connected and accepted by others. The SAs feel connected both to their school and their teammates, and no matter what role they had within their team, or where they finished at a meet, they felt valued for being who they are; they live in an autonomy supportive climate. It seems as if the strong environment established within college-athletic programs, based on the NCAA's core values, focusing on support, identity, respect and autonomy (NCAA, 2004), creates desirable results in terms of motivation and level of satisfaction among the SAs of this study.

13.6.1.2 Recommend it to Others

After having presented the main findings of the study, I would like to conclude this study by attending to the prospective SAs, who are the main motivation for conducting this study in the first place. In this final section, the current SAs' recommendations to their followers will be presented. Hopefully, this information will be of value to those considering this opportunity in the future. When the SAs were asked if they would recommend it to others, they all responded yes without any hesitation. The following are some tips and advice.

I am honest when people ask, and I tell them that it is, you have challenging periods there too, but I have, like I said, never felt regret about going there and I had, I hadn't dwelled upon it for a split second if I had been given the same opportunity again (Claire)

Yes, most definitely... Mhm, its absolutely worth the experience, I probably would have regretted it a whole lot if I hadn't done so myself. There's so much to experience. It is, well, for me it was better doing it this way than to continue racing in Norway and maybe be able to obtain the same results as earlier, it was more rewarding getting over there to try it out (Adam).

Referring back to section 13.2.2, both Claire and Adam also gave the advice to prospective SAs to take advantage of all the resources made available to them. Caroline also reflected on the value of all the help and support they were given as SAs, especially when they first arrived as unexperienced freshmen where everything was new and unfamiliar. Even though it was scary at first, she felt like she grew tremendously over the years, and now she feels more confident, actually enjoying pushing her limits. She shared that it is the overall experience and all the lessons learned that have been of greatest value to her, and that she almost feels like the "theoretical education" turned out to be a bonus on top of everything else.

You get a whole new perspective on Norway and everything really. And now I'm just like, to all of my friends "just get out in the world", it's just so important. Not just to travel and stay at a hotel. But that I had to get new friends, the language, a different culture, ehm, yes, and just to get out of your comfort zone, I feel like I'm out of my comfort zone all the time... But now I kind of like it, now I try to find places where I am out of the comfort zone, while before I thought it was scary. (Caroline)

Based on her sharing how challenging it all was at first, being that far away from her family and friends in Norway, she encourages prospective SAs to be prepared for the initial challenges. However, she says, they will pass. She also found it important to share an important lesson she learned in this regard, a lesson that changed her experience of being a SA for the better.

Another advice is that, in the beginning I tried to stay in touch with everyone at home. I felt like I lived in Norway, but I was in the USA, kind of... And then I wasn't happy. But then, when I was just like "okay, now I'm in the USA, those friends, yes, of course I will stay in touch with them some", but when I learned to be more present, living here and now, "now I'm in the USA, this is my home, this is where I live" then I became so much happier. (Caroline)

This tells us something about the importance of being present in your current relationships. For Caroline to feel like her need for relatedness was being met, she had to live in the moment, with her teammates and friends she got to see and communicate with in person, on a regular basis.

14 Summary

The aim of this study was to better understand (1) the phenomenon of collegiate athletics and why Norwegian skiers are motivated to pursue careers as American student-athletes, and (2) how these student athletes perceive their basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness to be satisfied. The following is a summary of the main findings of the study.

First, we learned about the NCAA, which is the largest governing body of college athletics in the U.S. The NCAA's primary focus is to help athletes succeed academically, enhancing their well-being and creating a fair and inclusive environment for student-athletes to flourish (NCAA, 2017a). For the NCAA, academics is the top priority, and student-athletes ought to be students first and athletes second. The NCAA stresses the importance of academic achievements and success in the classroom with the ultimate goal of graduating student-athletes. Despite the NCAA stating that «Intercollegiate athletics programs shall be conducted in a manner designed to protect and enhance the physical and educational well-being of student-athletes» (2017a, p.15), as many as 66 percent of female student-athletes and 59 percent of male student-athletes reported they would prefer to spend more time on academics, and of even greater concern, mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, are increasing among student-athletes, with about 30 percent self-reporting that they had been intractably overwhelmed within the past month (NCAA, 2015). Having to balance the dual roles of being a full-time-student and an athlete, and trying to perform in both arenas simultaneously, can be very difficult, as each role, standing on its own, requires hard work and demands a lot of time; however, the NCAA's 2015 GOALS study found that as many as 90 percent of former student-athletes, surveyed 10 years after finishing their eligibility, reported they were satisfied with their overall college experience (NCAA, 2015). I was interested in finding out what the SAs of this study felt in this regard, keeping in mind that they are international student-athletes. Based on the responses the SA gave in their interviews, there was no doubt that they were all highly satisfied with their experience and recommended this once in a lifetime opportunity to others. Let's sum up why they were satisfied and how their basic needs were met.

First, the factors motivating the participants of this study to be SAs were addressed: (a) the opportunity to combine skiing and education; (b) the opportunity to experience something new and exciting; (c) the increased value of higher education; (d) the opportunity to see and live at new places; and (e) the access they had to top facilities and resources were of focus. The fact that they could continue doing what they loved (skiing), in combination with earning a degree, was the main driving force for them all to become SAs. This opportunity, they saw, as impossible in Norway, with its perceived "all or nothing attitude" towards skiing; either you go all in, or you quit all together. With time, being students, performing in the classroom, became more and more important to them. This shift in priorities can be due to (i) them internalizing the cultural values connected to college student-athletics where academics are top priority and (ii) them feeling an increased sense of mastery and competence. Further, another reason for their interest in becoming SAs was due to them being ready to take on new challenges in their lives. They were ready to venture out into the world, looking for new and optimal challenges, providing them with feelings of mastery and competence. All they were able to see and the ability to be outside, surrounded by pretty nature, were also of great value. Studies show that exposure to natural elements and daylight are associated with greater vitality (Ryan et al., 2010; Smolders et al., 2013). Not only the access to great nature, but also having access to top facilities and resources at their college campuses was an important motivating factor. Everything was organized to enhance the SAs' well-being and to help them succeed. This structure and prioritization made the SAs feel valued, not only based on their athletic achievements, but for being who they are. The need for relatedness seemed to be met, over and above anything else.

Second, the extent to which the participants were satisfied with their year/years as SAs was addressed. Even though they found it to be a tough start, as everything was new and unfamiliar and due to the high demands of being full-time students and athletes, the assistance and support they received helped them through the difficulties. Feelings of relatedness and unconditional positive regard from several sources made them feel of value, motivating them to put in the effort to work their way through the challenges they faced. Also, the way their motivation took on a new direction, as a consequence of all they got to experience and learn, was addressed. It seems as though the SAs internalized the American values connected to college sports, such as valuing team effort and the belief that you can be anything you want to

be. As their minds had been conditioned on being skiers only, they gradually widened their horizons and realized there's more to life and more that they can become.

Third, to what extent the SAs perceived their coach/coaches to be needs supportive were addressed. Two of the SAs were highly satisfied with their coaches and felt like their basic needs were met. These two focused on the following elements: (a) their coaches' ability to make them feel valued for who they are; (b) their ability to make adjustments to training based on their total load; (c) the frequent contact they had; (d) their ability to structure training in a way, as well as giving positive feedback, so that they felt mastery and perceived competence; and (e) the coaches permitting their participation in decision making processes. All three basic needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness appeared to be met for these two SAs. However, the other six SAs were not satisfied with their coaches. The following elements were of focus while addressing their coaches: (i) lack of coach contact and their inability to follow up on the SAs training and everyday life; (ii) the tendency to let the best athletes decide; (iv) lack of knowledge; and (v) the coaches being result oriented. None of the basic psychological needs seemed to be met by these coaches. This part of the study is where the greatest gaps, in terms of satisfaction, were found. Six of the SAs were united in the way they described their coaches as being the biggest negative of their experiences as SAs. From my interpretation, their coaches fell within the category of laissez faire coaching, with some controlling elements added to it. However, despite the coaches' inability to meet their basic needs, this fact did not seem to affect the SA's motivation and overall well-being because of the well-functioning teams of which they were a part. Individuals on the teams generally took over their coaches' roles and led the rest of the group through peer-transformational leadership, and as discussed, peer transformational leadership behaviors have been found to be positively related to athlete satisfaction, effort, team cohesion, and collective efficacy (Zacharatos et al., 2000). The supportive team environment they were able to create / uphold for themselves was unaffected by the lack of good coaching from their designated, but as they referred to them, "outdated" coaches.

Fourth, the way in which the SAs found their teammates to be needs supportive was discussed. The SAs felt like their basic needs were met, and they focused on the following elements: (1) their team functioning as a family; (2) how everyone was committed to the team; (3) they felt a strong sense of team spirit; (4) they were provided with unconditional positive regard; and (5) they all had clearly defined roles within their teams. Receiving such

autonomy support within the team led to them feeling of value, independently of how they performed. Autonomy supportive teammates, attending to their needs to help them achieve their athletic and academic goals and for them to experience an overall well-being, I propose, were the main factors leading to the SAs' intrinsic motivation to be student-athletes. In challenging times, this support is what the SAs referred to as getting them through. And in good times, they truly felt appreciated for their achievements, and genuine happiness seemed to be expressed on their behalf. Most importantly, the level of support was there, independent of their results, and this unconditional support led to a unique team environment and spirit, motivating them to perform with and for each other. This sense of relatedness seemed to be the single element contributing the most to the SAs' high levels of satisfaction and well-being. In turn, this sense of relatedness led to a commitment to the team, where showing up at team practices, and giving everything you had to perform for and with your teammates, were of high value.

Fifth, whether the SAs perceived their level of personal competence to be challenged due to them being international student-athletes was discussed. Three factors enhancing, and two factors diminishing, their perceived competence were found. The 3 factors that enhanced their perceived competence were: (1) The way they were able to overcome the initial challenges they faced as SAs; (2) the lessons they learned from all of the new experiences; and (3) the level of college Nordic skiing generally being lower than in Norway contributed to feelings of mastery and perceived competence. Learning how to handle the high demands of both academics and skiing, in addition to being acknowledged for it, left them with feelings of personal competence. All of the new experiences and lessons learned from them made them widen their horizons, become more independent and grow as people. The way they were able to compete among the best in the fields of college Nordic skiing, and how their performances did matter, even if they didn't end up in the top three, made it all less serious, more fun and affected their perceived competence positively. On the diminishing side, the high expectations from their coaches and the added pressure due to the scholarship received, negatively affected the level in which they felt competent. Such extrinsic factors can potentially undermine sport motivation, participation and enjoyment (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Medic et al., 2007; Ryan, 1977, 1980; White & Sheldon, 2014).

Sixth, to what extent the SAs felt a sense of belonging at their respective colleges and skiing teams was addressed. This part of the study stood out as being solely positive, as all of the

SAs focused on how grateful they were for the great environment they got to be a part of and for the way they were taken such good care of. They shared how the school/team spirit affected them and how they, with time, internalized these American values connected to college sports. All the hype around college sports teams, with media coverage, team uniforms and other effects, banquets and awards ceremonies made them proud to be SAs. This hype and events made them feel like they truly belonged somewhere and as if they were appreciated for their efforts and talents. No matter what role they had within their teams, they felt as if they were of value and as if both teammates and their network of support at their respective colleges provided them with unconditional positive regard.

It took the SAs by surprise just how big college sports are in the US. As it turned out, they absolutely loved it, referring to the overall experience as being "insane" or by comparing it to a circus. Six out of the eight were motivated to stay for as long as possible as SAs, whereas the remaining two, who had made up their minds to return to Norway after completing their freshman year, had a hard time doing so. What stood out the most in this study, and what seem to have contributed the most to their high levels of satisfaction, was the sense of relatedness they experienced. The importance of autonomy supportive teammates, providing them with unconditional positive regard, all the help offered to them within and outside of the sports arena, and the great team/school spirit made them feel connected, valued and well taken care of. They felt a strong sense of belongingness to their colleges, something that, in turn, enhanced feelings of security and pride in them.

When asked the final question, how they felt about the whole college student athlete experience, all the SAs lit up and shared with enthusiasm. They expressed how they appreciated the American culture for being so inclusive, making the adjustment easier for them, all the attention given to college athletics and how they got to be a part of it and how they got to experience a sense of team spirit like they've never experienced before. Again, the need for relatedness seems to have been met, over and above what they had experienced prior to becoming SAs, something that was reflected in their motivation to stay despite the initial challenges they met.

15 Concluding thoughts

About one year ago, I started this study, learning about the NCAA, college athletics and the experiences of Norwegian student-athletes on Nordic skiing scholarships in the U.S. It has

been a journey and a learning experience like I've never experienced before. Today, the final product is ready to be shared with others, and my hope is that it can be a guiding tool for those considering an opportunity in college athletics. In that regard, I feel obligated to share a few limitations of this study. First, due to the limited time and resources available for a master's thesis, the study was conducted accordingly. Looking back, I would have preferred to run the study where data was generated from a combination of interviews and observation. To have observed the SAs at their respective colleges in the U.S. would have given greater insight to the phenomenon of college-athletics. Further, I have to be open and honest about my lack of experience as a researcher. The whole process of conducting this study has been a learning process for me. Everything was new: from how to create the interview guide to obtain the core information you are interested in learning about, to how to make the interview subjects feel comfortable, to time management in terms of writing the resulting master's thesis. Also, a lesson learned is the importance of narrowing down the focus of the study as much as possible, as I wish I had done to a greater extent. For example, I could have focused on the importance of a team only and whether the teams were needs supportive. However, I learned a lot along the way, and despite small adjustments having been made (in terms of how I conducted the interviews and how I structured my day while working on this paper primarily), I feel confident that I've given everything in my power during this past year towards the preparation of this report I am now presenting. I can only hope this study will be of importance to prospective student athletes, their coaches and the Norwegian Ski Federation.

For future recommendations, I would propose that further research on international student-athletes should be conducted. This study was focused on Nordic Skiers only. In future studies, other sports should be addressed as well. Observation, in addition to interviews, would be another element that could possibly provide additional insight to the phenomenon.

In this study I propose the following as a conclusion: Overall, all of the SAs shared that they were highly motivated to be college student-athletes, but that the motivation was attributable to their overall experience and not to skiing alone. Being SAs gave them new perspectives and helped them realize there's more to life. Academics was the main element that grew in importance to them, while plans to become professional skiers, on the other hand, did not. Overcoming many challenges as SAs and new life experiences led to perceived personal

growth. And more than anything, a sense of belonging and unconditional positive regard motivated the SAs to perform as students and as athletes at American colleges.

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17 Figures

Figure 1: *Illustration of thematic map*..... 49

18 Definitions

AGT	Achievement Goal Theory
BPN	Basic Psychological Needs
CET	Cognitive Evaluation Theory
DSO	Designated School Official
GSR	Graduation Success Rate
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NSD	Norwegian Centre for Research Data
OIT	Organismic Integration Theory
RMT	Relationship Motivation Theory
SA	Student-Athlete
SAACs	Student-Athlete Advisory Committees
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SEVIS	Student and Exchange Visitor Information System
SEVP	Student and Exchange Visitor Program

19 Appendix

Appendix 1: NSD godkjenning

Appendix 2: Informasjonsskriv til deltakerene

Appendix 3: Intervjuguide

Appendix 1



Hallgeir Halvari
Postboks 4014 Ullevål Stadion
0806 OSLO

Vår dato: 12.07.2017

Vår ref: 54844 / 3 / LB

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

Forenklet vurdering fra NSD Personvernombudet for forskning

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 22.06.2017.
Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

<i>54844</i>	<i>Basic needs satisfaction among Norwegian junior skiers attending NCAA division 1 schools</i>
<i>Behandlingsansvarlig</i>	<i>Norges idrettshøgskole, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
<i>Daglig ansvarlig</i>	<i>Hallgeir Halvari</i>
<i>Student</i>	<i>Monika Kørre</i>

Vurdering

Etter gjennomgang av opplysningene i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg, vurderer vi at prosjektet er omfattet av personopplysningsloven § 31. Personopplysningene som blir samlet inn er ikke sensitive, prosjektet er samtykkebasert og har lav personvernulempe. Prosjektet har derfor fått en forenklet vurdering. Du kan gå i gang med prosjektet. Du har selvstendig ansvar for å følge vilkårene under og sette deg inn i veiledningen i dette brevet.

Vilkår for vår vurdering

Vår anbefaling forutsetter at du gjennomfører prosjektet i tråd med:

- opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg
- krav til informert samtykke
- at du ikke innhenter [sensitive opplysninger](#)
- veiledning i dette brevet
- Norges idrettshøgskole sine retningslinjer for datasikkerhet

Veiledning

Krav til informert samtykke

Utvalget skal få skriftlig og/eller muntlig informasjon om prosjektet og samtykke til deltakelse.
Informasjon må minst omfatte:

- at Norges idrettshøgskole er behandlingsansvarlig institusjon for prosjektet
- daglig ansvarlig (eventuelt student og veileder) sine kontaktopplysninger
- prosjektets formål og hva opplysningene skal brukes til
- hvilke opplysninger som skal innhentes og hva dette innebærer for deltaker

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

- når prosjektet skal avsluttes og når personopplysningene skal anonymiseres/slettes

På nettsidene våre finner du mer informasjon og en veiledende mal for [informasjonsskriv](#).

Forskningsetiske retningslinjer

Sett deg inn i [forskningsetiske retningslinjer](#).

Meld fra hvis du gjør vesentlige endringer i prosjektet

Dersom prosjektet endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å sende inn endringsmelding. På våre nettsider finner du svar på hvilke [endringer](#) du må melde, samt endringsskjema.

Opplysninger om prosjektet blir lagt ut på våre nettsider og i Meldingsarkivet

Vi har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet på nettsidene våre. Alle våre institusjoner har også tilgang til egne prosjekter i [Meldingsarkivet](#).

Vi tar kontakt om status for behandling av personopplysninger ved prosjektslutt

Ved prosjektslutt 30.05.2018 vil vi ta kontakt for å avklare status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Gjelder dette ditt prosjekt?

Dersom du skal bruke databehandler

Dersom du skal bruke databehandler (ekstern transkriberingsassistent/spørreskjemaleverandør) må du inngå en databehandleravtale med vedkommende. For råd om hva databehandleravtalen bør inneholde, se [Datatilsynets veileder](#).

Hvis utvalget har taushetsplikt

Vi minner om at noen grupper (f.eks. opplærings- og helsepersonell/forvaltningsansatte) har [taushetsplikt](#). De kan derfor ikke gi deg identifiserende opplysninger om andre, med mindre de får samtykke fra den det gjelder.

Dersom du forsker på egen arbeidsplass

Vi minner om at når du [forsker på egen arbeidsplass](#) må du være bevisst din dobbeltrolle som både forsker og ansatt. Ved rekruttering er det spesielt viktig at forespørsel rettes på en slik måte at frivilligheten ved deltakelse ivaretas.

Se våre nettsider eller ta kontakt med oss dersom du har spørsmål. Vi ønsker lykke til med prosjektet!

Vennlig hilsen

Dag Kiberg

Lene Christine M. Brandt

Appendix 2

FORESPØRSEL OM DELTAKELSE I FORSKNINGSPROSJEKTET

BASIC NEEDS SATISFACTION AND MOTIVATION OF NORWEGIAN SKIERS ATTENDING NCAA DIVISION 1 SCHOOLS

Bakgrunn og hensikt

Denne masteroppgaven har til formål å belyse muligheten for, og å se på motivasjonsgrunnlaget for at norske langrennsløpere velger å kombinere studier med langrenns satsing ved amerikanske universiteter. Gjennom dybdeintervjuer med norske *student-athletes* er målet å få et innblikk i deres behovstilfredsstillelse av de grunnleggende behovene for autonomi, kompetanse og tilhørighet, samt kartlegge hva som er de viktigste motiverende faktorene ved å være en *student-athlete*.

Hva innebærer studien?

Studien innebærer et dybdeintervju, ansikt til ansikt, med en varighet på 1-2t. 6-8 norske *student-athletes* som satser / har satset langrenn ved amerikanske universiteter vil bli inkludert i studien. Norges idrettshøgskole er behandlingsansvarlig institusjon for prosjektet.

Mulige fordeler og ulemper

Fordelene ved studien kan sies å være flerfoldig:

- (1) Belysing av muligheten til å kombinere studier med langrenns satsing i USA
- (2) Økt innsikt av motivasjonsgrunnlaget for å være en *student-athlete*.
- (3) Økt innsikt i henhold til norske *student-athletes* sin tilfredsstillelse av behovene for autonomi, kompetanse og tilhørighet.
- (4) Muligheten for fremtidige, potensielle *student-athletes* og deres trenere å få et innblikk i hva det innebærer å kombinere studier og langrenns satsing i USA.

Mulige ulemper ved studien er at intervjuet vil kreve noe tid (1-2t) og at deltakeren må tenke nøye igjennom om de får sine basale behov dekket som *student-athletes*.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Informasjonen som kommer frem av intervjuet skal kun brukes slik som beskrevet i hensikten med studien. Dine svar vil analyseres og kobles opp imot motivasjonsteorier for belysing av problemstillingen. Alle opplysninger og svar vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Det vil ikke være mulig å identifisere deg i resultatene av studien når disse publiseres. Datamaterialet vil bli aidentifisert etter prosjektets slutt i 2018, det vil si at navnelisten med tilhørende email adresse makuleres.

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i studien. Du kan når som helst og uten å oppgi noen grunn trekke ditt samtykke til å delta i studien. Dersom du ønsker å delta, undertegner du samtykkeerklæringen på neste side. Om du nå sier ja til å delta, kan du senere trekke tilbake ditt samtykke og ditt navn vil da bli slettet fra deltakerlisten. Dersom du senere ønsker å trekke deg eller har spørsmål til studien, kan du kontakte prosjektleder Monika Kørre på telefon: 97547228 eller email: monikakorra@gmail.com

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg er villig til å delta i studien

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Stedfortredende samtykke når berettiget, enten i tillegg til personen selv eller istedenfor

(Signert av nærstående, dato)

Jeg bekrefter å ha gitt informasjon om studien

(Signert, rolle i studien, dato)

Appendix 3

Intervjuguide

Overgangsspørsmål fra introduksjon til hovedspørsmål rundt problemstillingen	Underspørsmål
Kan du fortelle litt om deg selv?	Hvor kommer du fra? Utdanning? Hobbyer? Beskriv deg selv med 5 ord.
Kan du fortelle litt om din idrettslige bakgrunn?	Hvorfor startet du med idrett? Hva er det du liker best ved å være en langrennsløper? Hvorfor har du holdt ut i dette gamet så lenge?
Kan du dele noen erfaringer du har du som utøver?	Kan du fortelle om din beste opplevelse i langrennssporet?
Hvorfor går du på ski?	Hva motiverer deg til å satse langrenn? Hvorfor valgte du å satse i USA / i Norge?

Tema	Hovedspørsmål	Underspørsmål
Behov for Autonomi	Kan du fortelle litt om trener/utøver forholdet mellom deg og din universitetstrener?	En eller flere trenere? Hvor ofte ser du han/henne? Hvor tett oppfølging får du? Hvordan vil du beskrive forholdet? Kommunikasjon på trening/konkurransen? (individuell feedback? I medgang / motgang?)
	Føler du at du selv kan påvirke innholdet på trening? Hva med renndeltakelse?	Hvordan foregår dette? Individuelle Utøversamtaler?
	Hvordan foregår planlegging av trening? Hvordan setter du/dere mål?	Alene, sammen eller blir de satt for deg?
	Kan du fortelle litt om trenerens forventningskrav til dere?	I samsvar med nivå?
Behov for kompetanse	Hvem står for preparering og valg av ski?	Kan du dele hvordan denne prosessen foregår?
	Hvordan føler du satsingen i USA har gått siden du ble en del av dette laget?	Legg ut om positive / negative erfaringer så langt ift. opplevd utvikling og prestasjon.
	Hvordan har utviklingen din vært?	Er du fornøyd med egen utvikling og prestasjon? Hva må til for at du skal være fornøyd? Hvilke tilbakemeldinger har du fått ift. egen prestasjon/utvikling?

Tema	Hovedspørsmål	Underspørsmål
	Føler du deg kompetent til å nå dine mål? Har du nådd de målene du har satt deg?	På renn? På trening?
	Føler du deg kompetent ift. ski preparering og valg av ski i konkurranse?	Hvordan påvirker dette deg på trening og i renn?
	Hva gir deg en følelsen av mestring på trening og i konkurranse?	Hvor ofte føler du mestring?
	Føler du at du får utfordringer tilpasset ditt nivå? (teknisk, fysisk, mentalt)	Individuell tilpasning på trening?
	Føler du deg sett på trening?	Hvor ofte får du personlige tilbakemeldinger? (Av trener? Av andre utøvere?)
Behov for tilhørighet	Kan du fortelle litt om laget du er en del av?	Hvor mange utøvere? Alder? Nivå? Hvor ofte møtes dere på trening / utenom trening?
	Hvordan vil du beskrive miljøet i gruppa?	Sammensveiset gruppe? Glade på hverandres vegne? Støtte i medgang / motgang? Preget av konkurranse?
	Hvordan vil du beskrive din rolle i gruppa?	Hvordan tror du at dine lagkamerater ser deg?
	Møtes dere utenom fellestreninger / renn? Og i så fall er dette viktig for deg?	Hvor ofte?
	Føler du tilhørighet til laget ditt? Hvilke elementer får deg til å føle deg som en del av laget?	Bekledning? Heiarop? Maskot? Identitet?
	Føler du deg verdsatt i gruppa?	

Avrundning - Hovedspørsmål	Underspørsmål
Hvordan føler du året/årene som SA har preget din motivasjon?	I langrennsporet? Ift. studier? I positiv eller negativ retning? Hvorfor?
Anbefaler du andre å reise over til USA for å prøve seg som student-athletes?	Kan du utdype?

Kan du dele de 5 viktigste grunnene for at du ønsker/ønsket å være student-athlete?	Hvorfor ønsket du å reise over? Hva er det viktigste du sitter igjen med etter tiden din som student-athlete?
Noe annet du ønsker å dele ang. tiden din på dette laget?	